

**Humanity**  
AN INTRODUCTION TO  
CULTURAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY

**JAMES PEOPLES  
GARRICK BAILEY**

**Ninth Edition**



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**Ninth Edition**

# HUMANITY

## **An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology**

**James Peoples**

*Ohio Wesleyan University*

**Garrick Bailey**

*University of Tulsa*



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**James Peoples and Garrick Bailey**

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# Preface



A textbook titled *Humanity* might sound overly ambitious. The authors chose this title back in 1985, when we began working on the first edition. We thought *Humanity* captures the most distinctive feature of the discipline called anthropology: in the social sciences, anthropology alone studies all the world's peoples. Anthropologists are interested in all humans on our planet, including those who lived in the prehistoric past, the historic past, and the present day.

Anthropology is not only broad in its scope, but when we anthropologists do our work, we do it deeply as well: most research requires a commitment of years or even decades of detailed and intensive study. From such research, generations of anthropologists have discovered a vast amount of information about humanity. Paleoanthropologists are uncovering fossils and unwinding genetic relationships that are filling in the blanks in how and when our species originated. Archaeologists are digging into information about how prehistoric peoples lived their lives.

Another subfield, cultural anthropology, is the main subject of this book. Cultural anthropology describes and tries to explain or interpret the fascinating cultural variability of the world's diverse peoples. In this text, we try to convey to students the life-enriching as well as the educational value of discovering this variability. In the process of discovery, we hope students and other readers will experience a change in their attitudes about other cultures and about humanity in general.

We also hope the book leads readers to think about their own identities as individuals, as members of a particular society with its traditions and ways of thinking and doing things, and as participants in an increasingly

worldwide human community. To achieve this last goal, we discuss anthropological insights into some of the major problems that afflict the world in the twenty-first century, such as ethnic conflicts, global inequalities, hunger, and the survival of indigenous cultures and languages. As we describe the diversity in various dimensions of human life, such as relations with the natural world, marriage, child care, gender, and religion, we suggest the implications of such diversity for contemporary society.

Finally, we want those who are new to anthropology to grasp the full significance of the oldest anthropological lesson of all: that their own values, beliefs, and behaviors are a product of their upbringing in a particular human group rather than universal among all rational persons. If applied seriously, this simple principle questions unconscious assumptions and leads to viewing ourselves as well as other peoples from new perspectives.

As we write in 2010, the United States and its allies remain involved in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran is alleged to be developing nuclear weapons—or maybe not. Russia was an enemy, then a friend, and now—it's not clear. The Peoples Republic of China became the world's second largest economy in August, 2010. Offshoring of production to China is reducing consumer prices for Europeans and North Americans—but also reducing high wage factory jobs. Such conflicts, threats, and competitions lead some to believe that peoples of different nations, ethnicities, and religions can never live together in peace and security.

In the short term, wars and other forms of conflict separate antagonists from one another. Yet, overall,

the world's regions now interact more frequently and intensively than ever before. Words like *multiculturalism* and *multinationalism* have become familiar to most people in just the past couple of decades. Anthropology has much to say about these changes. Just as important, anthropology helps us become more aware of how our own lives are affected by such changes.



## New to the Ninth Edition

In the past 20 years, both the world and the discipline of anthropology have changed. The present as well as the last two editions of *Humanity* reflect these changes.

Interconnections among the world's peoples have increased. There are many reasons for the growing interdependence of peoples and nations: the increased integration of the world's national economies, rises in international travel and migration, educational exchanges between countries and regions, the availability of the Internet, the worldwide spread of consumer culture, and the international media. The general term for such changes is *globalization*, which has many dimensions: cultural, economic, political, artistic, linguistic, and religious, just to name a few. As in the previous edition, every chapter of *Humanity* includes a Globalization box, focusing on the dimensions of globalization that relate to the chapter's focus. For example, the box in Chapter 1 introduces globalization. Boxes in subsequent chapters deal with issues such as how globalization is affecting cultural diversity, language survival, anthropological research, family life, care of the elderly in Japan, inequality among nations, religious diversity in the United States, the production of art, fundamentalism, and development. Some discussions are mainly factually based, whereas others present anthropological insights into the process or the results of globalization.

Most chapters contain more material that explicitly states the relevance of the subject for modern North America, such as same-sex marriage and religious accommodation. Some insights are folded into the main text, whereas others appear in A Closer Look boxes, which examine relevant topics in more depth. In most chapters, we have condensed many sections, and several examples were shortened or eliminated to make room for new discussions.

In most chapters we have rewritten major sections to simplify the style and word use and make the material more engaging. Sections of several chapters have been

retitled and reorganized to improve clarity and logical flow.

To those instructors who are previous users of *Humanity*, the following chapter-by-chapter summary highlights the major changes in this edition.

Chapter 1 again introduces the subdisciplines and discusses the importance of anthropological perspectives, methods, and factual knowledge of cultural diversity. At the suggestion of several reviewers, we no longer identify Applied Anthropology as a fifth subfield, but the text emphasizes its importance in the field as a whole and for career opportunities for undergraduates. The information on human evolution is updated as of 2010, with the latest research on Neanderthals, *Ardipithecus* and *Australopithecus*. We added new material on human genetic adaptation, using examples of skin color and adaptation to high altitudes. Greater emphasis is given to recent cultural anthropological work in North America among both the “mainstream” and immigrant communities. The discussion of relativism retains the distinction between methodological and moral relativism, using female genital mutilation to illustrate the complexity of the issue.

We revised Chapter 2 (culture) by incorporating new material, but its topical structure and themes are intact. In a more extensive coverage of cultural identity and subcultures, we incorporated new examples of cultural diversity in modern nation-states such as China, eastern African nations, and Europe. New research on prehistoric flutes recently discovered in Germany enriches the subsection “Origins of Culture,” which also covers archaeological and physical evidence for the use of symbols and language. In describing norms we now introduce and distinguish the terms *folkway* and *more*. There is entirely new material on the “costs” of social learning. In the section “Biology and Culture,” we wrote a new description of lactose intolerance as an example of the co-evolution of biological and cultural differences. Other additions include an explicit discussion of material culture, the complexities of “shared values,” and new coverage of Victor Turner's analysis of symbols. To make space for these additions we again streamlined wording and deleted some older examples.

In Chapter 3 (language), at the advice of reviewers we further condensed the sections on structural linguistics. There is explicit discussion of the use of language to acquire and enhance power, using political speech as examples. In the section on language and culture, we cover how linguistic words and concepts might affect views of social reality, illustrated by terms like *family*, *human rights*, and *democracy*. This chapter continues



to emphasize relationships between culture, language, thought, and behavior over the technical aspects of linguistics.

The focus of Chapter 4 (theory) remains the distinctions between approaches that are broadly scientific and broadly humanistic. We try to represent both sides of the dialogue fairly and objectively. More than in previous editions, we integrate this distinction into later chapters. The relationship between early theorists and modern themes and divisions is more explicitly covered. Other specific changes are a description of Margaret Mead's importance and significant condensation of British functionalism and neoevolutionism.

Chapter 5 (methods) has been restructured. The Globalization box, Ethics and Field Research was totally rewritten to emphasize that ethical conduct in field research is no longer solely defined by the American Anthropological Association, but increasingly by laws concerning the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples and by the provisions of the "The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" passed by the U. N. 2007.

Chapter 6 (environment) contains a new large section on industrialized societies. It focuses on how the cultures of industrialism differs from those of preindustrial times, on environmental impacts (especially climate change and pollution), and on the globalization of production and resource harvesting. Major themes are the contributions made by China and other emerging economies to climate change; how the international system can handle the "public bad" problem; how smaller nations (e.g., island countries) are likely to be the most affected; and which nations should pay to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (given the globalization of production). To make room for the new section on Industrialism we condensed the early conceptual discussion. The sections on foraging, horticulture, intensive agriculture, and pastoralism, were also shortened. New dates on the domestication of plants and mammals are included. Finally, the summer, 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico receives attention.

In Chapter 7 (exchange), a new Globalization feature covers the global market for indigenous products, cultural tourism, and Anglos searching for meanings and lifestyle alternatives by engaging other traditions like Asians and Native Americans. We also cover the 2008–10 housing collapse and financial crisis, using them to introduce a comparison of market systems to other forms of economies. We condensed coverage of peasant marketplaces and other examples.

In Chapter 8 (marriage and family), we streamlined many discussions, while retaining most material, including fictive kin, matrifocal families, theories of the incest taboo, and issues surrounding gay marriage in the United States (updated for this edition). We expanded coverage of the relevance of anthropological studies on marriage and family to twenty-first century issues. There is increased coverage of the reasons for polygyny, new material on "parasite singles" in Japan, and descriptions of Old Testament references to levirate, bridewealth, and brideservice to increase student interest

In Chapter 9 (kinship, descent, and terminology), we streamlined the introductory section and the ethnographic examples. The cultural construction of kinship is now explicitly the underlying theme of the section on kinship terminology.

The major change in Chapter 10 (enculturation and the life course) is the addition of a psychological study published in 2010 suggesting that elderly persons in the United States are more satisfied with their lives than younger people. Other material is retained, though condensed wherever possible.

In Chapter 11 (gender) we substituted more modern terminologies, such as "Two Spirit" rather than "berdache," and "gendered" rather than "sexual" division of labor. Two new detailed ethnographic cases are added: the Hijra for multiple gender identities and the Vanatinai as a possible example of gender equality. New complexities are discussed for terms like *matriarchy* and *gender stratification*. A new Concept Review summarizes several dimensions of gender stratification. Discussion of same-sex marriage in the United States is updated as of 2010 with new material from several states. The section on Multiple Gender Identities now comes before the section on Gendered Division of Labor. There are more modern examples of changing gender roles in occupations and politics.

The major change in Chapter 12 (political life) is in the Globalization box, now entitled Multinational Corporations and the Nation-State. Arguing that the global financial crisis that started in 2007 was primarily the result of the unregulated speculative behavior of multinational corporations, particularly the financial institutions, the ability of national governments to control their economies has been greatly eroded. As in earlier editions, Chapter 13 (inequality and stratification) updates numerical data on the distribution of income in the United States. Melanesian peoples are described as special examples of egalitarian societies. In the globalization insert on inequality among and within nations,

we add information on recent Chinese suicides and labor strikes. Some section headings are retitled to improve clarity and some problematic Key Terms receive more discussion.

In Chapter 14 (religion) we rewrote introductory material to improve clarity for introductory students. The concept of rites of solidarity is introduced and exemplified. New brief ethnographic examples are Eastern Pueblo, Gebusi of New Guinea, and Hawaiian *mana*. In the globalization feature on religious pluralism, we added descriptions of European countries that are defending their values from the visible symbols (head coverings and minarets) of Islam.

Chapter 15 (art) now begins with a discussion of the disagreement between anthropologists over whether art is or is not a cultural universal. The section on body arts has now been expanded to include discussions of body piercing and Nuba body painting.

In Chapter 16 (globalization), the historical discussion of European expansion has been reduced, while the part on the development of the global economy has been expanded and updated. A new section has been added discussing the nature of Western cultural influences on other peoples which are associated with globalization. There is also a new Globalization box, Globalization and the Role of Asia, which discussed an issue now being raised by many scholars. After 500 years of European hegemony in world affairs, is the economic and political center of the world shifting back to Asia, where it was before Columbus?

For Chapter 17 (ethnicity), data on conflicts has been updated. In addition the discussion of ethnic conflict in what was British India has been expanded to include a discussion of the Pushtun peoples of the Tribal Areas and Territories of Pakistan and adjacent portions of Afghanistan. The section on accommodation has been expanded to include discussions of the autonomous ethnic areas of Russia and China, the creation of separate parliaments for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the special status of Greenland, Nunavut, and Puerto Rico.

In Chapter 18 (world problems) a new section, Health and Health Care, has been added which includes a discussion of Medical Anthropology. The discussion of anthropologists as advocates has been expanded. The discussion of the San and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana and the development of hydroelectric dams on the lower Xingu River in Brazil has been expanded and updated. A discussion of the Dongria Kondh people of India and the planned strip

mining of the Niyamgiri hills for bauxite has been added. It is also noted that while Botswana, Brazil and India supported “The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” in 2007, in all three cases the present policies of these governments are in violation of the declaration.



## Special Features

We have developed a special set of boxed features to provide a richer context highlighting key subject areas. Again, in the ninth edition, every chapter contains at least two boxes. The first is called **A Closer Look**, which provides more in-depth examination of anthropology research. The second box in each chapter is entitled **Globalization**, and this box provides further emphasis of the focus on the globalization process through the study of cultural anthropology. Many of the Globalization boxes include several Critical Thinking Questions, which causes students to reflect on how the globalization process relates to general anthropological concepts.

In addition to the enrich content provided by the two boxes there is a set of pedagogical aids designed specifically to help students understanding and retain the material they have just read. New in the ninth edition is a set of five to ten **Learning Objectives** in the form of questions which start off each chapter. These questions focus on what will be the key concepts of the chapter. The learning objectives are closely tied to the new point-by-point chapter **Summary**, which repeats the questions and provides answers in paragraph form. This ensures that the outcome of the chapter is reached and students should come away with a solid understanding of the key concepts.

We continue to include **Concept Reviews** to condense ideas and make sharp distinctions in just a few words. A new in-text **Glossary** is found for the first time in the ninth edition. **Key Terms** in bold are defined immediately now when students first encounter them in the chapter.

Anthropology is a highly visual discipline and *Humanity* holds to the highest standards in providing photographs, figures and maps to illustrate the text. Maps on the inside front cover show the location of peoples and cultures mentioned in the book.

There are **Bibliographic Notes** by chapter found at the end of the book. Two **indexes**, one a traditional subject index and the other a list of peoples and cultures mentioned in the book. Last, the **Suggested**

**Readings** that use to be found in prior editions at the end of chapter can now be found on the text's companion website.



## Resources

### Student Resources

**Anthropology Resource Center with InfoTrac® College Edition.** This hands-on online center offers a wealth of information and useful tools for both instructors and students in all four fields of anthropology: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. It includes interactive maps, learning modules, video exercises, and breaking news in anthropology. Please visit [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com).

**Companion Website.** To access additional course materials and companion resources, please visit [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com). At the [CengageBrain.com](http://CengageBrain.com) home page, search for the ISBN of your title (from the back cover of your book) using the search box at the top of the page. This will take you to the product page where free companion resources can be found.

### Instructor Resources

**Online Instructor's Manual with Test Bank.** *Instructor Description:* This online supplement offers learning objectives, chapter summaries, assignments, revised lecture and classroom suggestions with new Internet resources, as well as a revised and expanded film/video resource guide for each chapter. The test bank provides thirty-five to forty multiple-choice questions and fifteen true/false questions, as well as completion and essay questions.

**PowerLecture™ with ExamView®.** PowerLecture instructor resources are a collection of book-specific lecture and class tools on either CD or DVD. The fastest and easiest way to build powerful, customized media-rich lectures, PowerLecture assets include chapter-specific PowerPoint® presentations, images, videos, the instructor manual, test bank, and ExamView. PowerLecture media-teaching tools are an effective way to enhance the educational experience.

**Companion Website.** To access additional course materials and companion resources, please visit [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com). At the [CengageBrain.com](http://CengageBrain.com) home page, search for the ISBN of your title (from the back cover of your book) using the search box at the top of

the page. This will take you to the product page where free companion resources can be found.

**CourseReader: Anthropology.** *CourseReader Anthropology* is a fully customizable online reader that provides access to hundreds of readings and audio and video selections from multiple disciplines. This easy to use solution allows you to select exactly the content you need for your courses and is loaded with convenient pedagogical features like highlighting, printing, note taking, and audio downloads. YOU have the freedom to assign individualized content at an affordable price. The *CourseReader: Anthropology* is the perfect complement to any class.

**The Wadsworth Anthropology Video Library Volume 1.** Enhance your lectures with new video clips from the BBC Motion Gallery and CBS News. Addressing topics from the four fields, these videos are divided into short segments, perfect for introducing key concepts with footage sourced from some of the most remarkable collections in the world.

**AIDS in Africa DVD.** Expand your students' global perspective of HIV/AIDS with this award-winning documentary series focused on controlling HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. Films focus on caregivers in the faith community; how young people share messages of hope through song and dance; the relationship of HIV/AIDS to gender, poverty, stigma, education, and justice; and the story of two HIV-positive women helping others.

**Visual Anthropology Video.** Bring engaging anthropology concepts to life with this dynamic sixty-minute video from Documentary Educational Resources and Wadsworth Publishing. Video clips highlight key scenes from more than thirty new and classic anthropological films that serve as effective lecture launchers.

**Classic Readings in Cultural Anthropology, Third Edition.** Practical and insightful, *Classic Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, Third Edition, is a concise and accessible reader that presents a core selection of historical and contemporary works that have been instrumental in shaping anthropological thought and research over the past decades. Carefully edited by Dr. Gary Ferraro, the third edition includes five new classic readings from the disciplines of cultural anthropology and linguistics. Readings are organized around eight topics that closely mirror most introductory textbooks and are selected from scholarly works on the basis of their enduring themes and contributions to the discipline. These selections allow students to further explore anthropological perspectives on such key topics as culture, language and communication, ecology and economics, marriage and family, gender, politics and

social control, supernatural beliefs, and issues of culture change. The new edition also addresses pressing topics such as globalization, ethnic violence, environmental issues, and more. *Classic Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, Third Edition, delivers an excellent introduction to the field of anthropology and the contributions it makes to understanding the world around us.

**Human-Environment Interactions: New Directions in Human Ecology.** This module by Kathy Galvin begins with a brief discussion of the history and core concepts of the field of human ecology and the study of how humans interact with the natural environment. It then looks in-depth at how the environment influences cultural practices (environmental determinism), as well as how aspects of culture, in turn, affect the environment. Human behavioral ecology is presented within the context of natural selection and how ecological factors influence the development of cultural and behavioral traits, and how people subsist in different environments. The module concludes with a discussion of resilience and global change as a result of human-environment interactions. This module in chapter-like print format can be packaged for free with the text.

**Medical Anthropology in Applied Perspective Module.** This free-standing module is actually a complete text chapter, featuring the same quality of pedagogy and written content in Wadsworth's cultural anthropology texts. See your sales representative for information on bundling the module with this text.



## Acknowledgments

Since the first edition was published in 1988, the authors have benefited enormously from the reviewers of *Humanity*. Generally, the publisher solicits 10 to 15 reviews for each edition. Some reviewers are long-term users of the text, whereas others have never adopted it

for their classes. Of course, we have never been able to incorporate all their suggestions for improvement, or the book would be twice as long as it is. But, over the last 20 years, we have added, subtracted, updated, rethought, and reorganized most of the book based on reviewers' comments. We thank all of them.

This edition incorporates many of the suggestions of the following reviewers:

Frances Purifoy, University of Louisville  
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 Susan Krook, Normandale Community College  
 Anne Woodrick, University of Northern Iowa  
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 Michael McDonald, Florida Gulf Coast University  
 Beth Conklin, Vanderbilt University  
 Gyatri Thampy, Ohio State University

Although we were unable to make all the changes suggested by these scholars, a great many of their suggestions are incorporated into the text. Their comments that the book needs to be more *explicit* about the relevance of anthropology in today's world were especially influential.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**James (Jim) Peoples** is currently Professor of Sociology/Anthropology and Director of East Asian Studies at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. Peoples has taught at the University of California at Davis and at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, among other colleges and universities. He received a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Cruz and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis. Within cultural anthropology, his research interests are cultural evolution, human ecology, cultures of the Pacific Islands, and cultures of East Asia. His first book, *Island in Trust* (1985), describes his fieldwork on the island of Kosrae in the Federated States of Micronesia. Since joining the faculty of Ohio Wesleyan University in 1988, he has taught courses about East Asia, the Pacific islands, human ecology, cultural anthropology, the anthropology of religion, world hunger, the prehistory of North America, and Native Americans of the southwestern United States. He just published a chapter on cultural anthropology in a volume that is translated for course use in China. His latest project is a coauthored book describing the prehistory, history, and contemporary culture of Kosrae island, Micronesia. When not teaching or writing, He enjoys fly-fishing, traveling, and gardening.

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# 1 THE STUDY OF HUMANITY



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## **Subfields of Anthropology**

*Archaeology*

*Biological/Physical  
Anthropology*

*Cultural Anthropology*

*Anthropological Linguistics*

## **Applying Anthropology**

*Applied Anthropology*

*Careers in Anthropology*

## **Cultural Anthropology Today**

### **Understanding Human Cultures: Anthropological Approaches**

*Holistic Perspective*

*Comparative Perspective*

*Relativistic Perspective*

## **The Value of Anthropology**



Cultural anthropologists are fascinated by the vast diversity of humanity. This fascination leads us to explore other peoples and places. Here, anthropologist Margaret Kieffer interviews a Guatemalan woman weaver who is a member of the Mayan community.

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Describe** how anthropology differs from other disciplines that also study humans.
- 2 **List** the four major subfields of anthropology and their primary subject matters.
- 3 **Explain** some of the practical uses of anthropology in solving human problems.
- 4 **Discuss** the ways in which cultural anthropology has changed in the last several decades.
- 5 **Understand** the meaning and importance of the holistic, comparative, and relativistic perspectives.
- 6 **Report** on the wider lessons one can learn from studying anthropology.

What makes humans different from other animals? Do all people share a common human nature? If so, what is it like? How and why do human groups differ, both biologically and culturally? How are people who live in industrialized, urbanized nations different from “traditional” or “indigenous” peoples? What are the social and cultural implications of living on a planet whose diverse peoples are now connected by multinational corporations and other global organizations? These are a few of the questions investigated by **anthropology**, the academic discipline that studies all of humanity.

Almost everything about people interests anthropologists. We want to know when, where, and how the human species originated and why we evolved into what we are today. Anthropologists try to explain the many differences between the world’s cultures, such as why the people in one culture believe they get sick because the souls of witches devour their livers, whereas the people in another think that illness results from tarantulas flinging tiny magical darts into their bodies. We want to know why most Canadians and Australians like beef, which devout Hindus and Buddhists refuse to eat. We are interested in why some New Guinea peoples ceremonially gorge themselves with pork—the same animal flesh that some Middle Eastern religions hold to be unclean. In brief, anthropologists of one kind or another are likely to investigate almost everything about human beings: our biological

evolution, cuisines, values, art styles, behaviors, languages, religions, and so forth.

Anthropologists, then, study many different aspects of humanity. Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of anthropology—the one feature that makes it different from other fields that also include people as their subject matter—is its broad scope. Anthropologists are interested in *all* human beings, whether living or dead, Asian or African or European. We also are interested in many different *aspects* of humans, including their genetic makeup, family lives, political systems, relations with nature, and emotional responses. No people are too remote to escape the anthropologist’s notice. No dimension of humankind, from skin color to dance traditions, falls outside the anthropologist’s interest.



## Subfields of Anthropology

Because anthropology is so broad, no single anthropologist can master the entire discipline. Therefore, most modern anthropologists specialize in one of four principal subfields: archaeology, biological (or physical) anthropology, cultural anthropology, or anthropological linguistics. (The Concept Review summarizes the primary interests of each of the four subfields.) A fifth area, called applied anthropology, cuts across all four major subfields because it uses anthropological methods and insights to help solve real-world problems. Because cultural anthropology is the primary subject of this book, here we briefly summarize the other subfields and describe some of their major findings.

**anthropology** The academic discipline that studies all of humanity from a broad perspective.





Archaeology	Physical/Biological	Cultural	Anthropological Linguistics
Excavation of material remains in prehistoric sites to reconstruct early human ways of life; study of remains in historic sites to learn more about historic, literate peoples	Comparisons of human anatomy and behavior with other primate species; physical (genetic) variation among human populations; biological evolution of <i>Homo sapiens</i>	Differences and similarities in contemporary and historically recent cultures; causes and consequences of socio-cultural change; impacts of globalization and contacts on the world's peoples	General relationship between language and culture; role of language and speaking in cultural and social life of specific peoples; how language might shape perceptions and thoughts

## Archaeology

**Archaeology** investigates the human past through the excavation and analysis of material remains. Modern archaeology is divided into two major kinds of studies: prehistoric and historic.

**Prehistoric archaeology** is the study of prehistoric peoples, that is, those who had no writing to keep records of their activities, customs, and beliefs. Much information about the lives of prehistoric peoples can be recovered from the tools, pottery, ornaments, bones, plant pollen, charcoal, and other materials they left behind, in or on the ground. Through careful excavation and laboratory analysis of such material remains, prehistoric archaeologists reconstruct the way people lived in ancient times and trace how human cultures have changed over centuries and even over millennia. Contrary to impressions given by many television documentaries and popular films, the main goal of excavating archaeological sites is not to recover valuable treasures and other artifacts, but to understand how people lived long ago. Modern archaeologists seek to reconstruct as fully as possible how prehistoric peoples made their technology, lived in their environments, and organized their societies.

Over decades of field excavations and laboratory work, prehistoric archaeologists have learned that agriculture first developed around 10,000 years ago, when some peoples of the Middle East began planting wheat and barley—for the first time, humans transformed certain wild plants into *crops*. Somewhat later, peoples of southern China, Southeast Asia, and West Africa domesticated other plants. On the other side of the world, in what we now call the Americas, ancient peoples of southern Mexico and western South America domesticated different plants like corn, squash, beans, and potatoes. Surprisingly, most available evidence suggests that these six regions where agriculture

developed were independent—meaning that the people of one region domesticated plants on their own, rather than learning the idea of agriculture from other peoples. Similarly, civilization (living in cities) developed in several different regions independently, beginning about 5,000 years ago.

To learn about the past in societies in which some people could read and write, historians study written materials such as diaries, letters, land records, newspapers, and tax collection documents. The growing field of **historic archaeology** supplements such written materials by excavations of houses, stores, plantations, factories, and other structures and remains. Historic archaeologists seek to uncover information lacking in old documents about how people lived at a particular historic time and place.

Today, many archaeologists work not in universities but in museums, public agencies, and for-profit corporations. Museums offer jobs as curators and researchers. State highway departments employ archaeologists to conduct surveys of proposed new routes in order to locate and excavate archaeological sites that will be destroyed. The U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service hire archaeologists to find sites on public lands to help make decisions about the preservation of cultural materials. Those who work in *cultural resource management* locate sites of prehistoric and historic significance, evaluate their importance, and make

**archaeology** The investigation of past cultures through excavation of material remains.

**prehistoric archaeology** Field that uses excavation of sites and analysis of material remains to investigate cultures that existed before the development of writing.

**historic archaeology** Field that investigates the past of literate peoples through excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts and other material remains.





© Robert Brenner/Photo Edit

Prehistoric archaeologists investigate the remote past by the careful excavation of material remains.

recommendations about total or partial preservation. Since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, private corporations and government agencies that construct factories, apartments, parking lots, shopping malls, and other structures must file a report how the construction will affect historical remains and which steps will be taken to preserve them. Because of this law, the business of *contract archaeology* has boomed in the United States. Contract archaeology companies bid competitively for the privilege of locating, excavating, and reporting on sites affected or destroyed by construction. Hundreds of contract archaeology companies exist, providing jobs for thousands of archaeologists and students.

### Biological/Physical Anthropology

**Biological** (also called **physical**) **anthropology** is closely related to the biological sciences in its goals and methods.

**biological (physical) anthropology** major subfield of anthropology that studies the biological dimensions of humans and other primates.

**primatology** The study of primates, including monkeys and apes; subfield of biological anthropology.

It focuses on areas such as the anatomy and behavior of monkeys and apes, the physical (including genetic) variations between different human populations, and the biological evolution of the human species.

Within biological anthropology, researchers in **primatology** study the evolution, anatomy, adaptation, and social behavior of primates, the taxonomic order to which humans belong. Research on group-living monkeys and apes has added significantly to the scientific understanding of many aspects of human behavior, including tool use, sexuality, parenting, cooperation, male–female differences, and aggression. Field studies of African chimpanzees and gorillas, the two apes genetically most similar to humans, have been especially fruitful sources of hypotheses and knowledge.

In the 1960s, famous British primatologist Jane Goodall was the first to observe toolmaking among African chimpanzees. Chimps intentionally modified sticks to probe entry and exit holes in termite mounds. When termite soldiers attacked the intruding objects, the chimps withdrew the probes and licked off the tasty insects. Goodall observed adult chimps teaching their young how to probe for termites, showing that humanity’s closest animal relatives have at least a semblance of cultural tradition. Some chimpanzee groups wave tree branches in aggressive displays against other groups and wad up

leaves to use as sponges to soak up drinking water. Working in West Africa, other researchers have observed some chimp groups using heavy round stones as hammers to crack open hard-shelled nuts. The chimps select stones of the proper shape and weight, control the force of their blows so that the nut does not shatter, and often leave the tools under nut trees for future use.

African gorillas also use tools. Using sticks, gorillas in the wild gauge the depth of water and even lay down a tree trunk to cross a deep pool. Researchers have seen one young female gorilla use stones to smash open a palm nut to get at the oil inside.

These and other observations have changed our understanding of human–animal differences: prior to such studies, making tools was widely considered to be one of the things humans could do that other animals could not. Also, the ability to make tools reveals a certain amount of foresight: the apes must be able to see a natural object as a potential tool that can be used to get something or to solve some problem.

Biological anthropologists who study **human variation** investigate how and why human populations vary physically due to hereditary, genetic factors. All humanity belongs to a single species, which taxonomists call *Homo sapiens*. One of the most important findings of anthropology is that the physical/genetic similarities among the world’s peoples far outweigh the differences. Nonetheless, peoples whose ancestral homelands are in Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, the Pacific islands, and the Americas were once more isolated than they are today. During this time, they evolved differences in overall body and facial form, height, skin color, blood chemistry, and other genetically determined features. Specialists in human variation measure and try to explain the differences and similarities among the world’s peoples in these physical characteristics. (We return to “racial” variation in Chapter 2.)

Often, genetic differences are related to the environment in which a people or their ancestors lived. For example, melanin in human skin produces the color our eyes perceive as dark. High levels of melanin protect skin against sun damage, so melanin usually is beneficial in tropical environments, where sunlight is most intense. However, as humans migrated into more temperate regions tens of thousands of years ago, the melanin that once protected their ancestors turned harmful. In high latitudes, melanin reduces the penetration of sunlight in the skin, reducing its ability to make Vitamin D. Thus, dark pigmentation is harmful in high latitudes like Europe and Siberia, and over many centuries skin grew lighter (“whiter”) in such regions.

Peoples who live in high altitudes also have evolved physiological adaptations, in this case to increase the supply of oxygen to their tissues. Andean peoples of South America have relatively large lungs and high levels of hemoglobin. The blood of Tibetans circulates more rapidly than most other people, thus allowing their muscles and organs to function more efficiently at elevations over 14,000 feet. Such populations evolved physiological adaptations to supply oxygen to their tissues.

Another aim of physical anthropology is to understand how and why the human species evolved from prehuman, apelike ancestors. The specialization that investigates human biological evolution is **paleoanthropology**. Over decades of searching for fossils and carrying out meticulous laboratory studies, paleoanthropologists have reconstructed the history of how the human anatomy evolved.

In the late 1970s, paleoanthropologists began to use new methods for investigating human evolution. Scientists in the field of molecular genetics can now sequence DNA—the genetic material by which hereditary traits are transmitted between generations. By comparing DNA sequences, geneticists estimate how closely different species are related. Studies comparing the genetic sequences of African apes with humans show that humans share 97.7 percent of their DNA with gorillas and 98.7 percent with chimpanzees and bonobos (also known as pygmy chimpanzees). DNA from modern humans and DNA sampled from the extinct human species *Neanderthal* are about 99.5 percent the same. Similarities in the DNA of two or more species are evidence that they share a common evolutionary ancestor. Also, the more similar the DNA between two or more species, the less time has elapsed since their divergence from a common ancestor. Thus, anthropologists study DNA sequences to estimate how long ago the species separated.

Through discovering and analyzing fossils, comparisons of DNA sequences, and other methods, the outlines of human evolution are becoming clear. Most scholars agree that the evolutionary line leading to modern humans split from the lines leading to modern African apes (chimpanzees and gorillas) at least six million years ago. (See A

**human variation** Physical differences among human populations; an interest of physical anthropologists.

**paleoanthropology** The specialization of physical anthropology that investigates the biological evolution of the human species.



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Paleoanthropologists specialize in human evolution, using evidence from fossils, DNA and other sources. This is a French Paleoanthropologist Jean-Jacques Hublin of the Max Plank Institute in Germany, holding a skull of a fossil hominid.

Closer Look for an overview of basic facts and the latest findings on human biological evolution.)

Most biological anthropologists work in universities or museums as teachers, researchers, writers, and curators. But many also apply their knowledge of human anatomy to practical matters. For instance, specialists in **forensic anthropology** work for or consult with law enforcement agencies, where they help identify human skeletal remains. Among their contributions are determining the age, sex, height, and other physical characteristics of crime or accident victims. Forensic anthropologists gather evidence from bones about old injuries or diseases, which are then compared with medical histories to identify victims.

## Cultural Anthropology

**Cultural anthropology** (also called **social anthropology**, **sociocultural anthropology**, and **ethnology**) is

**forensic anthropology** A specialization within physical anthropology that analyzes and identifies human remains.  
**cultural anthropology (social anthropology, sociocultural anthropology, ethnology)** The subfield that studies the way of life of contemporary and historically recent peoples.

the study of contemporary and historically recent human societies and cultures. As its name suggests, the main focus of this subfield is culture—the customs and beliefs of some human group. (The concept of culture is discussed at length in Chapter 2).

As we'll see in future chapters, cultural anthropologists study an enormous number of specific subjects, far too many to list here. Here are some of their overall objectives:

- Study firsthand and report about the ways of living of particular human groups, including both indigenous peoples and peoples who live in modernized, industrialized nations.
- Compare diverse cultures in the search for general principles that might explain human ways of living.
- Understand how various dimensions of human life—economics, family life, religion, art, communication, and so forth—relate to one another in particular cultures and in cultures generally.
- Analyze the causes and consequences of cultural change, including the consequences of the process of globalization.
- Enhance public understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and multicultural diversity.



In his 1871 book, *The Descent of Man*, British naturalist Charles Darwin realized that humans and African apes (chimpanzees and gorillas) are closely related biologically. Noting the anatomical similarities between humans and apes, Darwin argued that humanity evolved from an ape-like ancestor over eons of time. In his day, there was little evidence in the form of fossils that directly connected apes to humans, but Darwin realized that the many physical similarities among humans, chimps, and gorillas can best be explained by a common biological ancestry.

By the early twentieth century, most scientists accepted Darwin's general theory of biological evolution as well as his specific hypothesis about the close relationship between humans and apes. Since then, biological anthropologists and archaeologists have discovered thousands of fossils that confirmed the evolution of humanity out of an apelike ancestor. Before summarizing this evidence, we must describe briefly how scientists classify living organisms using the methods of taxonomy.

Even in Darwin's day, taxonomists recognized the similarity between African apes and humans. Both are classified in the same taxonomic superfamily (Hominoidea), though in different families (Pongidae for apes, Hominidae for humans). Below the family level, modern humans are classified in the genus *Homo* and in the species *sapiens*. Thus, you and I are *Homo sapiens*; the common chimpanzee is *Pan troglodytes*; the mountain gorilla is *Gorilla gorilla*. Generally, the criterion used to decide whether two very similar animals are in the same species is whether they mate and produce fertile offspring under natural conditions. All humans can do so.

Assigning an extinct animal known only from fossils to a species, or even to a genus, is often difficult. In human evolution, there are many ambiguities and uncertainties, many of which center around whether a particular fossil is or is not a direct ancestor of humans: for example, is a newly discovered bone or tooth one of a hominid, and, if so, was it a *Homo*, and, if so, to which species did it belong? These uncertainties are inherent in the fossil record; they are not, as some believe, "proof" that those who study human evolution are "just speculating."

### Human Biological Evolution

An enormous amount of evidence exists about the biological evolution of modern humans from an apelike ancestor over several millions of years. There are many popular misconceptions about human evolution. Here we correct a few while describing some major general findings.

1. **Your ancestors were not chimpanzees or gorillas.** Although these two African apes are indeed our closest

relatives in the primate family, humans did not evolve from them. Rather, modern humans and modern apes share a common ancestor that lived in Africa sometime between about seven and eight million years ago. Metaphorically speaking, the living apes are our cousins, not our evolutionary grandparents.

2. **There is no missing link.** In the early twentieth century, the phrase *missing link* referred to a fossil that is transitional between ape and human, combining some ape features with some human features. Even today, those who deny that humans evolved erroneously believe no fossil directly connects *Homo sapiens* to an apelike ancestor. But, in fact, the first fossil link between apes and humans was discovered in South Africa back in the 1920s. Named *Australopithecus africanus*, its skull was much like that of an ape, but it walked bipedally (on two legs rather than four). Future discoveries showed that its pelvis, legs, and feet were much like those of modern humans. Later, paleoanthropologists found literally thousands of fossils linking *Homo sapiens* to apelike ancestors, representing hundreds of individuals who were hominids (in the human evolutionary lineage) of one type or another. Today, debate centers largely on how these hominids are related to one another and on which particular remains are directly ancestral to humans.

3. **The main difference between apes and humans is bipedal locomotion.** Most people think brain size and intelligence are the main differences between humans and other animals. Certainly, the size of the brain distinguishes people and apes—a chimpanzee's cranial capacity averages around 400 cubic centimeters, a gorilla's around 500, and a human's around 1,300. And people are, in many ways, "smarter" than apes—humans use more sophisticated tools, speak complex languages, solve abstract problems, drastically modify their environments, and so forth. But the first change that began to split the evolutionary line leading to modern apes from the line leading to modern humans was not brain size, but the form of locomotion—human ancestors walked on two legs millions of years before their brains increased notably in size. Thus, evolutionarily speaking, it was bipedalism that set humanity on a different evolutionary path from modern apes. In fact, when biological anthropologists judge whether or not a disputed fossil fragment is from a hominid, their main criterion is whether the fossil remains suggest that the animal regularly walked on two legs, not the size of its brain.

4. **The human family tree is a bush.** Until the 1970s, most scholars thought human evolution was essentially *linear*; that is, one hominid species arose from its predecessor, which quickly became extinct, perhaps because it could not compete. Linear evolution means that only one or, at most,

two hominid species lived at the same time. In this view, a single evolutionary line led from an apelike creature through various transitional forms (the “links” that people used to say were “missing”) to modern humans.

For example, most researchers thought that two million years ago, only two hominids coexisted—both found only in Africa. Both were members of the genus *Australopithecus*. The chimpanzee-sized *A. africanus* was mainly a meat-eater. The somewhat larger *A. robustus* was mainly a vegetarian and an evolutionary dead end that left no modern descendants. Both were considered hominids because both were bipedal.

*A. africanus* gave rise to another African species called *Homo habilis*, which existed until about 1.4 million years ago. In turn, *Homo habilis* evolved into *Homo erectus*, which eventually evolved into modern humans. *A. africanus* was sometimes known as the “killer ape” because it was a predator, so killing animals for food was one of the things that began to differentiate hominids from apes. Or this is what most paleoanthropologists believed.

Today, it is fairly well established that the human family tree is not linear (tree-like) but has *multiple branches (bush-like)*; that is, several species of early hominids existed at the same time, with most ending in extinction. Discoveries since the 1970s have dramatically altered the linear view of the past, and today far more hominids are identified. The major issues are how they are related to African apes, to one another, and to modern *Homo sapiens*.

### Some Hominid Fossils and Dates

The first discovery of a fossil eventually recognized as an early form of human occurred in 1856. In Germany’s Neander Valley, quarry workers accidentally unearthed the first bones of the hominid that later was called Neanderthal Man. At the time, no one realized the significance of the bones. There was debate about whether they came from a deformed European with a projecting face or whether they were human at all. Later, Neanderthal fossils were found in both Ice Age Europe and western Asia, along with convincing evidence that Neanderthals made stone tools, hunted large mammals, built shelters organized spatially for different activities, used fire for cooking and warmth, and buried their dead.

By the mid-twentieth century, many scientists thought that Neanderthal was our direct ancestor. (Perhaps it was comforting to think that modern humans evolved in Europe or in the Middle East.) By the late twentieth century, though, both fossil evidence and DNA comparisons demonstrated fairly clearly that *Homo neanderthalensis* is not a direct human ancestor but an offshoot that lived between 500,000 and 30,000 years ago. DNA studies published in 2007 suggested

that sometime after migrating into northern Europe, Neanderthal was the first hominid to acquire light skin and red hair! After modern *Homo sapiens* migrated into Europe around 40,000 years ago, Neanderthal went extinct somewhere around 30,000 years ago. DNA studies published in 2010 suggested that modern people interbred with Neanderthals, but only rarely and the evidence came from the DNA of only three Neanderthal individuals.

Today, most paleoanthropologists believe the first hominid, living between about five and six million years ago in what is now Ethiopia, was *Ardipithecus*. In 2009, a team of Ethiopian and Western researchers published extensive new information about a female *Ardipithecus* that lived about 4.4 million years ago. The skeleton showed several unusual features. For example, the pelvis and feet showed that “Ardi” (the nickname given her) could walk bipedally, but her great toe was capable of grasping branches. This, along with the possibility that she lived in a forested area, suggested that Ardi spent part of her time in trees and part on the ground walking on two legs. *Ardipithecus*’ canines were smaller than those of apes, but in most other features of skull it resembled apes more than humans.

A later form of hominid, *Australopithecus afarensis* (also known as Lucy) lived between about three and four million years ago. Bones and teeth from about 300 individuals show pretty conclusively that *A. afarensis* walked on two legs. Lucy is most simply described as a bipedal hominid with an apelike head and humanlike limbs. In 2006, paleoanthropologists published new information about the 4.2-million-year-old *Australopithecus anamensis* from Ethiopia. Many believe that *anamensis* is the link between *Ardipithecus* and *afarensis*.

In April 2010, a new species of *Australopithecus*, named *A. sediba*, was reported from South Africa. It lived around 2 million years ago. If future research supports that it was a new species, then between about two and three million years ago, there were six or seven hominid species living at roughly the same time. One of them, *Homo habilis* (apparently the first hominid to make chopping tools out of stone), arose prior to two million years ago and lived at least until 1.4 million years ago. One of its several forms became a new species, *Homo erectus*, about two million years ago.

Presently, it appears that some populations of *Homo erectus* were the first hominids that left Africa. *Homo erectus* was in Georgia (the modern Asian nation bordering Turkey) by 1.8 million years ago. It migrated as far away from Africa as Indonesia (when first discovered, it was called Java Man) and China (“Peking Man”). Although its brain size averaged only about 900–1,000 cubic centimeters, *Homo erectus* was almost as tall as modern people and had a low forehead, prominent brow ridges, and a large but recognizably human face.



This early form of humanity made sharp stone tools, butchered animals, and probably controlled fire.

In Africa, some local populations of *Homo erectus* evolved into early forms of *Homo sapiens* around 200,000 years ago. Evidence suggests that modern humans lived *only* in Africa until as recently as 60,000 years ago. By 50,000 to 45,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* had moved into tropical southern Asia and reached Australia. If any local populations of *Homo erectus* were left in eastern and southeastern Asia, they were replaced by *Homo sapiens*. Somewhere around 40,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* migrated into temperate Europe. From Siberia, people crossed the Bering Strait (then dry land because of the lower sea levels of the Ice Age) into the Americas, probably by 20,000 years ago. By 12,000 years ago, human beings had migrated to every landmass on Earth except Antarctica and the remote islands of the Pacific.

Notice how rapidly our species migrated to and colonized vast regions once we left our African homelands. In only about 50,000 years, humanity was found almost everywhere. Most scholars think our remarkable success in colonizing new regions was due to a combination of our technological prowess, our ability to communicate complex messages through symbolic language, and the transmission of new ideas and behaviors to new generations through social learning—that is, through learning the culture of previous generations (see Chapter 2).

In 2004, the discovery of a tiny hominid on the Indonesian island of Flores caused a stir among paleoanthropologists. The first specimen was estimated to be around 18,000 years old and stood about 3½ feet tall. The international team that discovered it nicknamed it “The Hobbit,” to the delight of the media. The team claimed that the hominid was a new human species, which they named *Homo floresiensis*. Soon, other specialists disputed that the Hobbit was a new form of human, claiming instead that it was similar to nearby “pygmy” peoples and that its brain was so small (about 350 cubic centimeters versus about 1,300 for modern humans) because of the genetic disorder called microcephaly. Then, in 2005, seven more adults were described, along with a child’s leg and arm bones, dating between about 74,000 and 12,000 years ago. This find supports the notion that *Homo floresiensis* was a distinct, and new, hominid that survived in isolation even after modern people had colonized most of the islands around it. For now, the wider significance of this unusual hominid is unclear.

It seems that the more we discover, the more complicated the evolutionary history of humanity becomes.

### **What Does All This Have to Do with You and Me?**

What relevance does the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens* hold for modern humanity—for humans as we are today? If evolution is accepted, then the characteristics of a living species

are a product of the forces that shaped it in its past. So the way modern people are—human nature, some call it—might be more understandable if we can reconstruct our evolutionary past. For instance, many popular writers have claimed that humans are naturally aggressive, either because evolving into predators made us fierce or because our ancestors competed for resources so that early hominids had to fight to defend their territories. As evidence for their views, such writers cite research that allegedly showed that australopithecines were “killer apes,” that *Homo erectus* ate their own kind, that Neanderthals made weapons used in violent encounters, and so forth. Modern humans are prone to violence and warfare because evolution made us this way, some claim. Implicit in the argument is that violence and warfare are so difficult to control because they are part of humanity’s genetic heritage.

Such arguments are not necessarily wrong, but the evidence about human evolution is subject to many interpretations. That humans evolved from apelike ancestors is practically indisputable, but researchers differ on details of the process. For example: Which early hominid is *the* earliest? Were the australopithecines our ancestors or just an evolutionary branch that died out? What are the details of how various ancient hominids are related to one another and to us? There are no generally accepted answers to such questions. Particular paleoanthropologists have their own opinions and publish them. Then others support or attempt to refute those ideas based on their views of what the evidence shows or, sometimes, based on their own biases. If the interpretations of human *physical* evolution are contentious, then think about the uncertainties involved in trying to reconstruct the *behavior* (e.g., aggression) of an ancestor.

Some people, of course, do not accept evolution at all, and they especially do not accept the notion that humans evolved from any other so-called lower form of life. Those who even bother to read the scientific literature on human evolution misinterpret the many disagreements and contentious issues. “See,” such skeptics often say, “those evolutionists can’t even agree among themselves. Why should we believe them when they don’t even believe one another?” But, fundamentally, evolutionists *do* believe one another. They disagree only on specific details and particular issues. They do not disagree on the fact that humans and apes shared a common ancestor some millions of years ago. Scholarly disagreement indicates that scholars are considering evidence and coming to different conclusions. It does not mean that the scholars are making things up. Indeed, it means only two very obvious things: the fossil record is incomplete and fragmentary, and bones do not speak for themselves.

*SOURCES:* Balter (2009); Berger et al. (2010); Bower (2010); Gibbons (2009); Goebel (2007); Green et al. (2010); Jurmain et al. (2008); Lalueza-Fox et al. (2007); Lordkipanidze et al. (2007); Moorwood et al. (2005); Spoor et al. (2007); Trinkhaus (2007); Wood (2002).

The last two objectives are especially important in the contemporary world, in which individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds regularly come into contact with one another in the rapidly changing global society.

To some people, studies of other cultures seem esoteric—“interesting but of little practical value,” they often say. Most anthropologists disagree. We think that what we learn by our descriptions, comparisons, and analyses of cultures helps to improve the human condition. For one thing, studies of other cultures help us understand our own way of life. For another, specific studies carried out by cultural anthropologists have helped solve practical problems in real human communities.

To collect information about particular cultures, researchers conduct **fieldwork**. Fieldworkers ordinarily move into the community under study so that they can live in close contact with the people. If practical, they communicate in the local language. Daily interaction with the members of a community provides anthropologists with firsthand experiences that yield insights and information that could not be gained in any other way. Fieldworkers usually report the findings of their research in books or scholarly journals, where they are available to other scholars and to the general public. A written account of how a single human population lives is called an **ethnography**, which means “writing about a people.” (We have more to say about fieldwork in Chapter 5.)

## Anthropological Linguistics

Defined as the study of human language, linguistics is a field all its own, existing as a separate discipline from

**fieldwork** Ethnographic research that involves observing and interviewing the members of a culture to describe their way of life.

**ethnography** A written description of the way of life of some human population.

**anthropological linguistics** Subfield that focuses on the interrelationships between language and other aspects of a people’s culture.

**applied anthropology** Subfield whose practitioners use anthropological methods, theories, and concepts to solve practical, real-world problems; practitioners are often employed by a governmental agency or private organization.

anthropology. Linguists describe and analyze the sound patterns and combinations, words, meanings, and sentence structures of human languages. The ability to communicate complex messages with great efficiency may be the most important capability of humans that makes us different from primates and other animals. Certainly our ability to speak is a key factor in the evolutionary success of humans.

Cultural anthropologists are interested in language because of how the language and culture of a people affect each other. The subfield of **anthropological linguistics** is concerned with the complex relationships between language and other aspects of human behavior and thought. For example, anthropological linguists are interested in how language is used in various social contexts: What style of speech must one use with people of high status? Does the particular language we learned while growing up have any important effects on how we view the world or how we think and feel? (Chapter 3 provides more information about language and social life.)



## Applying Anthropology

In the past, most professional anthropologists spent their careers in some form of educational institution, either in colleges and universities or in museums. However, since around 1990, more and more anthropologists have jobs in other kinds of institutions. The American Anthropological Association (or “AAA”) is the professional association of anthropologists. In its 2006 *Annual Report*, the AAA reported that more than half of anthropologists work outside academic settings, in government agencies, international organizations, nonprofit groups, or private companies. Hundreds of others make their living as consultants to such organizations and institutions.

## Applied Anthropology

**Applied anthropology** use anthropological methods, theories, concepts, and insights to help public institutions or private enterprises deal with practical, real-world problems. Applied anthropology sometimes is viewed as a fifth subfield, but all applied anthropologists have been trained in one or more of the traditional four fields. In this sense, applied anthropology cuts across the other subfields and individuals in all subfields may also do applied work—that is, work that contributes directly to problem solving in an organization.

As globalization brings together peoples in travel, education, and business, learning about other cultures takes on increasing practical importance.



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We discuss some of the ways applied anthropologists have contributed to the alleviation of human problems in later chapters. For now, a few examples illustrate some of the work they do.

*Development anthropology* is one area in which anthropologists apply their expertise to the solution of practical human problems, usually in developing countries. Working both as full-time employees and as consultants, development anthropologists provide information about communities that helps agencies adapt projects to local conditions and needs. Examples of agencies and institutions that employ development anthropologists include the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. One important role of the anthropologist in such institutions is to provide policymakers with knowledge of local-level ecological and cultural conditions, so that projects will avoid unanticipated problems and minimize negative impacts.

*Educational anthropology* offers jobs in public agencies and private institutions. Some roles of educational anthropologists include advising in bilingual education, conducting detailed observations of classroom interactions, training personnel in multicultural issues, and adapting teaching styles to local customs and needs. Many modern nations, including

those of Europe and the Americas, are becoming more culturally diverse due to immigration. As a response to this trend, an increasingly important role for educational anthropologists working in North America is to help professional educators understand the learning styles and behavior of children from various ethnic and national backgrounds. Persons trained in both linguistic and cultural anthropology are especially likely to work in educational anthropology.

Private companies sometimes employ cultural anthropologists full time or as consultants, creating a professional opportunity often called *corporate anthropology*. As international trade agreements remove tariffs, quotas, and other barriers to international trade, people of different cultural heritages increasingly conduct business and buy and sell one another's products. The dramatic growth of overseas business activities encourages companies to hire professionals who can advise executives and sales staff on what to expect and how to speak and act when they conduct business in other countries. Because of their training as acute observers and listeners, anthropologists also work in the private sector in many other capacities: they watch how employees interact with one another, analyze how workers understand the capabilities of office machines, study how the attitudes and styles of managers affect

worker performance, and perform a variety of other information-gathering and analysis tasks.

A rapidly growing field is **medical anthropology**. Medical anthropologists usually are trained both in biological and cultural anthropology. They investigate the complex interactions among human health, nutrition, social environment, and cultural beliefs and practices. Medical anthropologists with extensive training in human biology and physiology study disease transmission patterns and how particular groups adapt to the presence of diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness. Because the transmission of viruses and bacteria is strongly influenced by people's diets, sanitation, sexual habits, and other behaviors, many medical anthropologists work as a team with epidemiologists to identify cultural practices that affect the spread of disease. Different cultures have different ideas about the causes and symptoms of disease, how best to treat illnesses, the abilities of traditional healers and doctors, and the importance of community involvement in the healing process. By studying how a human community perceives such things, medical anthropologists help hospitals and other agencies deliver health care services more effectively. Language and communication also are important influences on health care delivery, so people trained in linguistic anthropology sometimes work in medical anthropology.

Speaking broadly, anthropologists are valuable to governments, international agencies, companies, and other organizations because they are trained to do two things very well: first, to observe, record, and analyze human behavior in diverse settings; and, second, to look for and understand the cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs that underlie that behavior.

## Careers in Anthropology

People who earn doctoral degrees in anthropology have a wealth of career options, as the preceding discussion shows. What opportunities exist for those with an undergraduate degree in anthropology? The following are a few of the many websites that describe available opportunities.

- The University of Kentucky website (<http://anthropology.nku.edu/index.php/careers-in-anthropology>) is good for a quick overview of opportunities.

**medical anthropology** The specialization that researches the connections between cultural beliefs and habits and the spread and treatment of diseases and illnesses.

- The American Anthropological Association (<http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/careers/>) provides an overview of the general kinds of jobs that can be pursued by people with a bachelor's degree.
- The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology ([www.practicinganthropology.org/](http://www.practicinganthropology.org/)) is the professional association of anthropologists who work predominantly in nonacademic jobs. On the website, click the tab "Practicing Anthro" for a brief overview of the kinds of jobs for which anthropological training is useful. Then, click the tab "Links" for more specific information.
- The Wiley InterScience website provides many online articles from anthropological journals. Two sites of interest about careers are:
  1. Practicing Anthropology in Corporate America ([www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/bookhome/122334425](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/bookhome/122334425))
  2. Practicing Anthropology in a Postmodern World ([www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/bookhome/122334389](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/bookhome/122334389))

Generally, in addition to learning to write, analyze, and think critically, students who study cultural anthropology are prepared to examine human life from many alternative perspectives, to study interactions between individuals and groups objectively and insightfully, to adjust to various social situations, to fit into diverse communities by respecting their ways of life, and to be sensitive to the multitude of differences between the world's peoples. Of course, along the way, most students master other skills, such as statistical analysis or foreign languages, which demonstrate ability and establish credentials for a variety of career paths.



## Cultural Anthropology Today

As our brief summary of the five subdisciplines confirms, anthropology is indeed a diverse field. Even by itself, cultural anthropology—the main subject of this text—is enormously broad: modern fieldworkers live among and study human communities in all parts of the world, from the mountains of Tibet to the deserts of the American Southwest, from the streets of Chicago to the plains of East Africa.

In most peoples' imagination, anthropologists go to far-off places to study "native" cultures. Except for some common but mistaken stereotypes about "natives," this image was reasonably accurate until the 1970s. Until





© Reuters/Corbis

Forensic anthropologists work with governments and international organizations to identify human skeletal remains and to help determine the causes of death. These forensic specialists are examining remains in El Salvador.

then, cultural anthropology differed from sociology and other disciplines that studied living peoples mainly by the kinds of cultures studied. Anthropologists focused on small-scale, non-Western, preindustrial, subsistence-oriented cultures, whereas sociologists tended to study large Euro-American, industrial, money-and-market countries. Not too long ago, many cultural anthropologists sought untouched tribal cultures to study because living among the “primitives” usually enhanced one’s reputation.

All this has changed. Today, you are as likely to find an anthropological fieldworker studying the impact of Hurricane Katrina as a New Guinea village, as shown by an article titled “Chronic Disaster Syndrome: Displacement, Disaster Capitalism, and the Eviction of the Poor from New Orleans.” As the Internet accelerates global communications, anthropologists publish books with titles like *Dreaming of a Mail Order Husband: Russian-American Internet Romance* (Ericka Johnson, 2007). Anthropologists

are researching how educated professionals produce information communicated to ordinary people, as in the book *Authors of the Storm: Meteorologists and the Culture of Prediction* (Gary Alan Fine, 2007). Changing gender roles and working conditions lead to articles like “Man Enough to Let My Wife Support Me: How Changing Models of Career and Gender Are Reshaping the Experience of Unemployment.” In brief, cultural anthropology has widened its investigations well beyond the old idea of Natives. We now recognize we are all Natives.

Some studies done in the anthropologist’s own country are of immigrant communities. North America—correctly said to be the continent of immigrants—includes people of diverse origins. Some immigrants become largely or partly assimilated: over a period of decades or generations, they adopt many of the customs and beliefs of the so-called mainstream. In other cases, though, there is considerable cultural continuity with



**G**lobalization is one of those words that appear daily in the news media. The word means that the diverse nations and peoples of the world are increasingly interconnected by commercial relationships, communication technologies, political interests and conflicts, short-term travel and long-term immigration, and other forces. Huge container ships and lowered costs of sea transportation move billions of dollars' worth of products across the Pacific, allowing North American consumers to benefit from the low labor costs of China and other nations when they shop at Wal-Mart, Toys“R”Us, and other stores. More people than ever before migrate between nations to study and work, affecting their home countries as well as those to which they relocate. The Internet and mobile phones link people together to an unprecedented degree, facilitating the flow of information, ideas, and messages across national boundaries. The political impacts could be revolutionary, a fact recognized by the government of the People's Republic of China as it tries to control its citizens' access to websites.

The mere existence of interconnectedness between world regions is not new. The ancient Silk Road linked China to Rome, the two greatest empires 2,000 years ago. Along it flowed not just silk and precious metals, but ideas and inventions as well (the latter mostly from China to Europe). Islamic traders from Arabia proselytized their religion into both coasts of Africa as well as into much of the area that we know today as Southeast Asia. In the Americas, too, the Inca Empire stretched over most of western South America, and its runners/messengers carried commands from the Inca ruler to regions over which he ruled. These and other empires were far-reaching, but they were not truly global—neither communications nor transportation

the past—immigrants continue their language, cuisine, family relations, wedding and funeral customs, and other practices and beliefs. For example, in the 1970s, the U.S. government relocated thousands of Hmong, a people of highland Southeast Asia, into the Central Valley of California. Even after two or three decades of living in the United States, many immigrant Hmong still speak little English, bring large numbers of relatives to live with them in houses other Americans consider “single-family” dwellings, use their traditional methods of curing, and occasionally eat animals that Americans define as pets. Many people with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and South Asian heritages maintain some traditions of their ancestral homelands to a surprising degree. African Americans celebrate their origins with Kwanzaa and many Latinos speak “Spanglish” and continue to practice Latin festivals.

technologies were efficient enough to link most of the world's people to the major centers of global wealth and influence. And, until after Columbus's voyages in the 1490s, the peoples and cultures of the New and Old Worlds were mostly isolated from one another.

After Columbus, Europeans learned they had encountered a world that was new to them, rather than discovering the alternative route to Asia that the Spanish monarchy had commissioned Columbus to find. By 1500, vast quantities of gold and silver began to flow from the Americas to Europe, either looted from the Incas and Aztecs or mined with the labor of the “Indians.” Two centuries later, millions of enslaved West Africans were working on the plantations of the American South, the Caribbean, and eastern South America. In the 1600s and 1700s, well-off Europeans developed a taste for the sugar, tobacco, and coffee from the Americas that the slaves produced and their “owners” sold on world markets. By the 1800s, African slaves in the American South were producing vast quantities of cotton fibers for Europe's Industrial Revolution, which was based on steam-powered looms for weaving clothing. The white owners of the large plantations became wealthy selling the products produced by “their” slaves, but the owners of clothing factories in the North also benefited, as did those who wore the clothes.

During these same centuries, the European overseas trade with the East for spices, tea, silk, and porcelain brought India, China, and eventually the rest of Asia into world markets and ultimately into world conflicts. Catholic and Protestant missionaries usually accompanied or followed the contacts made to trade and build empires, further spreading the ideas and values of the West into other continents. For 500 years,

In the past couple of decades, anthropologists have intensively researched globalization—the process by which *particular* peoples of the world's 190 or so nations participate in a single system that encompasses *all* peoples and nations. The parts (continents, regions, nations, cities, small villages) of the global system are interconnected by flows of technology, transportation, communications, travel, and—above all—market exchanges of raw materials and finished products. It is important to realize that globalization is a *process* rather than a *state*, that is, globalization is not (and never will be) finished—it is ongoing, changing, evolving, transforming. Cultural anthropological studies involve intensive, first-hand, prolonged fieldwork in local communities, both rural and urban. Such research provides a bottom up view of globalization that complements the top down view focused on by most of the media and scholars. In later chapters, we present many examples of such anthropological studies.

then, various representatives of Western civilization have engaged other continents, incorporating most non-Western peoples into a larger, worldwide system.

Noting the half-millennium of such contacts between the world's regions and peoples, some say there is nothing new about globalization. If globalization is only about the existence of "contacts" and "interconnections," they are correct. But both the degree and the nature of contacts and interconnections are different in the twenty-first century. By *degree*, we mean that the intensity and importance of contacts and interconnections have increased dramatically in the past several decades; today, the lives of more people are affected more thoroughly than, say, 50 years ago. By *nature*, we mean that the ways in which the world's peoples are interconnected are different than in the past. Two differences are especially important, each considered in more detail in later chapters.

First, the division of economic activities between nations and regions has changed. Until the mid-twentieth century, some nations and regions produced mainly food, metals, lumber, and other raw materials in plantations, mines, and forests. Generally, these nations and regions were known as "underdeveloped" or "Third World." The more industrialized, and mostly wealthier, countries bought most of these relatively low-value products, which their factories and laborers then turned into higher-valued, profit-making products. Today, factory production itself is increasingly globalized: in Latin America, Asia, and other regions, hundreds of millions of people now work in factories producing commodities for sale in international markets. More than ever before, there is an *international* market for labor, meaning that the industrial laborers of the countries we used to call "underdeveloped" are competing with the labor force of the "developed" countries. Whole

Globalization has another consequence for ethnographic work: people who used to live in remote villages now migrate to urban areas in their own country and abroad. If an anthropologist wants to conduct fieldwork in a "remote" place, some people from most such places will have migrated elsewhere in search of employment or excitement. In the twenty-first century, if an anthropologist wants to study "a people," it is increasingly necessary to study them in all the places on our planet where they now live. Today, globalization and its consequences are one of the most important areas of research. What are its impacts on people of all nations? Is a global megaculture developing that will someday make all humanity pretty much alike? (The Globalization box gives a first look at this topic, which runs throughout this book.)

industries have relocated. For example, the American textile industry has almost disappeared, its factories replaced by those in China, Indonesia, and other countries with far cheaper labor. Other industries that have moved offshore are toys, shoes, and consumer electronics. Some say the globalization of factory production is leading to the decline of incomes among middle-class families and is largely responsible for the growing disparity of income and wealth between the rich and everyone else.

Second, things like DVDs, international migration, overseas travel, and the Internet have fostered increasing two-way cultural exchanges. Most people think the media—an important carrier of music, tastes, styles, foods, ideas, beliefs, and the like—is rapidly transmitting the "culture" of the West to the rest of the world. A primary concern is that the North American and European culture (the "West") will erode and eventually destroy local traditions. We take up this and other issues about globalization in future chapters.

So, although the existence of interconnections among peoples and nations is not new, the impact of these connections on all peoples and nations and the way these interconnections work have changed in the last few decades. In the remainder of this book, we discuss globalization in boxes like this one as well as in the main body of the text itself. We emphasize the effects of globalization on all nations and regions, and not just how people like "Us" are affecting people like "Them," or how "They" threaten "Us."

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Being as specific as you can, how has globalization affected you personally?
2. In the future, how problematic will the "Us/Them" distinction become?

As anthropologists have moved beyond their traditional focus on peoples of far away, the boundaries between cultural anthropology and other disciplines (especially sociology) are less clear-cut than they were even a few years ago. Most anthropological work, though, is still done in relatively small communities (on the order of a few hundred to a few thousand), where the researcher can interact directly with people and experience their lives firsthand. More than any other single factor, the intense fieldwork experience distinguishes cultural anthropology from other disciplines concerned with humankind. Also, cultural anthropology remains more comparative and global in its scope and interests than the other social sciences and humanities. Even today, ethnologists are far more likely than sociologists or psychologists to conduct research in a country other than their own.



## Understanding Human Cultures: Anthropological Approaches

The main difference between anthropology and other social sciences and humanities is not so much the *kinds* of subjects anthropologists investigate as the *approaches* we take to studying human life. We believe it is important to study cultures and communities holistically, comparatively, and relativistically. Because it is these perspectives that make cultural anthropology distinctive, they need to be introduced.

### Holistic Perspective

To study a subject holistically is to attempt to understand all the factors that influence it and to interpret it in the context of all those factors. The **holistic perspective** means that no single aspect of a human culture can be understood unless its relationships to other aspects of the culture are explored. Holism requires, for example, that a fieldworker studying the rituals of a people must investigate how those rituals are influenced by the people's family life, economic forces, political leadership, relationships between the sexes, and a host of other factors. The attempt to understand a community's customs, beliefs, values, and so forth holistically is one reason ethnographic fieldwork takes so much time and involves close contact with people.

Taken literally, a holistic understanding of a people's customs and beliefs is probably not possible because of the complexity of human societies. But anthropologists have learned that ignoring the interrelationships among language, religion, art, economy, family, and other dimensions of life results in distortions

**holistic perspective** The assumption that any aspect of a culture is integrated with other aspects, so that no dimension of culture can be understood in isolation.

**comparative perspective** The insistence by anthropologists that valid hypotheses and theories about humanity be tested with information from a wide range of cultures.

**cultural relativism** The notion that one should not judge the behavior of other peoples using the standards of one's own culture.

**ethnocentrism** The attitude or opinion that the morals, values, and customs of one's own culture are superior to those of other peoples.

and misunderstandings. The essence of the holistic perspective may be stated fairly simply: *Look for connections and interrelationships, and try to understand parts in the context of the whole.*

### Comparative Perspective

More than most people, anthropologists are aware of the diversity of the world's cultures. The ideas and behaviors learned from upbringing and experience in one's own society may not apply to other peoples with different cultural traditions. This implies that any general theories or ideas scholars might have about humans—about human nature, sexuality, warfare, family relationships, and so on—must take into account information from a wide range of societies. In other words, general theoretical ideas about humans or human societies or cultures must be investigated from a **comparative perspective**.

The main reason anthropologists insist on comparison is simple: Many people mistakenly think the customs and beliefs familiar to them exist among people everywhere, which is usually not the case. Anthropologists believe the cultural ideas and practices of people living in different times and places are far too diverse for any general theory to be accepted until it has been investigated and tested in a wide range of human groups. The comparative perspective anthropologists use to investigate their ideas may be stated as: *Do not make generalizations about humans without considering the full range of cultural diversity.*

### Relativistic Perspective

Fundamentally, **cultural relativism** means that no culture—taken as a whole—is inherently superior or inferior to any other. Anthropologists adopt this perspective because concepts such as superiority require judgments about the relative worthiness of behaviors, beliefs, and other characteristics of a culture. Such judgments are usually rooted in one's own values, however, and by and large, values depend on the culture in which one was raised. (If you think there must be universal standards for judging cultures, you may be right. However, aside from such actions as homicide, people don't agree on what they are.)

To see why a relativistic approach to studying cultures is important, contrast cultural relativism with ethnocentrism. **Ethnocentrism** is the belief that the moral standards, manners, attitudes, and so forth of one's own culture are superior to those of other cultures. Most



people are ethnocentric, and a *certain degree* of ethnocentrism is probably essential if people are to experience the sense of belonging necessary for contentment and if their culture is to persist. Mild ethnocentrism—in which people are committed to certain values but don't insist that everyone else hold and live by those values—is unobjectionable and inevitable. But extreme ethnocentrism—in which people believe their values are the only correct ones and that all people everywhere should be judged by how closely they live up to those values—leads to attitudes of intolerance and misunderstandings that anthropologists find objectionable.

Clearly, ethnocentric attitudes make objectivity difficult, and ethnographic fieldworkers should avoid evaluating the behavior of other people according to the standards of their own culture. Like the holistic and comparative perspectives, the essential point of cultural relativism may be stated simply: *In studying another culture, do not evaluate the behavior of its members by the standards and values of your own culture.*

Unfortunately, many people misconceive the word *relativism*. To anthropologists, relativism is a *methodological principle* that refers to an outlook that is essential for maximum objectivity and understanding when studying a people whose way of life differs from their own. As a methodological principle, relativism recognizes that behavior viewed as morally wrong (or sinful) in one society may not be wrong in another, such as polygamy or bare-breasted females. Unqualified condemnations of the actions or beliefs of some group of people have no place in anthropological research or in anthropological writings.

However, to a great many people, the term *relativism* means “anything goes” with respect to individual behaviors. *Moral relativism* (relativism as a *moral principle*) implies that there are no absolute, universal standards by which to evaluate actions in terms such as right and wrong or good and bad.

Some people blame moral relativism for a host of social problems. In the early 2000s, many Americans worry about the morality and the long-term social effects of gay and lesbian relationships. When gays and lesbians demanded the equal rights they believe only marriage can grant, the legislatures of a number of states passed “defense of marriage acts” that define marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. Others worry that society's acceptance of extramarital sex or tolerance for homosexuality erodes family values and increases divorce rates, or that the failure of public schools to inculcate patriotism and morality leads to

delinquency and violence, or that the lack of public attention given to religious teachings is responsible for high crime rates. Such arguments and policies imply that there *are* absolute standards and clear rules about right and wrong or moral and immoral behavior. But moral relativism *taken to its extreme* says that few such standards or rules exist.

Newcomers to anthropology often confuse the two meanings of *relativism*, mistakenly believing that anthropologists promote both kinds of relativism. Most anthropologists are methodological relativists, but fewer are moral relativists. Anthropologists are as likely as anyone to consider oppression, slavery, violence, murder, slander, and so forth as morally objectionable. Many anthropologists speak out about violence that some claim are ingrained in their culture or are part of their religion, such as stoning of women found guilty of adultery. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States is viewed with as much horror by anthropologists as by most other people, although most of us seek to understand the historical background and social and cultural context that led to it rather than viewing it simply as the incarnation of evil.

But the issues are not as simple in practice as the distinction between methodological and moral relativism implies. An example will illustrate. Most people have heard of the custom generally called *female circumcision* or *female genital mutilation*. The practice is widespread (but far from universal) in some regions of northern Africa. It varies in severity, ranging from removing the clitoris to stitching shut the labia until marriage. Cultural beliefs about the reasons for the custom also vary, but most often focus on controlling unmarried female sexuality and increasing a woman's desirability as a marriage partner. Greatly complicating the relativism issue is that in many places, a majority of older women support the custom, so it is not unambiguously an issue of male control or oppression of women. Often a girl or young woman herself considers it a symbol of her femininity and of her and her family's honor.

How should an anthropologist view this custom? Do we think of it as just another age-old tradition—like people eating with their fingers or men covering their genitals with only penis sheaths—that varies from people to people but is *inherently* neither right nor wrong? Surely not: this custom causes pain, exposes women to the dangers of infection and other complications, and is applied only to women because of their gender. Often, it is forced upon a girl at a certain age—even if she objects. Because of its pain, danger, selectivity, and social enforcement, female

circumcision is not comparable to customs surrounding foods and clothing styles, which vary from people to people but are generally “harmless.”

Then, is female genital mutilation a form of oppression? And if so, by whom? Can culture itself oppress people? If it is oppression, does the anthropologist simply learn and write about it, place it in its local cultural context, compare the cultures that practice it with other cultures that do not, develop an idea about its meaning and why it occurs, and then do nothing? That is what many anthropologists believe we should do *as anthropologists*. Others disagree, believing instead that we should speak out against such practices, both as anthropologists and as human beings.

Then again, exactly what counts as “such practices”? Does eating dogs or cats or horses count? Does female footbinding in 1600s China count? Would tightly binding the waists of women in nineteenth-century Europe count? In the twenty-first century, just how different are breast augmentation or reduction surgery, hip and thigh liposuction, face-lifts, and nose jobs different from female circumcision? Is it that they seem to be voluntary? If so, then when a North African woman consents to her circumcision, does her consent make the custom acceptable to us? And if a young woman feels constrained by the ideals of beauty as defined by the culture in which she grew up, is it unambiguously true that her liposuction or breast augmentation is voluntary?

Along these same lines, why is there so little international concern over the removal of the foreskin of most American male infants, who have absolutely no choice when a physician mutilates their genitals? In 2009 in the Eastern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa, 91 men died from their circumcisions, considered a rite of passage into manhood. Should we regard male circumcisions as just as morally objectionable as the deaths and suffering caused by female genital mutilation?

Answers to such questions are not obvious, which is our main point. Most anthropologists would probably be satisfied with the following solution: relativism as a methodological principle is essential to anthropological research because it facilitates fieldwork and leads to greater objectivity. Moral relativism is a separate matter and depends largely on one’s values. When an anthropologist encounters customs like female circumcision that rather clearly cause harm, then the matter becomes complex because it is difficult to remain morally neutral. In such cases, we need to examine the custom holistically to place it in its cultural context: perhaps the “victim’s” perception of “harm” differs from ours, or perhaps the harm is necessary to achieve some more

important objective. We also should consider comparable practices (such as breast augmentation) that might have a similar character or function within our own culture. After doing so, we might note that “we” sometimes do similar things as “them”—though we have trouble recognizing the similarity because it involves “us”—so that we need to examine ourselves when we condemn others. Such a view does not resolve the essential problem of cultural relativism in its moral meaning, but at least it reminds us that all human groups believe and do things that some other human groups find abhorrent.



## The Value of Anthropology

What insights does anthropology offer about humanity? What is the value of the information that anthropologists have gathered about the past and present of humankind? We consider these questions in future chapters. For now, we note some of the most general insights and contributions.

First, anthropology helps us understand the biological, technological, and cultural development of humanity over long timespans. Most of the reliable information available about human biological evolution, prehistoric cultures, and non-Western peoples resulted from anthropological research. This information has become part of our general storehouse of knowledge, recorded in textbooks and taught in schools. We easily forget that someone had to discover these facts and interpret their significance. For example, only in the late nineteenth century did most scientists accept that people are related to apes, and only in the last several decades has the relationship between humans and African apes become clear.

Anthropology has contributed more than just facts. Anthropological concepts have been incorporated into the thinking of millions of people. For example, in this chapter, we have used the term *culture*, confidently assuming our readers know the word and its significance. You may not know that the scientific meaning of this word, as used in the phrase *Tibetan culture*, is not very old. Well into the nineteenth century, people did not fully understand the importance of the distinction between a people’s culture (the *learned* beliefs and habits that made them distinctive) and their biological makeup (their *inherited* physical characteristics). Differences we now know are caused largely or entirely by learning and upbringing were confused with

differences caused by biological inheritance. Early-twentieth-century anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, and Margaret Mead marshaled empirical evidence showing that biological differences and cultural differences are independent of each other. As this example shows, anthropologists have in fact contributed much to our knowledge of the human condition, although most people are not aware how important anthropology was in developing these understandings and insights.

Another value of anthropology is that it teaches the importance of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. Anthropology urges all of us not to be ethnocentric in our attitudes toward other peoples. Mutual respect and understanding among the world's peoples are increasingly important in the century of globalization, with its world travel, international migration, multinational businesses, and conflicts based on ethnic or religious differences. The world's problems will not be solved simply by eliminating ethnocentrism, but a relativistic outlook on cultural differences might help to alleviate some of the prejudices, misunderstandings, stereotypes, interethnic conflicts, and racism that cause so much trouble among people on all continents. Would America's reactions to the 9/11 attacks have been different if we had a better understanding of Iraq and Islam and the history of the relations between the Middle East and the West? How much can understanding cultural differences help in alleviating international tensions and outright conflicts?

A related point is that anthropology helps to minimize the miscommunications that commonly arise when people from different parts of the world interact with one another. As we shall see in Chapter 2, our upbringing in a particular culture influences us in subtle ways. For instance, English people know how to interpret one another's actions on the basis of speech styles

or body language, but these cues do not necessarily mean the same thing to people from different cultures. A Canadian businessperson selling products in Turkey may wonder why her host does not cut the small talk and get down to business, whereas the Turk can't figure out why the salesperson thinks they can do business before they have become better acquainted. A manager from a German firm may be unintentionally offensive when he shoves the business card of his Korean or Japanese counterpart in his pocket without carefully studying it. A Vietnamese student attending a California university may come across as a sycophant to her professors because her culture values learning so highly, which manifests itself as respect for teachers. Anthropology teaches people to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences—people's actions may not mean what we take them to mean, and much misunderstanding can be avoided by taking cultural differences into account in our dealings with other people.

Finally, because of its insistence on studying humanity from a comparative perspective, anthropology helps us to understand our own individual lives. By exposing you to the cultures of people living in other times and places, anthropology helps you see new things about yourself. How does your life compare to the lives of other people around the world? What assumptions do you unconsciously take for granted about the world? Do people in other cultures share the same kinds of problems, hopes, motivations, and feelings as you do? Or are individuals raised in other societies completely different? How does the overall quality of your existence—your sense of well-being and happiness, your family life, your emotional states, your feeling that life is meaningful—compare with that of people who live elsewhere? Anthropology offers the chance to compare yourself to other peoples who live in different circumstances. By studying others, anthropologists hope that people gain new perspectives on themselves.

## Summary

**1 Describe how anthropology differs from other disciplines that also study humans.** The broad scope of anthropology distinguishes it from other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. The field as a whole is concerned with all human beings of the past and present, living at all levels of technological development. Anthropology is also interested in all aspects of humanity: biology, language, technology, art, religion, and all other dimensions of human life.

**2 List the four major subfields of anthropology and their primary subject matters.** Individual anthropologists usually specialize in one of four subdisciplines. Archaeology uses the material remains of prehistoric and historic peoples to investigate the past, focusing on the long-term technological and social changes that occurred in particular regions of the world. Biological/physical anthropology studies the biological dimensions of human beings, including nonhuman primates, the physical



variations among contemporary peoples, and human evolution. Cultural anthropology is concerned with the social and cultural life of contemporary and historically recent human societies. Anthropological linguistics concentrates on the interrelationships between language and other elements of social life and culture.

**3 Explain some of the practical uses of anthropology in solving human problems.** More and more, anthropologists are applying the insights gained from the concepts, methods, and theories of anthropology to solve real-world problems in such areas as development, business, education, and health care services. Most people who do applied work are trained in cultural anthropology, but the other three subfields also are represented. As an undergraduate major, anthropology trains people in critical thinking and cultural sensitivity, skills that are increasingly useful as globalization brings diverse people together into larger systems.

**4 Discuss the ways in which cultural anthropology has changed in the last several decades.** Until around 1970, cultural anthropology concentrated on cultures known as “tribal” or “indigenous.” This is not as true in the globalized world of today. Many anthropologists conduct research in the urbanized, industrialized nations of the developed world. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish ethnology from the kindred discipline of sociology. However, firsthand, extended fieldwork in villages or relatively small towns or neighborhoods continues to be a hallmark of cultural anthropology. Also, ethnologists are far more comparative and global in their interests and research than other social scientists.

**5 Understand the meaning and importance of the holistic, comparative, and relativistic perspectives.** Cultural anthropologists approach the study of other cultures from three main perspectives. Holism is the attempt to investigate the interrelationships among the customs and beliefs of a particular people. The comparative perspective means that any attempt to understand humanity or explain cultures or behaviors must include information from a wide range of human ways of life. Cultural relativism urges fieldworkers to try to understand people’s behaviors on their own terms, not those of the anthropologist’s own culture. Most anthropologists consider themselves methodological relativists, but moral relativism is a separate, though related, matter.

**6 Report the wider lessons one can learn from studying anthropology.** Anthropology has practical value in the modern world. Most existing, reliable knowledge about human evolution, prehistoric populations, and indigenous peoples was discovered by anthropologists. Early anthropologists were instrumental in popularizing the concept of culture and in showing that cultural differences are not caused by racial differences. The value of understanding peoples of different regions and nations is another practical lesson of anthropology, one that is increasingly important as global connections intensify. The information that ethnographers have collected about alternative ways of being human allows individuals to become more aware of their own life circumstances.

## Media Resources

**The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center**  
[www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 2 CULTURE



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## **Introducing Culture**

### **Defining Culture**

*Shared...*

*...Socially Learned...*

*...Knowledge...*

*...and Patterns of Behavior*

### **Cultural Knowledge**

*Norms*

*Values*

*Symbols*

*Classifications and Constructions  
of Reality*

*Worldviews*

### **The Origins of Culture**

#### **Culture and Human Life**

#### **Cultural Knowledge and Individual Behavior**

*Is Behavior Determined by  
Culture?*

*Why Does Behavior Vary?*

#### **Biology and Culture**

*Biology and Cultural Differences*

*Cultural Universals*



*Culture is the shared and learned patterns that make peoples and nations different in their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. This temple contains the Golden Pagoda, the most sacred pagoda for Burmese Buddhists.*

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 1 Define** culture in a way that is useful to compare and contrast different cultures.
- 2 Understand** the concept of cultural knowledge and five of its key components.
- 3 Describe** why most anthropologists believe that “race” is a cultural construction, rather than biologically determined.
- 4 Discuss** the evidence for the origins of the human capacity for culture.
- 5 Analyze** the relationship between cultural knowledge and the behavior of individuals.
- 6 Describe** why cultural and biological differences between human populations vary independently.

The word *culture* is so common that you hear it almost every day. Sometimes it means that some individuals are “more cultured” than others. For example, some people believe they are more “culturally sophisticated” than other people because they regularly attend symphonies or go to art galleries. Perhaps you have heard someone complain about the “popular culture” of TV reality shows, action-adventure movies, online gaming, tongue and navel piercings, and the like. Maybe you use peoples’ speech style or personal tastes as a basis for thinking that some persons have “more culture” than others because of their ethnic identity, social class, or where they went to school.

Taken in context, these meanings of the word *culture* are fine. However, anthropologists define and use the term in a different way. We want people to appreciate the full significance of culture for our understanding of humanity. In the anthropological conception, it is impossible for one group of people to “have more culture,” or to “be more cultured” than another group. Anthropologists believe that judgments about “high culture” and “low culture” are themselves based on cultural assumptions (“high” in whose culture?). Phrases like “working class culture” and “popular culture” do have meaning in anthropology, but that meaning does not include judgments about relative quality or sophistication.

In this chapter, we discuss the anthropological conception of culture. After giving the word a fairly precise definition, we cover some of its main elements, introducing some terms along the way. We then discuss why culture is so important to humanity. Finally, we explain the modern anthropological view of how cultural

differences and physical/biological differences between human populations are related.



## Introducing Culture

The Englishman E. B. Tylor was one of the founders of the field that was later to become cultural anthropology. In Tylor’s 1871 book, *Primitive Culture*, he pulled together much of the information available about the native peoples of other lands (that is, places other than Europe). His definition is often considered the earliest modern conception of culture. Tylor (1871, 1) wrote that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Notice that this definition is very broad, including almost everything about a particular people’s overall way of life, from “knowledge” and “art” to “customs” and “habits.” Notice also that culture is something an individual acquires as “a member of society,” meaning that people learn their culture from growing up and living among a particular group.

Since Tylor’s day, anthropologists have defined culture in hundreds of ways, although the main elements of Tylor’s original conception of culture are still with us. Practically all modern definitions share certain key features. Anthropologists agree that culture:

- is learned from others while growing up in a particular human society or group
- is widely shared by the members of that society or group



- is responsible for most differences in ways of thinking and behaving that exist between human societies or groups
- is so essential in completing the psychological and social development of individuals that a person who did not learn culture would not be considered normal by other people

In brief, culture is learned, shared, largely responsible for differences between human groups, and necessary to make individuals into complete persons.

Cultural anthropologists often use the term *culture* to emphasize the unique or most distinctive aspects of a people's customs and beliefs. When we speak of Japanese culture, for example, we usually mean the beliefs and customs of the Japanese that make them different from other people. How Japanese think and act differs in some ways from how North Americans, Iranians, Chinese, and Indians think and act, and the phrase *Japanese culture* concisely emphasizes these differences. Generally, to speak of the culture of a people is to call attention to all the things that make that people distinctive from others.

There are some things that anthropologists do *not* mean by the word *culture*. We do not mean that Japanese culture is inherently better or worse than, say, French or Turkish culture. We mean only that the three differ in certain identifiable ways. Anthropologists also do not mean that Japanese, French, or Turkish culture is unchanging. We mean only that they remain in some ways distinct despite the changes they have experienced over the years from historical contact and globalization. Above all, anthropologists do not mean that Japanese, French, or Turkish cultures are different because of the biological (genetically based) differences between the three peoples. We mean only that Japanese, French, and Turkish children are exposed to different ways of thinking and acting as they grow up. They *become* Japanese, French, or Turkish because of their upbringing in different social environments.

Notice that an individual does not invent his or her culture, just as people do not invent their own language. Rather, the members of any given generation receive the cultural ideas and beliefs they have learned from previous generations. They also transmit that culture to future generations, albeit with some changes. Of course, during their lifetimes some people have more influence on their culture than others, but even very innovative and creative people build on the cultural knowledge their group has learned from previous generations.

How do cultures differ? As a first look, they vary in ways of thinking and ways of behaving. *Ways of*

*thinking* means what goes on inside people's heads: how they perceive the world around them, how they feel about particular people and events, what they desire and fear, and so forth. *Ways of behaving* refers to how people commonly act: how they conduct themselves around parents and spouses, how they carry out ceremonies, what they do when they are angry or sad, and so forth. Obviously, thought and behavior are connected. How we act depends, in part, on how we think. In turn, how we think depends, in part, on how people around us behave, because our observations of their actions shape our thoughts.

Ways of thinking and behaving obviously are related, but it is important to distinguish between them. To do so, we distinguish *mental* components and *behavioral* components of culture.

Culture's mental components include all the knowledge and information about the world and society that children learn and adults apply during their lives. Among these components are:

- attitudes about family, friends, enemies, and other kinds of people;
- notions of right and wrong (moral standards);
- conceptions about the proper roles of males and females;
- ideas about appropriate dress, hygiene, and personal ornamentation;
- rules about manners and etiquette;
- beliefs about the supernatural;
- standards for sexual activity;
- notions about the best or proper way to live (values); and
- perceptions of the world.

This list could be expanded greatly to include all other knowledge that the members of a society or other group learn from previous generations. These and other kinds of knowledge largely determine how the members of a culture think and react.

The phrase **cultural knowledge** refers to the attitudes, ideas, beliefs, conceptions, rules, values, standards, perceptions, and other information learned while growing up and stored in people's heads. In this text, we sometimes use words like *beliefs* and *ideas* as synonyms for cultural knowledge.

**cultural knowledge** Information, skills, attitudes, conceptions, beliefs, values, and other mental components of culture that people socially learn during enculturation.



As for the behavioral components of culture, they include all the things people regularly do, or how they habitually act. As the terms *regularly* and *habitually* imply, members of the same culture generally adopt similar behaviors in similar situations (for example, in church, on the job, at a wedding or funeral, visiting a friend, sitting in a classroom). Anthropologists are usually more interested in these regularities and habits—in what most people do most of the time in similar situations—than in the behavior of particular individuals. We are most concerned with **patterns of behavior**. To avoid repetition, we sometimes use the terms *behavior(s)* and *action(s)* as synonyms for *behavioral patterns*.

To emphasize the interconnections between the mental and behavioral components of culture, we speak of **cultural integration**, which means the various parts of culture are mutually interdependent. We use the phrase *cultural system* when we wish to emphasize the integration of culture.



## Defining Culture

The concept of culture is so important that it is useful to have a formal definition of the term:

The **culture** of a group consists of shared, socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior.

This definition seems simple and even sounds like “plain common sense,” but in fact each part of it is problematic, as we now discuss.

### Shared...

Culture is a *collective* phenomenon—it is shared. People who were brought up in or are familiar with a given culture are mostly able to communicate with and interact with one another without serious misunderstandings and without needing to explain what their behavior means.

**patterns of behavior** Within a single culture, the behavior most people perform when they are in certain culturally defined situations.

**cultural integration** The interrelationships among the various components (elements, subsystems) of a cultural system.

**culture (as used in this text)** The socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior shared by some group of people.

If you are German, other Germans are far less likely than Saudi Arabians to misunderstand your intentions. Individuals who share the same culture usually don’t have to explain their intentions or actions to one another so as to avoid “cultural misunderstandings.”

Implicit in *shared* is “by some group of people.” The nature of the group that shares culture depends largely on our interests. The people who share a common cultural tradition may be quite numerous and geographically dispersed, as illustrated by phrases like *Western culture* and *African culture*. We use such phrases whenever we want to emphasize differences between Africans and Westerners. However, in this context the hundreds of millions of people to whom *culture* refers are so scattered and diverse that the term *group* has little (if any) meaning. On the other hand, the group that shares a common culture may be small. Some historic Pacific islands or Amazonian tribes, for instance, had only a couple hundred members, yet the people spoke a unique language and had distinct customs and beliefs.

We often assume that people who share a common culture are members of the same nation-state (country). The identification of a cultural tradition with a single nation is sometimes convenient because it allows us to use phrases like “Canadian culture” and “Chinese culture.” In these and other cases, the people whom we identify as “sharing” culture are the residents of one country. This identification of culture and country is accurate for some countries, like South Korea and Japan—although both nations have immigrants and foreign residents, and Japan has an indigenous culture called Ainu.

However, most modern nations contain a lot of cultural diversity within their boundaries. This is especially true for nations with a history of colonialism. For example, the internationally recognized national borders of most African and South Asian countries are a product of their history as colonies, not of their indigenous cultural or ethnic identities. That is, more often than not, colonizing nations created boundaries between “their” colonies to further their own interests rather than to reflect cultural distinctions and ethnic divisions (see Chapter 17). Thus, modern India has dozens of languages and cultural identities, as do most sub-Saharan African nations like Kenya and Tanzania. The government of the People’s Republic of China recognizes 56 minority peoples, some of whom theoretically have traditional homelands labeled autonomous regions on maps.

Modern European nations are also multicultural: migrants from north Africa, Turkey, South Asia, and other regions now work in European countries like

France, Germany, and Great Britain. The immigrants enrich their host countries with new cuisines, festivals, music, and other cultural practices. But they also take jobs and have different beliefs and behaviors. Some “native” Europeans view immigrants as a political threat and as endangering their own way of life. For example, in 2009, the citizens of Switzerland were so anxious about immigrants from Islamic countries that they voted for a law against building more minarets—the towers that identify (Muslim) mosques.

Other complexities exist. People have a **cultural identity**, meaning that individuals define themselves partly by the cultural group in which they were born and raised. Your cultural identity helps define who you are, along with your ideas about your gender, race, and other features. Yet cultural identity is actually complicated: if you are an African American, you may feel like you share a cultural identity with people born and living in Africa or with people of African heritage living in Haiti or Jamaica or parts of Brazil. You are far more likely to “share” cultural knowledge and behavior patterns with Anglo-Americans, but nonetheless perhaps culturally you identify also with other persons whose ancestors were black Africans. Similar considerations apply to other cultural identities, such as individuals whose parents were born in East Asia and Latin America.

Thus, the identification of “culture” and “nation” is simplistic, because many cultural groupings, identities, and traditions coexist within the boundaries of most modern nations. We sometimes use phrases like *majority culture* and *mainstream culture*, as opposed to *minorities*, which have their “own culture.” Usually, though, to say that minority groups have their own culture means mainly they have their own cultural identities.

The term **subculture** refers to cultural variations that exist within a single nation. We are familiar with *regional subcultures*. Contrast the American states of Mississippi and Connecticut or the Canadian provinces of Quebec and British Columbia. Aside from regional subcultures, various *ethnic identities* live within national boundaries.

Sometimes people extend the concept of subculture to refer to particular groups that recruit their members from the nation at large, as in phrases like *corporate cultures* or *occupational cultures*. Particular religious denominations are sometimes called subcultures to emphasize contrasting worship rituals and values between churches, like Episcopalians and Southern Baptists. The word *subculture* often is applied to people based on sexual

orientation, as in the gay and lesbian subculture. Some people distinguish subcultures based on contrasts like rural and urban, public school and prep school, homemakers and professional women, and even male and female.

These examples show that culture is shared at various levels, which makes the concept of culture more complicated than it seems: At which level shall we speak of “a” culture or of “the” culture of people X? Generally, the words *culture* and *subculture* are useful if they contrast some group with another of the same kind—for example, West Europe/East Asia, English/French, Cherokee/Anglo, north/south, Catholic/Methodist. In most cases, the context of the discussion adequately defines the level.

The word *subculture* is often used too loosely, however. It is most useful when it points out distinctions that have many dimensions. For example, if gay subculture refers *only* to sexual orientation, then the word *subculture* is not very useful. It becomes more meaningful if it refers to broader contrasts between straights and gays in values and lifestyles. Also, the more similarities there are between the members of the groups we wish to contrast, the less meaningful the concept of subculture becomes. Not just any difference between groups should be called *subcultural* (otherwise, even families could be subcultures). Distinctions based on criteria like occupation, employment status, or type of school, are so vague that they have limited usefulness.

For all these reasons, in the global society of the twenty-first century, the simple statement “culture is shared among some group of people” has many complexities. In fact, some people think the entire world is headed toward “sharing” a single culture. This possibility is discussed in the Globalization box below.

### ...Socially Learned...

Individuals acquire their culture in the process of growing up in a society or some other kind of group. The process by which infants and children learn the culture of those

**cultural identity** The cultural tradition a group of people recognize as their own; the shared customs and beliefs that define how a group sees itself as distinctive.

**subculture** Cultural differences characteristic of members of various ethnic groups, regions, religions, and so forth within a single society or country.

European nations have immigrants from South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, sometimes resulting in misunderstandings and intolerance on both sides. This Turkish folkore group is performing in Germany as part of an tolerance initiative



© Robert Brenner/Photo Edit

around them is called **socialization**, or **enculturation**. Learning one's culture, of course, happens as a normal part of childhood. To say that culture is learned from others seems obvious, but it has several important implications that are not completely intuitive.

To say that culture is *learned* is to say that it is not acquired genetically, that is, by means of biological reproduction. A people's culture does not grow out of their gene pool or biological makeup, but is something the people born into that group acquire as they grow up. Africans, East Asians, Europeans, and Native Americans do not differ in their cultures because they differ in their genes—they do not differ *culturally* because they differ *biologically*. Any human infant is perfectly capable of learning the culture of any human group or biological population, just as any child can learn the language of whatever group that child is born into. To state the main point in a few words: *Cultural differences and biological differences are largely independent of one another.* (We qualify this statement later in this chapter.)

To say that culture is *socially* learned is to emphasize that people do not learn it primarily by trial and error. The

main ways children learn culture are by observation, imitation, communication, and inference. One important way in which humans differ in degree, though not in kind, from other primates is their ability to learn by imitating and communicating with other humans. When you were an infant, you did not learn what is good to eat primarily by trying out a variety of things that might have been edible and then rejecting things that were not edible. Rather, other people taught you what is and is not defined as food. If you are a North American, you probably view some animals (cattle, fish, chicken) as food and others that are equally edible (horses, dogs, guinea pigs) as not food. You did not discover this on your own but by learning from others what is edible, good tasting, or appropriate. This social learning of what is good to eat spared you most of the costs (and possible stomachaches and health hazards) of learning on your own by trial and error.

Relying on social learning rather than trial and error gives humanity other advantages. First, any innovation that one individual makes can be communicated to others in a group, who thus take advantage of someone else's experience. If you recombine the elements of old tools to develop a more effective tool and share your knowledge, other members of your community can also use that better tool.

Second, each generation learns the culture of its ancestors and transmits it to the next generation, and so on to future generations. Thus, any new knowledge or behavior acquired by one generation is potentially available to future generations (although some of it is lost or replaced with each

**socialization** The process of social learning of culture by children.

**enculturation (socialization)** The transmission (by means of social learning) of cultural knowledge to the next generation.



generation). By this process of repeated social learning over many generations, knowledge accumulates. People alive today live largely off the knowledge acquired and transmitted by previous generations. In modern societies, certain kinds of knowledge are transmitted through formal education in schools and colleges as well as through informal teaching by parents, relatives, and community members.

Third, because culture is socially learned, human groups are capable of changing their ideas and behaviors very rapidly. Genetic change (biological evolution) is slow because it relies on biological reproduction. In contrast, no genetic change and no biological evolution have to occur for the knowledge and actions of a human population to be utterly transformed. Furthermore, your genetic makeup is more or less fixed at conception. During the course of your life, however, your ideas and actions are likely to change dramatically.

In sum, culture is learned, not inborn, which means that cultural differences cannot be explained by biological/genetic differences between groups of people. And the fact that culture is *socially* learned gives humanity some big advantages over other animals: innovations can spread, knowledge can accumulate, and peoples' ideas and actions can change rapidly in a single generation.

Social learning has a downside, too. For reasons no one fully understands, sometimes particular ideas and beliefs arise that lead those who believe them to harm or even kill other people. In 1995, in Japan the members of a “cult” called Aum Shinrikyo coordinated the release of a nerve gas in five trains at rush hour, injuring over 5,000 and killing 12 persons. In Oklahoma City in April, 1995, Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people. McVeigh was influenced by antigovernment, antitax, progun movements. This was the worst terrorist attack on American soil until September 11, 2001. On that date, terrorists influenced by Al Qaida guided an airliner into the Twin Towers of the New York City World Trade Center, killing nearly 3,000 people.

On February 18, 2010, Andrew Joseph Stack crashed his small plane into an Internal Revenue Service building where 190 federal employees were working in Austin, Texas. Stack intentionally killed himself in the attack, leaving behind a lengthy suicide note describing his anger with the IRS and a government he believed cares only about big business and the wealthy.

These individuals did not simply think up the beliefs and ideas that led to their violent behavior. They were influenced by the beliefs and ideas of others, which in their minds made sense of their life experiences. Even though none of the original beliefs explicitly called for



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On April 19, 1995 Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. 168 persons died and 500 were injured in this terrorist attack.

violence, in the minds of some individuals violence was justified in the name of some greater good. Individuals react differently to what they have socially learned. Sometimes, beliefs not only harm other people, but also the individuals who accept them: the men who guided the 9/11 aircraft died, as did Andrew Joseph Stack.

### ...Knowledge...

When anthropologists use the phrase *cultural knowledge*, we do not mean that a people's beliefs, perceptions, rules, standards, and so forth are true in an objective or absolute sense. We do not mean that cultural knowledge is “accurate,” as the examples just given illustrate. In our professional role, for the most



As contacts between the world's nations become more common and intense, people in various places react differently depending on their own culture, the nature of the contacts, and their personal circumstances. The impacts on local cultures therefore differ widely. Those concerned about these impacts have opinions, often strong ones, on what the future holds for the cultural diversity on our planet.

First, some fear (even while others hope) that the cultures of the most wealthy and militarily powerful regions will eventually become globally dominant, gradually displacing other traditions. This is what many North American travelers to Japan or India conclude when they see businesses like McDonald's or KFC doing well. It is what many Middle Eastern political and religious leaders fear when they ban movies with scantily clad women. Even some wealthy European countries like Italy and France are concerned that their national traditions are being overwhelmed by the "American consumer culture." Some call the international marketing of products *cultural imperialism*, with companies from the United States usually identified as the main perpetrators—although Nokia (Finland), Nestlé (Switzerland), Samsung (South Korea), Panasonic (Japan), De Beers (the South African diamond company), and other companies with global markets and advertising are equally involved.

Thus, some people believe that what they call Western culture is becoming *the* global culture. This global cultural future is the one commonly portrayed by the media. Some almost take it for granted or treat it as inevitable—for better or worse.

However, perhaps new forms of culture will arise out of the increased contacts between peoples that result from travel and migration. International travel for tourism or business exposes people to other places and peoples. At least a few travelers go back home with new understandings and appreciation of the countries that hosted them. Temporary and permanent migration links peoples and traditions. Some countries are primarily destination countries for migrants. Most of the richest countries of Europe were formerly colonial powers. In some, large

numbers of people from former colonies have immigrated, as in France (Algerians) and Britain (Pakistanis and Indians). In destination countries like Canada, the United States, and recently Australia, immigrants come mainly for jobs. But their traditions come along with their labor. Some citizens of destination countries worry about being culturally overwhelmed (and outvoted) by immigrants. They wonder whether "those people" can or even want to be culturally assimilated. Others more sympathetic to diversity note the new choices in food, films, music, and books immigrants bring with them, believing that immigration culturally enriches their nations.

Globalization has other effects. One is that some people feel culturally threatened by the frequency and intensity of contacts, which leads them to cling even more firmly to what they believe are their traditional values. In this case, globalization leads to greater attachments to a cultural past perceived as pure or uncorrupted by foreign influences. Outside influences are consciously rejected, sometimes with profound political consequences, including violence.

In countries with large numbers of immigrants, sometimes the newcomers are culturally and linguistically assimilated into the majority or so-called mainstream. Then, future generations may not be recognized as immigrants and will be almost indistinguishable from others. Of course, immigrants usually bring new foods, drinks, customs, and holidays to their new homelands, such as Italian and Mexican food, Irish pubs, St. Patrick's day, and Kwanzaa. If these become mainstreamed, then "assimilation" in reality is partly a "synthesis," meaning that the influences pass in both directions.

Alternatively, instead of assimilation, people from a particular national background may establish permanent cultural enclaves in their new homelands. Festivals, cuisines, family and living arrangements, and languages are often preserved in these enclaves, which include various Chinatowns and Koreatowns in North American large cities as well as small towns in California's Central Valley that some Anglos (mistakenly) say are "just like Mexico." In these cases, as people of the

part anthropologists do not judge the accuracy or worthiness of a group's knowledge. We simply recognize that the knowledge of any cultural group differs to a greater or lesser degree from the knowledge of any other group. What is most important about cultural knowledge is not its truth value, but that:

- The members of a culture share enough knowledge that they behave in ways that are meaningful and acceptable to others so that they avoid frequent misunderstandings and usually do not need to explain what they are doing.

- The knowledge guides behavior such that the people can survive, reproduce, and transmit their culture.

In a few words, cultural knowledge generally leads to behavior that is meaningful to others and adaptive to the natural and social environment. We consider some of this knowledge later. Notice what this means for *you*: the knowledge that you accept as Truth leads you to act in acceptable and meaningful ways and allows your culture to persist, but that does not imply that this knowledge is True. We find it much easier to recognize that this applies to Others than to Ourselves.

past and present have migrated from their original countries, they have kept some of their traditions and maintained viable communities as ethnic enclaves within the larger society.

Most Anglo citizens of the U.S.A. recognize—some reluctantly—that they live in a “nation of immigrants.” They know the original Americans were the Native Americans (the “Indians”) and have learned in schools or media that their Anglo ancestors took lands from the Native peoples. Some Anglos feel guilty, whereas others think this history was inevitable or even beneficial for those Natives who now enjoy the benefits of the civilization Westerners believe they brought to the New World. Few Anglos realize that in New Mexico, California, and southern Texas, there was an earlier influx of “Westerners” from New Spain (Mexico), just as there was an earlier influx of French into the state we now call Louisiana. If you know where to go, in New Mexico you can still find Latino/Hispanic towns that have existed since the 1600s. In Louisiana the influence of “Cajun” culture is still found in cuisine and language. If the oil spill in the summer of 2010 allows, shrimping and oystering will retain their importance in Cajun identity.

All these diverse effects of globalization have occurred in some form in some places. There is no point in predicting what will happen in the end, mainly because changes will continue in future decades and centuries so there will never be an “end.” That is, there will not be a final outcome to cultural change once the global system has stabilized—because the global system will never stabilize.

It is worth pointing out, however, that when people discuss the worldwide spread of “culture,” in most cases they are really talking and worrying about the external manifestations of culture. They are concerned about the observable trappings of culture rather than about *culture* as anthropologists usually use the term. For example, McDonald’s originated in the United States, but does its presence in Japan and South Korea threaten those “cultures”? Is American culture threatened by Honda manufacturing plants in the Midwest? If you are an American citizen, did you feel your “culture” was threatened when a Chinese company bought IBM and started producing

computers with the Lenovo label? If you are a Canadian resident of Vancouver, British Columbia, did you worry that your traditions were under attack when thousands of immigrants from Hong Kong settled in your city in the 1990s?

In fact, many things that people now believe are “theirs” originated elsewhere. The “English” alphabet came from the ancient Greeks, who adapted it from the even more ancient Phoenicians. “English” numerals (1, 2, 3, ...) are in fact Arabic numerals. The English language originated in northern Europe out of the Germanic subfamily, which is part of the widespread Indo-European language family. Canadian and American staples like bread, steak, and peas originated from other places. At least corn, tomatoes, beans, and chilis originated in North America, but actually those of us whose ancestors were immigrants from Europe learned about them from the real Native Americans.

Finally, it is worth countering the common opinion that the transmission of the material manifestations of culture has been in only one direction—from the West to the Rest. Certainly, American movies and music are popular in most of the world, as are Western fashions, cosmetics, and a host of other trappings. But similar things have moved in the other direction. Japanese *anime* and *manga*, karaoke, sushi and sushi bars, and horror movies have made it big among North American young people. Indian and Chinese movies, *shisha* smoking from the Middle East, East Asian martial arts and tai chi, tattoos featuring Chinese characters, and salsa dancing and music also are doing well. In Honolulu, you can visit bars that serve kava (a mouth-numbing drink made from the root of a plant from the pepper family, which originated in Polynesia and other Pacific islands like Fiji, Vanuatu, and Pohnpei). And, in most large North American and European cities, you can visit restaurants that will sell you food from practically anywhere.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you think consumer culture is taking over the world? Why or why not?
2. What will be the condition of Earth’s cultures in the year 2100?

## ...and Patterns of Behavior

Even individuals brought up in the same culture differ in their behaviors. The behavior of individuals varies for several reasons. First, individuals have different *social identities*: males and females, old and young, rich and poor, family X and family Y, and so forth. Actions appropriate for people with one identity may not be appropriate for others. Second, the behavior of individuals varies with *context and situation*: a woman acts

differently depending on whether she is interacting with her husband, child, priest, or employee. Third, each human individual is in some ways a *unique* human individual: even when brought up in the same society, we all differ in our emotional responses, appetites, interpretations of events, reactions to stimuli, and so forth. Finally, cultural standards for and expectations of behavior are often *ambiguous*. For these and other reasons, it is a mistake to think of behavior as uniform within the same culture.

Despite such complexities, within a single cultural group, behavioral regularities or patterns exist. For instance, into the 1980s had you visited a certain area of Amazonian rain forest and encountered people known as the Yanomamö, you might have been shocked by some of their actions. By most cultures' standards, the Yanomamö are unusually demanding and aggressive. Slight insults often lead to violent responses. Quarreling men may duel in a chest-pounding contest, during which they take turns beating one another on the chest, alternating one blow at a time. More serious quarrels sometimes call for clubs, with which men bash one another on the head. Fathers sometimes encourage their sons to strike them (and anyone else) by teasing and goading, while praising the child for his fierceness.

If, on the other hand, you visited the Semai, a people of Malaysia, you might be surprised at how seldom they express anger and hostility. Indeed, you might find them *too* docile. One adult should never strike another—"Suppose he hit you back?" they ask. The Semai seldom hit their children—"How would you feel if he or she died?" they ask. When children misbehave, the worst physical punishment they receive is a pinch on the cheek or a pat on the hand. Ethnographer Robert Dentan suggests one reason for the nonviolence of the Semai: children are so seldom exposed to physical punishment that when they grow up, they have an exaggerated impression of the effects of violence.

The contrasting behavioral responses of the Yanomamö and Semai people illustrate an important characteristic of most human behavior: its social nature. Humans are supremely social animals. We seldom do anything alone, and even when we are alone, we rely unconsciously on our cultural upbringing to provide us with the knowledge of what to do and how to act. Relationships between people are therefore enormously important in all cultures. Anthropologists give special attention to the regularities and patterning of these social relationships, including such things as how family members interact, how females and males relate to one another, how political leaders deal with subordinates, and so forth.

The concept of **role** is useful to describe and analyze interactions and relationships. Individuals are often said to have a role or to play a role in some group. Roles usually carry names or labels, such as *mother* in a

family, *student* in a classroom, *accountant* in a company, and *headman* of a Yanomamö village. Attached to a role are the group's *expectations* about what people who hold the role should do. Learning to be a member of a group includes learning the expectations of its members. Expectations include rights and duties. The *rights* (or privileges) defined by my role include the benefits the group members agree I should receive as a member. My *duties* (or obligations) include other group members' expectations of my behavior.

Rights and duties are usually *reciprocal*: my right over you is your duty to me, and vice versa. My duties to the group as a whole are the group's rights over me and vice versa. If I adequately perform my duties to the group, then other members reward me, just as I reward them for their own role performance. By occupying and performing a role in a group, I behave in ways that others find valuable, and I hope that some of my own wants and needs will be fulfilled. Conversely, failure to live up to the group's expectations of role performance is likely to bring some sort of informal or formal punishment. Among the Yanomamö, young men who refuse to stand up for themselves by fighting are ridiculed and may never amount to anything. The shared knowledge of roles and expectations is partly responsible for patterns of behavior.

Although defining culture as shared and socially learned knowledge and behavior seems quite inclusive, some things most people commonly consider a part of culture are not seen as part of culture by many anthropologists. For example, many anthropologists do not see architecture and art objects such as paintings and sculptures as part of a people's culture. They are, rather, physical representations and material manifestations of cultural knowledge. They are products or expressions of culture rather than parts of culture.

For example, some think that art expresses a culture's values, ideals of beauty, conflicts, worldviews, and so forth. Houses and public buildings are products of various aspects of culture such as family life, sexual practices, political organization, ideas of beauty and symmetry, religious beliefs, and status distinctions. Similar considerations apply to other kinds of physical objects and material things. For example, tools are physical manifestations of the ideas of their human makers and users, who have a mental template that determines the form of the tool. Even writing is not seen as "part of" culture by many anthropologists. Rather, writing is a means of storing knowledge, transmitting information, and—in the case of fiction—telling stories that are meaningful in the cultural group.

**role** Rights and duties that individuals receive because of their personal identity or membership in a social group.



Component	Brief Definition	Example
Norms	Standards of propriety and appropriateness	Expected behaviors at weddings and in classrooms
Values	Beliefs about social desirability and worthwhileness	Individual rights
Symbols	Objects and behaviors with conventional meanings	Interpretations of nonverbal behavior
Constructions	Divisions of reality into categories and subcategories	Kinds of persons and natural phenomena
Worldviews	Interpretations of events and experiences	Origin of good and evil

Thus anthropologists do not agree on whether such material objects—often called **material culture**—are “part of” culture or only “material manifestations” of culture.



## Cultural Knowledge

Cultural knowledge includes beliefs, attitudes, rules, assumptions about the world, and other mental phenomena. In this section, we discuss five elements of cultural knowledge: norms, values, symbols, constructions of reality, and worldviews. We cover these elements because they are among the most important components of cultural knowledge and because their anthropological meaning goes beyond that of everyday speech. The Concept Review previews the five major components in just a few words.

### Norms

**Norms** are shared ideals (or rules) about how people ought to act in certain situations, or about how particular people should act toward particular other people. The emphasis is on the words *ideals*, *rules*, *ought*, *should*, and *situations*. To say that norms exist does not mean everyone follows them all the time. Some norms are regularly violated, and what is normative in one situation need not be in other situations. *Norm* thus does not refer to behavior itself. Rather, *norm* implies that (1) there is widespread agreement that people ought to adhere to certain standards of behavior, (2) other people judge the behavior of a person according to how closely it adheres to those standards, and (3) people who repeatedly fail to follow the standards face some kind of negative reaction from other members of the group.

Any culture obviously includes hundreds or thousands or more norms, some of which people are not consciously aware. Borrowing a distinction from sociology, we distinguish *folkways* from *mores* (pronounced “morays”). *Folkways* are norms about how

things should be done (properly/improperly) or what behavior is called for (appropriate/inappropriate) in a given situation. Most customs about politeness are folkways, as are shaking hands and how far apart people space themselves while conversing casually. *Mores* are norms about behavior that carry moral connotations, meaning that others judge an individual’s character (right/wrong) according to how well she or he adheres to the more. Many collective judgments we make about someone’s personal morality or character are based on mores. Many standards about sexual behavior and familial obligations are mores.

Like most dichotomies, the distinction between folkways and mores is clear in theory but not always in practice. How to dress can be a folkway, when the judgment of others is based on whether your outfit is appropriate for the occasion. Dress also can be a more, when others evaluate you negatively based on your immodest dress. Whether to give gifts and what kind of gift to present can be a folkway, if you give too little (inconsiderate) or too much (embarrassing). It can also be or a more, if others think you are immoral for not living up to your obligations.

Sometimes people feel that norms are irrational or arbitrary rules that stifle their creativity or keep them from doing what they want for no good reason. In fact, though, norms make social interactions much more predictable and so are quite useful to us as individuals. It is mainly because we agree on norms that we know how to behave toward others and that we have expectations

**material culture** Artifacts and other physical, visible manifestations of culture, including art, architectural features, tools, consumer goods, clothing, and writing.

**norms** Shared ideals and/or expectations about how certain people ought to act in given situations.



about how others should behave toward us in diverse social situations or settings.

For example, at a party where you do not know many people, you may feel a little nervous. But in your culture people know how to introduce themselves, so soon you are introducing yourself, shaking hands, and asking the other guests what they do, what they are studying, and where they work. Perhaps you even know subtle ways of figuring out whether someone is “available.” Here, and in many other cases in everyday life, we do not experience norms as oppressive. Rather, norms are useful instructions on how to do something in such a way that others know what you are doing and accept your actions as “normal.”

## Values

**Values** consist of a people’s beliefs about the way of life that is desirable for themselves and their society. Values have profound, though partly unconscious, effects on people’s behavior. The goals we pursue, as well as our general ideas about the good life, are influenced by the values of the culture into which we were born or raised. Values affect our motivations and thus influence the reasons we do what we do. Values are also critical to the maintenance of culture as a whole because they represent the qualities people believe are essential to continuing their way of life. We may think of values as providing the ultimate standards that people believe must be upheld under most circumstances. People may be deeply attached to their values and, sometimes, are even prepared to sacrifice their lives for them.

Although people may say they cherish their values, it is easy to overemphasize their importance in peoples’ lives. For one thing, to uphold one value sometimes leads us to neglect others (e.g., people “value” career enhancement as well as family life). For another, our personal interests can lead us to ignore or downplay some values in some situations (e.g., people should be “honest” but also should successfully compete). Finally, our fears, loves, hates, and other emotions can lead us to ignore our values in favor of other concerns.

**values** Shared ideas or standards about the worthwhile-ness of goals and lifestyles.

**symbols** Objects, behaviors, sound combinations, and other phenomena whose culturally defined meanings have no necessary relationship to their inherent physical qualities.

For example, most people in the United States agree that persons accused of crimes have rights to a speedy trial and an attorney. But perceived threats from real and imagined terrorists lead many to agree that these values can justifiably be ignored. As an abstract value, prisoners of war should not be tortured. But national security also is important. What shall we do when national security seems to conflict with upholding human rights? Many disagreements about public policy are based on how much weight people place on one of their values as opposed to other values. To say that values are “shared” does not mean that everyone gives them the same importance.

## Symbols

A **symbol** is something (like an object or an action) that represents, connotes, or calls to mind something else. Just as we learn norms and values during socialization, so do we learn the meanings that people in our group attach to symbols. And just as norms and values affect patterns of behavior, so do the understandings people share of the meanings of symbols. Our shared understandings of the meanings of actions allow us to interact with one another without the need to explain our intentions, or to state explicitly what we are doing and why.

For the most part, the understandings that people share about the meanings of actions and objects are unconscious. We can speak to inquiring strangers about many of our values and explain to them why we believe they are important. But it is nearly impossible to tell someone why a particular gesture, a way of walking, a style of dress, or a certain facial expression carries the meaning it does rather than some other meaning. We “just know.” “Everyone knows,” for such things are common knowledge and maybe even common sense—to people who share the symbols.

Two important properties of symbols are that their meanings are arbitrary and conventional. *Arbitrary* means there are no inherent qualities in the symbol that lead a human group to attribute one meaning to it rather than some other meaning. Thus, the wink of an eye that often means “just kidding” in some cultures is—literally—meaningless in other cultures. *Conventional* refers to the fact that the meanings exist only because people implicitly agree they exist. Thus, at an intersection, a red light means “stop,” but only because all drivers agree that it does.

Words provide a familiar example of the arbitrary and conventional nature of symbols. In English, the

word for a certain kind of large animal is *horse*, but in Spanish, the same animal is called *caballo*, in German *pferd*, in Arabic *hisanut*, in French *cheval*, and so on for other languages. The meaning “horse” is conveyed equally well by any of these words, which is another way of saying that the meaning is arbitrary and conventional.

Often we think of symbols as objects that stand for something important or sacred: a flag, a cross, a wedding ring, a religious writing. Some objects have uses or functions, in the sense that they are useful in everyday life. Many useful objects also “function” as status symbols: expensive cars, particular clothing styles, huge houses, and iPads. Individuals themselves can serve as symbols: the Queen of England and the Emperor of Japan have little formal power in their nations’ Constitution. Rather, they symbolize their peoples’ history, traditions, and values. Many citizens are emotionally attached to them despite the expense of maintaining the trappings of their offices.

Victor Turner’s ideas about symbols have influenced anthropology and other disciplines for decades. Writing about objects used in rituals among the Ndembu, an indigenous people of Zambia, Turner noted that Ndembu ritual symbols have several properties that make them powerful in the minds of the people. Turner called two of these properties *multivocality* and *condensation*. Symbols represent many qualities and abstract values simultaneously (multivocality) and they do so by condensing their meanings in a material form that is easy to represent, think about, and become attached to. National flags, monuments, state capitols, and religious symbols like statues and crosses are good examples of these two properties. People become emotionally attached to such symbols, which can come to stand for all that is right and valuable. Some feel that flag-burning should be illegal and considered an act of treason. The cross represents more to Christians than just the death of Jesus. Some Japanese continue to revere and even worship the office of emperor, even though the emperor himself renounced his divinity in 1945.

Not all symbols are physical objects. Much of our behavior also communicates meanings that are arbitrary and conventional. Our shared understandings of what actions mean allow us to interact with one another without the need to explain our intentions, or to state explicitly what we are doing and why.

The shared understandings that allow people to correctly interpret the meanings of behaviors are enormously important. Because you assume that the people you interact with share your understandings, in

most situations you know how to act and what to say so as not to be misunderstood. Culture, in other words, includes common understandings of how to interact with one another appropriately (i.e., according to shared expectations) and meaningfully (i.e., in such a way that other people usually are able to interpret our intentions).

Nonverbal communication provides a fine example of these understandings. When you interact with someone face to face, the two of you are engaged in a continual giving and receiving of messages communicated by both speech and actions. Spoken messages are intentionally (consciously) sent and received. Other messages—including body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, touching, and the use of physical space—are communicated by nonverbal behavior, much of which is unconscious. Nonverbal messages emphasize, supplement, or complement spoken messages. We are not always conscious of what we are communicating nonverbally, and sometimes our body language even contradicts what we are saying. (Is this how your mother often knew when you were lying?)

The general point is that cultural knowledge conditions social behavior in ways people do not always recognize consciously—at least until someone’s behavior violates our understandings. Furthermore, many gestures and other body movements with well-known meanings in one culture have no meaning, or have different meanings, in another culture. On a Micronesian island studied by one of the authors, people may answer “yes” or show agreement by a sharp intake of breath (a “gasps”) or by simply raising the eyebrows. One may also answer “yes” by the grunting sound (“uh-uh”) that carries exactly the opposite meaning to North Americans. Pointing out a direction is done with the nose, not the finger. You would signal “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure” by wrinkling your nose, rather than by shrugging your shoulders. It is rude to walk between two people engaged in conversation; if possible, you walk around them; if not, you say the equivalent of “please excuse me,” wait for permission, and then bend at your waist while passing between them.

Aside from showing the social usefulness of shared understandings of symbolic actions, these examples illustrate one way misunderstandings occur when individuals with different cultural upbringings interact. Raised in different cultures in which gestures and sounds carry different meanings, individuals (mis)interpret the actions of others based on their own culture’s understandings, often seeing the others as rude, unfriendly, insensitive, overly familiar, and so forth.

Consider some examples. Arabs and Iranians often stand “too close” for the Canadian and American comfort

Cultures vary in how they use space and body language in communication. These three elderly Arab men converse at a market in Oman.



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zone. In South Korea, it is common to see two young females holding hands or with their arms around each other while walking. But their touching symbolizes nothing about their sexual orientation, nor does two men holding hands in parts of the Middle East. Japanese are less likely than North Americans to express definite opinions or preferences or to just say no. To outsiders, this reluctance often comes across as uncertainty, tentativeness, or even dishonesty, whereas the Japanese view it as politeness. The common American tendency to be informal and friendly is viewed as inappropriate in Japan and many other cultural settings where outward displays of emotions are not shown to mere acquaintances.

In a world where the globalization of trade and international travel are commonplace, it is worth knowing that much of what you “know” is not known to members of other cultural traditions, just as what they “know” may be unfamiliar to you. Think before you take offense at their actions. And think before you give it.

## Classifications and Constructions of Reality

The members of a cultural tradition share beliefs about what kinds of things and people exist. They have similar **classifications of reality**, meaning that people

**classifications of reality (cultural constructions of reality)** Ways in which the members of a culture divide up the natural and social world into categories, usually linguistically encoded.

generally agree on how nature, objects, groups, individuals, and other phenomena should be divided into categories. Another phrase for this is the **cultural construction of reality**: from the multitude of differences and similarities that exist in some phenomena, a culture recognizes (constructs) only some features as relevant in making distinctions. The cultural construction of reality implies that different peoples do not perceive the human and natural worlds in the same ways. Such constructions are one of the important intersections between culture and language (Chapter 3).

For instance, all cultures recognize kinship relationships, but they classify relatives in diverse ways. What kind of “blood” relative someone is to you might seem to depend on how that person is related to you biologically. But how you conceive of your relatives and how you place them into named categories like *uncle* and *cousin* are not determined strictly by how they are related to you biologically. English speakers think of the sisters of both our mother and our father as a single kind of relative, and we call them by the same kinship term, *aunt*. But in some cultural traditions, the sister of your mother is considered one kind of relative and the sister of your father a different kind, and you would call each by a separate kinship term.

Thus, people of different cultural traditions vary in the way they conceive of their societies as divided up into kinds of people. The phrase *kinds of people* also refers to how the members of a culture classify one another into categories loosely referred to as *racial*. Probably most people think of the members of one race as physically more similar to one another than they are to members of

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 5 about Hispanic origin and Question 6 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

**5. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?**

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.*

**6. What is this person's race? Mark X one or more boxes.**

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.*

Asian Indian

Chinese

Filipino

Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.*

Japanese

Korean

Vietnamese

Native Hawaiian

Guamanian or Chamorro

Samoan

Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.*

Some other race — *Print race.*

In this portion of the 2010 United States Census Form—sent to all American households—respondents are asked to identify their “race.” Question 5 correctly does not equate “Hispanic origin” with “race.” Notice that there are 12 “races” specifically listed in question 6. Further, if you are a Pacific Islander or Asian you have lots of “races” with which you can identify yourself. How many of these are “races,” in the anthropological meaning?

different races—thus, the “white race” and the “black race” are physically distinct. In fact, though, most anthropologists agree that race is culturally constructed rather than biologically given (see A Closer Look).

Similar considerations apply to how a people divide up plants, animals, landscape features, seasons, and other dimensions of the natural world. In turn, how people culturally construct their environment influences how they define and use natural resources (which, therefore, are not entirely natural). Plants, animals, minerals, waters, and the like are classified not just into various kinds but also into various categories of usefulness. For example, what one group considers *food* is not necessarily defined as *food* by another group. Muslims and Orthodox Jews consider pork unclean. Traditional Hindus refuse to consume the flesh of cattle, their sacred animal. The fact that a given animal or plant is edible does not mean that people *consider* it edible (or else more North Americans would eat dogs, as do many East and Southeast Asians, and horses, as do many French).

Finally, people of different cultures differ in their beliefs about the kinds of things that do and do not exist. For instance, some people believe in witches who use malevolent supernatural powers to harm others. Traditional Navajo believe that witches can change themselves into wolves, bears, and other animals. The Tukano people of the Bolivian rain forest think that a spirit of the forest controls the animals they depend on for meat. So a Tukano shaman periodically makes a supernatural visit to the abode of the forest spirit. He promises to magically kill a certain number of humans and to send their souls to the forest spirit in return for the spirit’s releasing the animals so the hunters can find game.

In sum, not only do different cultures classify objective reality in different ways, they also differ on what reality *is*: one culture’s definition of reality may not be the same as that of another culture.

## Worldviews

The **worldview** of a people is the way they interpret reality and events, including their images of themselves and how they relate to the world around them. Worldviews are affected by cultural constructions of reality, which we have just discussed. But worldviews include more than just the way a culture carves up people and nature. People have opinions about the nature of the cosmos and how they fit into it. All cultures include beliefs about spiritual souls and include more beliefs about what happens to souls after bodies are lifeless. People have ideas about the meaning of human existence: how we were put on Earth, who or what put us here, and why. They have notions of evil: where it comes from, why it sometimes happens to good people, and how it can be combated. They have beliefs about what supernatural powers or beings are like, what they can do for (or to) people, and how people can worship or control them. Everywhere we find myths and legends about the origins of living things, objects, and customs. (We have more to say about such topics in Chapter 14.)

These examples all seem to be based in a group’s religion. But it is important not to confuse worldview and religion, and especially not to think that *religion* and *worldview* are synonymous. Although religious beliefs do influence the worldview of a people, cultural

**worldview** The way people interpret reality and events, including how they see themselves relating to the world around them.



Even today, race is an explosive topic. In the United States, political liberals think that affirmative action policies based in part on race are necessary to redress centuries of discrimination against “racial minorities.” Conservatives argue that “race-based” hiring and admissions practices deny opportunities to qualified white people, many of whom come from socioeconomic backgrounds that are just as deprived as those of many minorities.

Most people who debate such public issues assume that race is an objective, natural category into which most individuals with certain physical characteristics can be placed. If you can’t say what race you are, it is probably because you are of “mixed race.” We can observe the racial differences between humans by visiting almost any large city in North America, where members of different races mingle. Race seems real. Race even seems obvious.

Most anthropologists disagree. They argue that race is not, in fact, an objective and natural category, but a cultural classification of people based on perceptions and distinctions that arise more from culture than from biology. Race, they believe, is a cultural construct rather than a biological reality. What does this mean, and why do most anthropologists believe it?

First, genetic studies show that the genetic variation within a given race far exceeds the variation between races. Two randomly chosen individuals within the same racial category are about as likely to be as different from each other in their total genetic makeup as are two individuals of different races.

Second, most differences that we attribute to race are only skin deep. When we place people into racial categories, we generally focus on certain visible physical traits: skin color, facial features, hair characteristics, and so forth. If we looked beyond observable traits to consider other (invisible or less visible) traits, different racial categories would result. For example, a racial classification of the world’s people based on blood groups (ABO, rH, and other factors) would yield a different classification than one based on skin color. The same applies to a racial classification based on the shape of teeth or jaws, or on the ability of adults to digest the milk enzyme called lactase (discussed later).

In short, the sets of traits we use to define races lead to one kind of racial classification, but we would have a different classification if we used different traits. We define some physical features as relevant, whereas others are unrecognized (unperceived) or irrelevant. Also, note that it does not take very much ancestry to classify individuals as members of a

minority racial category such as African American or East Asian. Barack Obama is viewed as black by most blacks and whites, despite the fact that his mother is white.

Third, just how many “races” are there? Most elderly people raised in North America would say three, which used to be called Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasoid. This threefold classification of humanity is based on the history of contacts between Europeans and certain peoples of Africa and Asia. But why only three? The so-called Pygmies of central Africa are quite different physically from their Bantu neighbors, as are the once-widespread Khoisan peoples of southern Africa. The indigenous peoples of New Guinea, Australia, and the surrounding islands are quite different not only from many of their neighbors but also from some Africans whom they outwardly resemble in their skin coloration. Many people of southern Asia have skin as dark as some Africans, although in some other physical characteristics they resemble Europeans. Why don’t we place these groups into their own racial categories?

Along the same lines, different cultures sometimes develop different racial classifications of people. In Brazil, people use a multitude of terms for people whom they classify as different. Based on his fieldwork, Conrad Kottak reported that in a single village in northeastern Brazil, 40 different terms were used in a racial classification! To non-Japanese, Japan appears to be a racially homogeneous country. Yet many Japanese recognize and emphasize the differences between native Japanese and descendants of immigrants from Korea. Some Japanese are prejudiced against the Burakamin, the modern descendants of groups whose ancestors are believed to have engaged in low-level occupations. Yet Burakamin are so indistinguishable physically that those “pure” Japanese who care about such things have to investigate the ancestry of potential spouses to be sure they are not Burakamin.

Fourth, racial classifications change over time even within the same cultural tradition. In the Americas, people who are today considered indistinguishable racially once were widely viewed as members of different races. When large numbers of Irish immigrated to the Americas after the potato blight struck Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, they were considered a race by many other Americans whose ancestors had lived here somewhat longer. Jews were also seen by many as a distinct racial group. Such distinctions sound absurd today—to most North Americans, at any rate. Will present-day racial divisions seem just as absurd in the next century?

traditions vary in aspects of worldview that we do not ordinarily think of as religious.

For instance, the way people view their place in nature is part of their worldview: Do they see themselves

as the masters and conquerors of nature, or as living in harmony with natural forces? The way people view themselves and other people is part of their worldview: Do they see themselves, as many human groups do, as

The fact that we are selective when we identify traits as “racial” and others as not; the difficulty of determining how many races exist; the knowledge that different cultures disagree on the number and definition of races; and the varying ways that race has been viewed historically—all cast doubt that races are objectively definable biological groupings.

So, do some anthropologists actually deny that there are important physical differences between populations whose ancestors originated in different continents? No. What they deny is that these differences cluster in such a way that they produce discrete biological categories of people (i.e., races). Individual human beings differ from one another physically in a multitude of visible and invisible ways. If races—as North Americans typically define them—are real biological entities, then people of African ancestry would share a wide variety of traits while people of European ancestry would share a wide variety of *different* traits. But once we add traits that are less visible than skin coloration, hair texture, and the like, we find that the people we identify as “the same race” are less and less like one another and more and more like people we identify as “different races.” Add to this point that the physical features used to identify a person as a representative of some race (e.g., skin coloration) are continuously variable, so that one cannot say where “brown skin” becomes “white skin.” Although the physical differences themselves are real, the way we use physical differences to classify people into discrete races is a cultural construction.

For these and other reasons, most anthropologists agree that race is more of a cultural construction than a biological reality. Indeed, the American Anthropological Association recommends eliminating the word *race* from the 2010 American census.

Why does it matter whether race is a cultural construction rather than a biological reality? So long as people can avoid viewing some “races” as inferior to others, why is it so important that we see race as a cultural construct?

It matters a great deal, given the past and current realities of racial divisions. Racial terms (e.g., *brown*, *black*, *white*) carry connotations, making it very difficult for most people to use such terms in a neutral manner. Once a culture has classified people into kinds or types, it is difficult to avoid ranking the types according to some measure of quality, goodness, or talent. Familiar qualities include intelligence, work ethic, athletic ability, and musical talent. Some people believe Asians are smart and work hard,

whereas African Americans are better natural athletes, dancers, and musicians. From such seemingly innocent stereotypes, we too easily conclude that it is natural talent that puts many Asians near the top of their class, and some African Americans near the bottom academically. Books such as *The Bell Curve* (1994) argue that genetically-based intellectual abilities explain much of the differential success of different “races” in America today. Such arguments are moot if race is indeed a cultural construction.

There is another reason to view race as culturally constructed: Doing so helps to avoid confusing “race” with other kinds of differences that have nothing to do with physical differences. Most North Americans do not distinguish—at least not consistently—differences due to “race” from differences due to language, national origin, or cultural background. The latter differences, of course, are based on culture and/or language, not on physical characteristics. Too easily, race is confused with ethnicity. For example, many people view Native American and Hispanic as the same kind of identity as race. But Hispanics may be black or white or brown or any other humanly possible color, and many people who identify themselves as Native American based on their origins and culture are indistinguishable physically from Americans with European ancestry.

Last, race is currently a part of the way people identify themselves to one another. It is an important part of an individual’s social identity. Another person’s perception of you—and your perception of yourself—is affected by your assumed membership in some racial category. Such identities often carry a great degree of “racial pride.” Racial pride may be a positive force in the lives of people who have suffered the effects of prejudice and discrimination, as older African Americans who were part of the 1960s Black Power movement will appreciate. Yet racial pride cuts both ways, as people familiar with the beliefs and activities of the Aryan Nation and other such groups dedicated to maintaining “racial purity” know. Although race may be a source of pride, it is also a major—perhaps *the* major—source of conflict and cause of division in many of the world’s nations. Political leaders and opinion shapers in the popular media can and do manipulate the opinions of one “race” about other “races” to further their own political and social agendas. Depending on your own “racial” identity and values, it may be either comforting or disconcerting to realize that race is a cultural construction and therefore a division of our own making.

the only true human beings, and all others as essentially animals? Or do they see their way of life as one among many equally human but different ways of life? Most modern scientists share a similar worldview: They

believe that all things and events in the universe have natural causes that we can discover through certain formal procedures of observation, experimentation, and systematic logic.



## The Origins of Culture

Like so much else about the early past of humanity, when we began to depend on culture is unknown and, perhaps, unknowable. Most ethnologists think the essence of culture—without which everything else about culture could not exist—is the ability to create and understand symbols. If so, then somehow researchers must find a way to date the development of the cognitive capacity needed to understand symbols, the meanings of which are arbitrary and conventional rather than inherent in their physical properties. Obviously, determining when humanity developed this capacity is difficult.

One way to investigate the origin of culture is to look at the anatomy needed to produce speech. Language is almost entirely symbolic (see Chapter 33), so estimating when the ability to speak language evolved is one indication of when humanity became dependent on culture. Indeed, culture as we know it could not exist without language.

Philip Lieberman is one scholar who investigates the origins of language. The mouth, tongue, larynx, and other parts of the human vocal tract are biologically evolved for speech (see Chapter 33). The vocal tract of apes and other animals are incapable of producing the full array of sounds humans use to speak, making humans the only speaking animal. By measuring parts of the hard anatomy (bones) of modern humans and comparing them to the anatomy of prehistoric hominids, Lieberman believes the full capacity for language probably evolved between about 90,000 and 50,000 years ago. Of course, very few fossils are available for such a study, so Lieberman's conclusions are tentative, and future research is more likely to make the estimated dates earlier rather than later.

Archaeology provides another possible way to investigate the origin of culture. It is difficult to know whether some long-gone people had the ability to create and understand symbols because material evidence of this ability is seldom preserved in the archaeological record. For example, artifacts like spear points were made for practical purposes—that is, to produce a useful product like food or shelter. Tools are not *inherently* symbolic, as shown by the fact that other animals make and use them. Their shape or style may have had symbolic components, but often it is difficult to know whether ancient toolmakers chose a particular shape or style because it was “efficient” or because it was “meaningful.”

Good material evidence of prehistoric symbolic capacity would be objects that have no obvious or probable use in producing something. There are plenty

of such objects in late prehistory. For example, as early as 32,000 years ago, prehistoric people made paintings on the walls of more than 300 caves in France and Spain. Some other objects were clearly produced for their aesthetic/artistic value, like clay, ivory, and stone sculptures of humans and animals, but they too are relatively late.

In June 2009, a team of archaeologists reported they had uncovered the earliest known musical instrument. About 35,000 to 40,000 years ago, a prehistoric group living in what is now southwestern Germany made a flute from the wing bone of a vulture. The flute had at least five fingering holds that produced different notes. The makers modified one end of the bone to make it into a better mouthpiece. Two other smaller flute fragments, made of ivory, also were found. The technique for making the flutes seemed highly developed, suggesting that flute-making skills were even earlier. Why people would make a musical instrument is subject to speculation. One commentator suggests that these early inhabitants of Europe “produced symbolic objects that embodied complex beliefs shared by a larger community of individuals.” (Adler 2009, 696). If so, then the instruments, and perhaps music itself, requires the mental ability to create and understand symbols.

In 2007, archaeologists reported even earlier evidence that early *Homo sapiens* from North Africa created objects that carried a meaning beyond their physical properties. An international team of archaeologists excavated marine shell beads that ancient people of Morocco manufactured around 82,000 years ago. Many beads were perforated and had wear patterns indicating that they had been strung and worn on the body. Some were coated with a mineral called red ochre, showing that the makers altered the natural color of the shells. Most likely, people were decorating their bodies with the beads. Bodily decorations imply that others understood the beads as symbols of beauty, status, family or group identity, or the like. The beads communicated meanings that were not determined by their appearance or other physical properties, that is, the beads were symbols.

Probably culture as we socially learn and experience it today originated earlier than its physical manifestations in the form of instruments, art, beads, or other symbolic objects. But so far, all we can say is that humanity had the capacity for culture by around 80,000 years ago. Perhaps this helps explain why current evidence suggests that *Homo sapiens* did not leave our African homeland until around that time.



## Culture and Human Life

Anthropologists believe culture is absolutely essential to human life as it is usually lived—in association with other people, or in social groups. Those who study animal behavior know that living in social groups does not require culture. Many species of termites, bees, ants, and other social insects live in quite complex groups, yet they have no culture. Gorillas, chimpanzees, baboons, macaques, and most other primates are also group-living animals. Primatologists have shown that chimpanzees learn to use and make simple tools, share food, communicate fairly precise messages, have intergroup conflicts in which animals are killed, and form relationships in which two individuals who are physically weaker cooperate to overpower a stronger animal. Yet few anthropologists claim that chimpanzee groups have culture in the same sense as all human groups do. (Some use the term *proto-culture* to emphasize that many animal behaviors are socially learned rather than instinctive.) If other group-living social animals cooperate, communicate, and survive without culture, why do people need culture at all?

The main reason boils down to this: the culture of the society or other group into which people are born or raised provides the knowledge (information) they need to survive in their natural environments and to participate in the life of groups. This knowledge, which infants begin to socially learn soon after birth, is necessary because humans do not come into the world equipped with a detailed set of behavioral instructions inherited genetically from their parents. Rather, people are born with a *propensity to learn the knowledge and behaviors of the group they were born into from observation, interaction, and communication with members of that group*. Similar considerations apply to language, another capability that sets humans apart from other primates.

Culture is necessary for human existence in at least three specific ways:

1. Culture provides the knowledge by which we adapt to our natural environment by harnessing resources and solving other problems of living in a particular place. As they grow up, children socially learn skills for tracking game, gathering wild plants, making gardens, herding livestock, or finding a job, depending on how people make their living in a particular society. Because most human populations have lived in the same environment for many generations, if not centuries, the current generation is usually wise to take advantage of the adaptive wisdom learned and passed down by its cultural ancestors.
2. Culture is the basis for human social life. It provides ready-made norms, values, expectations, attitudes, symbols, and other knowledge that individuals use to communicate, cooperate, live in families and other groups, relate to people of their own and opposite sex, and establish political and legal systems. As they grow up, people learn what actions are and are not acceptable, how to win friends, who relatives are, how and whom to court and marry, when to show glee or grief, and so forth.
3. Culture affects our views of reality. It provides the mental concepts by which people perceive, interpret, analyze, and explain events in the world around them. Our culture provides a filter or screen that affects how we perceive the world through our senses. Some objects “out there” in the world are sensed; others are not. Some events are important; others are ignored. Growing up in a given culture thus leads people to develop shared understandings of the world (keep in mind that “shared understandings” do not imply Truth).

In sum, culture is essential to human life as we experience it because it provides us with the means to adapt to our surroundings, form relationships in organized groups, and interpret reality. Adaptation, organization, interpretation—these are three of the main reasons culture is essential to a normal human existence. In later chapters, we look at some of the diverse ways in which various cultures have equipped their members to adapt to their environment, organize their groups, and understand their world.



## Cultural Knowledge and Individual Behavior

How are the shared ideas and beliefs of a group of people related to the behavior of individuals? This question is important not only for studying other cultures but also for learning how people think about their own lives and their relationship to society.

### Is Behavior Determined by Culture?

Some believe culture largely determines or dictates behavior, a view known as **cultural determinism**. If

**cultural determinism** The notion that the beliefs and behaviors of individuals are largely programmed by their culture.



this idea is strictly and literally true, then personal freedom is an illusion, as is the exercise of free will. We only *think* we are free and have free will, but actually culture is pulling our strings.

Many anthropologists of the past (and a few in the present) viewed culture as existing independently of individuals. Individuals were seen merely as culture's carriers and transmitters. Some claimed that "culture has its own laws," implying that people themselves have little ability to alter the future of their societies.

According to cultural determinism, culture provides rules or instructions that tell individuals what to do in particular situations: how to act toward friends, coworkers, and mothers-in-law; how to perform roles acceptably; how to worship; how to settle quarrels; and so forth. Any "deviants" who do not follow the rules of their culture are usually forced to conform, ostracized, or eliminated. In this view, norms are the parts of culture that are emphasized. Norms tell us how to do things: usually we do them in these ways; when we do, we receive rewards; when we don't, we are punished.

This view certainly applies to some behaviors, but cultural knowledge consists of far more than just rules or instructions. It consists of values that provide only rough and sometimes conflicting guidelines for behavior. It includes shared constructions of reality and worldviews, which influence our behavior, but only indirectly (by affecting how we perceive and interpret the world) rather than directly (as instructions). Finally, cultural knowledge includes attitudes, understandings of symbols, and other kinds of ideas and beliefs that affect how people act, but not in the same way that rules do. The effects of these and other mental components of culture are too subtle and complex to think of them as rules or instructions.

Besides, most people do not experience their culture as all powerful. Although it *could* be true that your mind is mainly a vessel that carries your culture, you probably think there is a lot more to you than that. Most modern anthropologists agree, rejecting notions of extreme cultural determinism. Culture does shape individuals, but it is also shaped by individuals.

In most situations, people do not blindly follow the "dictates" of their culture. They scheme, calculate, weigh alternatives, and make decisions. For those actions that are important in their own lives or in the lives of others they care about, they plan ahead and consider the possible benefits and costs before they act. In considering the relationship between knowledge and behavior, we must take into account people's ability to think ahead, plan, strategize, and choose.

One way to do this is to realize that formulating plans and making choices involve both rational thought and emotional dispositions, both of which occur in the context of cultural knowledge. Planning and choosing involve the following procedures: deciding on one's goals (ends); determining the resources (or means) available to acquire these goals; calculating which specific actions are likely to be most effective; estimating the relative costs (in time and/or resources) and benefits (rewards) of these alternative actions; and, finally, choosing between alternative courses of action.

Culture affects every step of this choice-making process. Norms force individuals to take into account how others are likely to react to their behavior. Values affect the goals that people have and help prevent them from acting in ways that infringe on the rights of others. Choices are affected by the existing cultural constructions of people and things, worldviews, and individuals' anticipation of how others will interpret the meaning of their actions.

Culture thus affects goals, perceptions of appropriate and effective means, relative weighting of costs and benefits, and so on. So important is the effect of cultural knowledge on individual decisions that one influential anthropologist long ago defined culture itself as "standards for deciding what is, . . . what can be, . . . how one feels about it, . . . what to do about it, . . . and how to go about doing it" (Goodenough 1961, 552).

Thus, one important way cultural knowledge affects behavior is by its influences on choices individuals make about what to do in various situations. One way to say this is that cultural knowledge provides "boundaries" for behavior. Speaking metaphorically, culture draws the lines that behavior usually does not cross, meaning that culture determines which behaviors are likely to be proper or acceptable or understandable to others. Within these boundaries, people are free to choose between alternative actions. Most people do not violate these cultural boundaries because they believe in the moral correctness of norms and values, because they fear negative reactions from others, or because doing so would involve actions that others might misinterpret.

## Why Does Behavior Vary?

The complexity of the relationship between knowledge and behavior is one reason we distinguish knowledge from behavior. Shared ideas and beliefs sometimes do not predict behavior very well at all, and what is expected is often not what occurs. There are several major reasons the actions of different individuals vary.

The most obvious reason is that no two individuals have exactly the same life experiences, even though they are brought up in the same cultural tradition. A related reason is that no two individuals (except identical twins) have the same genetic makeup, and our genes affect how we react to our life experiences. Different life experiences and biological uniqueness make individuals different (to greater or lesser degrees, of course) in their reactions and actions.

Other reasons for variations in behavior are more subtle. Norms and values are not always consistent and do not always provide unambiguous guidelines for behavior. Generally, you should not lie, but sometimes a small lie is necessary to preserve a personal relationship or to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to avoid greater harms. Often, too, small lies are so useful to achieve our personal goals that our private interests take precedence over the antilying norm.

In many situations, pursuing one worthwhile goal or upholding one value conflicts with pursuing another goal or upholding another value, so people must choose between them. You may believe in the work ethic, value success in your career, enjoy sports, and want to be a good parent. You hold these beliefs, values, and goals simultaneously. But holding a job and advancing a career reduces the time we can devote to the pursuit of our “family values,” so we must decide how to allocate our scarce time and energy between activities that are all culturally defined as worthwhile.

Also, people find ways to justify (to themselves and to others) violations of norms and accepted moral standards when such norms and standards conflict with their interests. You may rationalize stealing from your employer by your opinion that you are “underpaid.” Your boss may justify having you work overtime for no extra pay because he is “pressured” from his own boss. Your company may lay off its workers and move its operations overseas because it must operate in a “highly competitive global environment.” Your classmates may rationalize cheating on a test because the instructor is “boring” and the course is “all B.S. anyway.”

Finally, people receive contradictory messages about what actions are proper and morally right. Sometimes ideal models for behavior are contradicted by the messages and models people receive from the actions of their parents, relatives, friends, political leaders, and the media. Older generations want us to uphold their standards of sexual morality, but when we watch TV, DVDs, and movies, we are exposed to conflicting messages and values.

The preceding examples are familiar to most readers. Our main point is this: all cultures have abstract public

values and norms that distinguish right from wrong, appropriate from inappropriate, and so forth. But real-world situations are complicated. Real-life individuals have personal goals to pursue and sometimes yield to temptation. People have to choose between values and norms that conflict at least sometimes and in some circumstances.

In sum, all humans and all groups periodically deal with the complicated conflicts between private interests and public duties. The actions of individuals are often an uneasy compromise between the two. Although our behavior is embedded in the context of cultural knowledge, its relationship to this context is complex and variable. All of us recognize that this applies to ourselves. We should realize that it applies to others as well.



## Biology and Culture

In many ways, humans are like other mammals. Biologically, we must regulate our body temperatures, balance our energy and liquid intake and expenditures, and so forth. But anthropologists say that humans are special mammals because we rely so heavily on culture for our survival and sense of well-being. This raises the question of how culture is related to human biology.

### Biology and Cultural Differences

Although we cannot discuss this issue in depth, it is necessary to address one important question: Do biological/genetic/physical differences between groups of people have anything to do with the cultural differences between them? To rephrase the question so that its full implications are apparent: Is there any correlation between cultures and human physical forms, or “races,” as they are usually called? (See A Closer Look for why the whole concept of race is problematic.)

Before the twentieth century, many people believed the physical differences between groups of people explained differences in how they thought, felt, and behaved. That is, they believed “racial” differences partly or largely accounted for differences in culture. According to this notion, now called **biological determinism**,

**biological determinism** The idea that biologically (genetically) inherited differences between populations are important influences on cultural differences between them.



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Members of any “racial” type can and do learn the same culture. Having passed citizenship examinations, these people became American citizens on July 4, 2005.

cultural differences have a biological basis, meaning that groups of people differ in how they think, feel, and act because they differ in their innate biological makeup.

Biological determinism is a convenient theory about what makes human groups different from one another in their beliefs and actions. It is simple to understand. Often, it is a politically or economically useful idea, especially when combined with ethnocentric attitudes about the superiority of one’s own culture. If French or Chinese see their culture as superior to African or Native American cultures, then it might be because the French or Chinese are biologically superior to Africans or Native Americans. Colonial rule, the expropriation of land and other resources, slavery, genocides and attempted genocides, and other practices often were justified by the idea that groups of people differed in their customs and beliefs—and also in their intelligence—because of their physical differences. If who comes out on top in competition among individuals and groups is biologically determined, then whoever is on top and on bottom is justifiable—and even inevitable.

With few exceptions, modern ethnologists reject biological determinism. We believe that genetic differences between human populations do not cause cultural differences. The diverse cultures of Africa did not and do not differ from the cultures of Europe or Asia because the peoples of these continents differ biologically. Nor do the cultures of different ethnic groups within a modern nation differ because these ethnic groups differ physically: African Americans, European Americans, and Asian Americans do not differ in their beliefs and actions because of their different genetic makeup.

To claim that physical differences are largely irrelevant as causes for cultural differences seems like a sweeping overgeneralization. Certainly, it is difficult to prove. But evidence for it is familiar to most people. Consider the following three facts, drawn from everyday life:

1. Individuals of any physical type are equally capable of learning any culture. For instance, the North American continent now contains people whose biological ancestors came from all parts of the



world. Yet modern-day African-, Korean-, South Asian-, Irish-, and Italian-Americans have far more in common in their thoughts and actions than any of them have in common with the peoples of their ancestral homelands.

2. An enormous range of cultural diversity was and is found on all continents and regions of the world. For example, most West Africans are biologically similar, yet they are divided into many dozens of different cultural groupings. The same disjunction between physical characteristics and cultural diversity applies to people of northern Asia, southern Asia, Europe, and other regions. Far too much cultural variability exists within populations that are biologically similar for biological differences to be a *significant* cause of cultural variation.
3. Dramatically different ways of thinking and behaving succeed one another in time within the same biological population and within the same society. Cultures can and regularly do undergo vast changes within a single human generation, as the changes in countries like China, Brazil, and India since the 1980s so clearly reveals.

Because of these and other kinds of evidence, most cultural anthropologists feel justified in reaching the following conclusion: physical (including “racial”) differences between human populations are mostly irrelevant in explaining the cultural differences between them. For the most part, if we want to explain the differences between the Kikuyu culture of East Africa and the Vietnamese culture of East Asia, we ignore the physical and genetic differences between the Kikuyu and the Vietnamese.

However, “for the most part” does not mean “totally.” There are features in which differences in behavior can be attributed to biological differences between human groups. One well-understood example is the relation between population-level genetic differences and milk-drinking. Of course, all infants drink milk, but not all human populations retain the ability to continue milk-drinking into adulthood. Milk contains lactose, a kind of sugar, but lactose must be broken down in the small intestine by an enzyme called lactase before the body can digest it. Many peoples are lactose-intolerant, meaning that they lose the ability to digest milk as they mature.

For example, most peoples of eastern Asia and southern Africa cannot digest fresh milk, nor can most Native Americans. But the vast majority of Europeans and people with European ancestry (European-Americans and European-Australians/New Zealanders) are able to digest lactose, as are most peoples of central Africa. The obvious

reason for the difference in “behavior” or even in “taste” is genetic: the ancestors of some peoples were able to drink milk, so milk-drinking evolved as a behavioral pattern. If true, this would be an example of a biological difference “causing” a difference in behavior and “taste” between groups of people.

However, this obvious explanation is too simple. Evidence shows that it is likely that milk-drinking and genetic change *co-evolved*. That is, after cattle were domesticated several thousand years ago, milk became such a potentially nutritious food that the few people able to digest it had more children, so the “behavior” of milk drinking and the “taste” for milk spread as the “gene” for lactose tolerance grew more common. Prior to cattle domestication, milk was not a human food after infancy. But in those regions where cattle were domesticated, and in those regions where cattle-keeping spread, milk became a human food. The biological capability to digest it increased in those populations.

Lactose intolerance is an example in which a biological difference affects a cultural difference, making some peoples more likely to drink fresh milk than others. However, it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect in this case. As fresh milk became more available as a nutritious food, natural selection led more and more people to be able to digest it. So at the group level, its value as food increased, as did the taste for it. People therefore raised more cattle to provide more milk (and other resources). This is the meaning of *co-evolution*: as the nutritional value of milk increased, the ability to digest it increased among the population, creating more people able to drink it, which in turn led to cattle becoming more valuable and more common, further increasing the supply of a food resource. And so on. This kind of co-evolution probably also affected other changes in human diets after people domesticated plants and animals beginning around 10,000 years ago (Chapter 6).

As lactose tolerance illustrates, in specific cultural features, biological differences do affect behavior—or, at least, behavioral predispositions. It is unlikely that we can explain the difference between milk-averse and milk-drinking cultures without taking genetic differences into account.

## Cultural Universals

Biological factors are relevant to human life in a broader way. Human beings have physiological needs and biological imperatives just like other animals. Food, water, shelter, and the like are necessary to sustain life. Sexual activity is pleasurable for its own sake as well as necessary for reproduction. People become sick and may die from





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It is not clear whether music somehow helps people survive or performs essential functions for societies and cultures, but it nonetheless is a cultural universal. These Chinese are skilled drummers.

disease, so coping with the effects of viruses, bacteria, and other microorganisms is a biological necessity. Finally, no human society can survive unless its females give birth and its members effectively nurture and enculturate their children. To persist over many generations, all groups develop means of meeting these biological needs and coping with these environmental problems; those that have failed to do so are no longer around.

Because humans are both cultural and biological beings, much of what we do is oriented around the satisfaction of biological needs for food, shelter, reproduction, disease avoidance, and so forth. All peoples must deal with such imperatives. It is partly because of these problems that anthropologists have discovered **cultural universals**, or elements that exist in all known human cultural groupings.

Some cultural universals are obvious because they are requirements for long-term survival in a species that relies

**cultural universals** Elements of culture that exist in all known human groups or societies.

on social learning, material technology, and group living. These universals include tools, shelter, methods of communication, patterns of cooperation used in acquiring food and other essential resources, family systems, ways of teaching children, methods of social control, ways of regulating who may have sexual relations with whom, and so forth. There is no great mystery about why all human groups have such things.

Other cultural universals are not so obvious. They do not seem necessary for the physical survival of individuals or groups, but they are nonetheless present in all cultural traditions. Among these are:

- ways of assigning tasks and roles according to age, gender, and skill;
- prohibitions on sexual relations (incest taboos) between certain kinds of relatives;
- organized ways of sharing and exchanging goods;
- games, sports, and other kinds of recreational activities;
- beliefs about supernatural powers and rituals used to communicate with and influence them;

- decorative arts;
- singing and other forms of music;
- standards of modesty;
- customary ways of handling the dead and expressing grief;
- myths, legends, and folklore; and
- rites of passage that publicly recognize the movement of people through certain stages of life.

We could list more cultural universals. Here, our main point is that many cultural universals are not easily explained by the simple fact that they are obviously necessary for the short-or long-term biological survival of populations. Perhaps many of these universals exist because they are a necessary by-product of a toolmaking, culture-bearing, language-speaking, symbol-understanding species.

However, the precise forms that these and other universal elements take vary from culture to culture. For instance, all human societies have beliefs about the supernatural (religion), but the nature of these

beliefs varies enormously among cultures, as seen in Chapter 14. Likewise, people in all societies have prohibitions against sexual relations with certain kinds of relatives, but which family members are excluded varies from society to society, as discussed in Chapter 8. Male– female differences are important among all peoples but how people culturally construct these differences varies quite a lot, as described in Chapter 11. Music and art exist universally, but this tells us little about musical tastes or artistic styles, discussed in Chapter 15. Most of the rest of this book deals with these and other cultural variations.

Generally, it is important to understand that biologically the peoples of the world are overwhelmingly similar, no matter how different they might appear to our senses and cultural constructions. As we cover cultural variations in future chapters, it is also important to realize that cultures are not infinitely variable.

## Summary

**1 Define culture in a way that is useful to compare and contrast different cultures.** *Culture* refers to the whole way of life of some society or group. To describe and analyze culture, we distinguish its mental and behavioral components, or cultural knowledge and patterns of behavior. *Culture* is here defined as the shared, socially learned knowledge and behavioral patterns characteristic of some group of people. The term *group* may refer to an entire society, an ethnic group, or some kind of subculture, depending on the context of the discussion.

**2 Understand the concept of cultural knowledge and five of its key components.** Cultural knowledge has many components, some of which are norms, values, shared understandings of the meanings of symbolic objects and actions, constructions of reality, and worldviews. Cultural knowledge is not true in any objective sense, but it must at least allow a society to persist in its environment and it must enable people to interact appropriately and meaningfully.

**3 Describe why most anthropologists believe that “race” is a cultural construction, rather than biologically determined.** Most anthropologists claim that racial categories are culturally constructed rather

than biologically determined. The physical differences within a given “race” are just as large as the differences between “races.” People vary in invisible ways as well as in observable ways, and different categories result if different criteria are used. Not only do cultures vary in the number of physical “races” they identify, but historically people once identified races with labels that now sound ludicrous (e.g., the Irish race).

**4 Discuss the evidence for the origins of the human capacity for culture.** How, why, and when the human species first developed culture is uncertain. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of the capacity to understand symbols by about 80,000 years ago and probably earlier. A musical flute found in Germany is around 35,000 years old, and presumably people were making music long before then.

**5 Analyze the relationship between cultural knowledge and the behavior of individuals.** Cultural determinism is the idea that cultural knowledge determines the actions of individuals, but this view is simplistic. Cultural ideas and beliefs serve as more than just rules or instructions for behavior. A more realistic view is that cultural knowledge affects the choices people make about how to act in particular situations. Cultural knowledge limits and influences behavior but

does not determine it in detail because people's actions most of the time are not simply programmed by their culture.

**6 Describe why cultural and biological differences between human populations vary independently.** Biological determinism is the notion that cultural differences between human populations are greatly affected or even determined by the biological differences between them. This idea is

generally rejected because convincing evidence exists that biological and cultural differences vary independently. The shared biological heritage of the human species does affect culture, however, because how people meet their biologically given needs is reflected in their culture. The existence of cultural universals also suggests that the shared genetic heritage of all humanity affects the kinds of cultures that are possible in the human species.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 3 CULTURE AND LANGUAGE



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## Humanity and Language

### Five Properties of Language

- Discreteness*
- Arbitrariness*
- Productivity*
- Displacement*
- Multimedia Potential*

### How Language Works

- Sound Systems*
- Words and Meanings*

## Communication and Social Behavior

- Nonverbal Communication*
- Speech and Social Context*

### Language and Culture

- Language as a Reflection of Culture*
- Language, Perceptions, and Worldview*



People communicate mainly by language, but nonverbal methods also send messages in ways that often vary from people to people, as these Sicilian women illustrate.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- 1 **Explain** why the ability to speak and understand language is so remarkable and why language is such a powerful means of communication.
- 2 **Identify** five key properties of human language.
- 3 **Describe** how words are formed from combinations of discrete sounds.
- 4 **Explain** why every meaningful string of sounds is not a “word.”
- 5 **Discuss** nonverbal communication and how speech is affected by context and social relationships.
- 6 **Discuss** the concept of semantic domain.
- 7 **Describe** the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, why it is important, and some of the controversies surrounding it.

In addition to socially learning their culture, during socialization children master the sounds, words, meanings, and grammatical rules they need to send and receive complex messages. Language is the shared knowledge of these elements and rules. Along with humanity’s dependence on culture, our ability to communicate complex, precise information is the main mental capability that distinguishes humans from other animals.

We begin this chapter by discussing a few of many reasons language is so remarkable. Then we describe some features of language that make it more sophisticated than the communication systems of other animals. We show how people send and receive messages by following unconscious rules for combining sounds and words in ways that other people who know the language recognize as meaningful. People also communicate by nonverbal means, including bodily movements and spatial relationships. Cultures vary in how they interpret these elements of communication, although some expressions and movements seem to carry similar meanings universally. Finally, language is related to many aspects of culture, and speaking is itself a culturally conditioned behavior.



## Humanity and Language

Although we talk to one another every day, we seldom consider how remarkable it is that we can do so. Yet the ability to speak and comprehend the messages of language requires knowledge of an enormous number of linguistic elements and rules. Language and culture

together are critical to the development of human individuals—without them, our psychological and social development is incomplete. In all probability, without them we would be unable to think, as the word *think* is generally understood. Language and culture provide our minds with most of the concepts and terms for thought itself. Thus, the workings of the human mind depend crucially on the knowledge of some language.

Several points reveal the importance of language for human life. First, *Homo sapiens* is the only animal capable of speech and the only animal biologically evolved to speak and understand true language. Other animals—including honeybees, social species of ants and termites, some whales and dolphins, gorillas, and chimpanzees—are capable of impressive feats of communication, but only humans have language in a fully developed form. With the aid of intensive training from humans, chimpanzees and gorillas can learn to use sign language or to manipulate symbols standing for words and concepts into sentences. With no human interference, one chimp taught sign language to another and later they used it to communicate with one another. Despite these feats, no great ape is capable of responding to this simple request: “What are you going to do tomorrow?”

In fact, language is so critical to humanity that it helped shape our biological evolution. This includes, of course, the speech regions of our brain, but it also includes our vocal tract. The human *vocal tract* consists of the lungs, trachea (including vocal cords), mouth, and nasal passages. The vocal tract is biologically evolved for speech. It is a remarkable resonating chamber.

Here are a few examples. You make different vowel sounds by raising and lowering the tongue or parts of the tongue. Changing the position of the tongue modifies the shape of the mouth and produces sounds of different wavelengths which human ears recognize as different sounds (compare where your tongue is for the vowels in *sit* and *set*, in *far* and *fur*, and in *teeth* and *tooth*). You produce most consonants by interrupting the flow of air through the mouth. The initial sound of the word *tip* is formed by bringing the tip of the tongue into contact with the alveolar ridge just behind the teeth and then releasing the contact suddenly. You change *tip* to *sip* by blowing air through your mouth while almost, but not quite, touching the tip of your tongue to your alveolar ridge, thus making the initial sound a brief hissing noise. Your vocal cords interact with other parts of your vocal tract. Either they vibrate and produce a buzzy sound (as in “mmm”), or they remain open and allow air to flow into your mouth freely (contrast the sound *h* in *how* with the first *w* in *wow*). You change *tip* to *dip* by vibrating your vocal cords with the first sound of *dip*. The other vowels and consonants of English and other languages are made by articulating various parts of the vocal tract in contrasting ways.

You move all these parts of your vocal tract unconsciously with astonishing speed and precision. Each sound is possible because the chamber formed by the mouth, throat, nasal passages, and the muscles of the tongue and lips are biologically evolved to allow us to produce it. There is a good reason chimpanzees cannot speak human words: their vocal tract is not evolved to do so. Yet, with training, any human can utter the sounds found in any language.

Second, language makes it possible for people to communicate and think about abstract concepts as well as about concrete persons, places, things, actions, and events. Among these abstractions are *truth*, *evil*, *god*, *masculinity*, *wealth*, *values*, *humanity*, *zero*, *law*, *jihad*, *universal*, *space*, and *hatred*. Humans all understand such abstractions. Indeed, without the ability to conceptualize such abstractions, culture as we experience it could not exist. Further, our everyday behavior is greatly affected by abstract contrasts such as *friend* and *enemy*, *food* and *poison*, *beautiful* and *ugly*, *play* and *work*.

Third, the social learning by which children acquire culture would be impossible without language. Language makes it possible for the knowledge in one person’s mind to be transmitted into the mind of another person. During enculturation, not only do we learn “facts” and “lessons” about the world, but we also

hear (or read) stories and myths, whose lessons are only implicit. The worldview of a culture is communicated (and perhaps even shaped) by language.

Finally, language allows humanity to enjoy the benefits of the most complete and precise form of communication in any animal. We can communicate incredibly detailed information about past, present, and future events. In fact, we can learn about events that happened far away and long ago and speculate about events that could possibly happen tomorrow but probably won’t. We can tell lies. We can discuss plans, contingencies, and possible courses of action, based on our expectations about what might happen in the future. All these are things humans do so routinely that we consider them ordinary.

In brief, language is powerful. It makes abstract thought possible. It allows the relatively quick and easy transmission of information from one individual (and generation) to another. It allows the communication of complex and precise messages, including speculations and lies.



## Five Properties of Language

Back in 1960, linguist Charles Hockett identified 13 properties that distinguish language from the communication abilities of other animals. Only 5 of the 13 are important for our purposes.

### Discreteness

*Discreteness* means that when we speak we combine units (sounds and words) according to shared and conventional rules. Knowing a language means knowing both the units and the rules for combining them. Words are composed of discrete units of sound (e.g., *j*, *u*, *m*, *p*) that are combined to communicate a meaning (*jump*). Similarly, we apply rules to combine units of meanings (words) to form sentences.

Discrete sounds are the metaphorical building blocks of language. Discreteness makes alphabets possible. In alphabetic writing, people combine the letters of their alphabet to form printed words. Originally, each sound of the English alphabet was pronounced in a similar way in all the words in which it appeared. For example, the letter (sound) *t* appears in *student*, *textbook*, *eat*, and *today*. The same applies to other letters in an alphabet.

In English writing, most letters no longer represent a single sound. The letter *a*, for example, is pronounced differently in the words *act*, *father*, *warden*, *assume*, and *nature*. Some single sounds in English are rendered

in spelling as two letters, such as *th*, *ng*, and the *gh* in *rough*. Why doesn't English spelling always reflect the way these words are pronounced? Basically, because changes in how words are spelled have lagged behind changes in pronunciation since the invention of the printing press.

By themselves, most sounds carry no meaning: the three sounds in *cat*, for example, are meaningless when pronounced by themselves. But by combining this limited number of sounds in different ways, we form meaningful words. Thus, the three sounds in *cat* can be put together in different sequences to form the words *act* and *tack*. Words, then, are composed of sound combinations that a speech community recognizes as conveying standardized meanings.

Just as all languages use a small number of sounds to make a large number of words, words are combined according to the grammatical rules of the language to convey the complex messages carried by sentences. By mastering their language's words and meanings, and the rules for combining words into sentences, speakers and listeners can send and receive messages of great complexity with amazing precision (e.g., "From the basket of apples on your left, hand me the reddest one on the bottom.>").

## Arbitrariness

The relationship between the sound combinations that make up words and the meanings these words communicate is *arbitrary*, so words are symbols (see Chapter 2). As children learn to speak and understand, they learn the combinations of sounds that are permissible according to the rules of their language. For instance, in English, *mp*, *nt*, and *ld* are all possible combinations, but *pm*, *tn*, and *dl* are not (although these combinations are used by other languages). Children also learn to match certain sound combinations (words) with their meanings. By the age of 1 or 2, most children have learned the meanings of dozens of words. They have mastered many words that refer to objects (*ball*), animals (*doggie*), people (*mama*), sensory experiences (*hot*), qualities (*blue*, *hard*), actions (*eat*, *run*), commands (*no*, *come here*), emotions (*love*), and so forth. The child learns to associate meanings with words, even though the specific sound combinations that convey these various meanings have no inherent relationship to the things themselves.

Because the relationship between meanings and words or sentences is arbitrary, our ability to communicate linguistic messages is based on conventions shared by the sender and receiver of a message. When we learn a

language, we master these conventions about meanings, just as we master pronunciations and other things.

## Productivity

*Productivity* refers to a speaker's ability to create totally novel sentences and to a listener's ability to comprehend them. Productivity means that a language's finite number of words can be combined into an infinite number of meaningful sentences. The sentences are meaningful because the speaker and listener know what each word means individually and the rules by which they may be combined to convey messages. The amazing thing is that individuals are not consciously aware of their knowledge of these rules, although they routinely apply them each time they speak and hear. For example, unless you have linguistic training, you probably do not know that you form an English plural by adding one of *two* sounds (either *-z* or *-s*) to the end of a noun (contrast the last sounds of *beans* and *beats*).

## Displacement

*Displacement* refers to our ability to talk about objects, people, things, and events that are remote in time and space. Language has this property because it uses symbols (words and sentences) to transmit meanings, so things and people do not have to be immediately visible for us to communicate about them. We can discuss someone who is out of sight because the symbols of language (in this case, a name) call that person to mind, allowing us to think about him or her. We can speculate about the future because, although its events may never happen, our language has symbols that stand for future time, and more symbols that allow us to form a mental image of possible events. We can learn about events that happened before we were born, such as wars in Korea and Vietnam. People can learn of events and things far away in space, such as fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, explorations of the moon and Mars, factories in China and India, and oil spills in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico.

The displacement property also makes it possible to describe things (like ghosts and ghouls) and places (like Avatar and Caldaran) that do not even exist. We tell one another stories about events that might not have really happened, and thus create myths, fiction, legends, fairy tales, and folklore. Political leaders can mislead citizens, and be misled themselves, about weapons of mass destruction and terrorist connections in distant lands. Much that is familiar in human life depends on this important property—including the ability to lie.



Discreteness	Arbitrariness	Productivity	Displacement	Multimedia potential
Minimal units of sound and meaning may be combined in different ways to communicate messages.	Meanings of words cannot be understood or deduced by people who do not know the language.	Finite number of words can be combined into an infinite number of novel sentences.	People can discuss objects, persons, and events that are not immediately present or that are imaginary, future, or only possible.	Messages can be transmitted through many media (sound, print, sight, electronic).

### Multimedia Potential

Messages use some medium for their transmission from sender to recipient. For example, writing is the medium in which the messages of this book are transmitted. When you speak, the medium for your message is speech, transmitted to the ears of your listeners by sound waves. Gestures and bodily movements are communications media that are received by the sense of sight rather than hearing.

Unlike most other ways of communicating, language has *multimedia potential*, meaning that linguistic messages can be transmitted through a variety of media. The original medium for language, of course, was speech. Beginning around 5000 years ago, the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, Chinese, and the ancient Mesoamerican peoples known as Zapotecs and Mayans developed writing. This new medium of communication began as a way to keep records of taxes, labor, oracles, the passage of time (calendars), and military conquests. Over several centuries, writing techniques spread to other regions such as the Greek islands, southern Asia, Japan, Korea, and western Europe. We take writing so much for granted that it is hard to imagine life without books and magazines, computers and the Internet, street signs and billboards, and other “media.”

Hand gestures and movements are mediums for the hearing impaired, as illustrated by American Sign Language. Even touching and the resulting nerve signals can be a medium for language. Helen Keller, both blind and deaf, communicated and received linguistic messages by touch.

The Concept Review summarizes these five important properties of language. Together, discreteness, arbitrariness, productivity, displacement, and multimedia potential make language the most precise and complete system of communication known among living things. Because of them, you understand the following lie perfectly although you’ve never read or heard it before: “Last Tuesday at 7:02 P.M., I saw you chase my neighbor’s dog around the yard and bite its ear.” Furthermore, you are completely sure I’m lying.



### How Language Works

As children learn language, they master an enormous amount of information. **Grammar** refers to all the knowledge shared by those who are able to speak and understand a language: sounds that exist in that language, rules for combining them into sequences, meanings conveyed by these sequences, and how sentences are constructed by stringing words together according to precise rules.

Grammatical knowledge is *unconscious*: those who share a language cannot verbalize the nature of the knowledge that allows them to communicate with one another. It also is *intuitive*: speaking and understanding are automatic, and we ordinarily do not need to think long and hard about how to speak or understand linguistic messages.

This scientific use of *grammar* differs from the everyday use of the term. In everyday speech, some people judge others partly on the basis of whether others use “proper” grammar. In the English language and most others spoken by large numbers of people, there are several **dialects**, or variations in speech patterns, including in pronunciation and vocabulary. Dialects may be based on factors like region (e.g., England, Wales, the American south, Australia, Jamaica) or ethnic identification (e.g., Louisiana Creole, Black English, “Spanglish”). But speakers of English all understand one another, although sometimes with difficulty. In the United States, one American dialect, called *Standard American English* (SAE)—and it is a dialect,

**grammar** Total system of linguistic knowledge that allows the speakers of a language to send meaningful messages that hearers can understand.

**dialects** Variations in a single language based on factors such as region, subculture, ethnic identity, and socioeconomic class.



the one common in the national news media—is culturally accepted as most proper. Other dialects, especially those spoken by many African Americans and by southern or Appalachian whites, are looked down on by many of those whose dialect is SAE.

But there is no such thing as a superior and inferior dialect (or language) *in the linguistic sense*. That is, each language, and each dialect, is equally capable of serving as a vehicle for communicating the messages its speakers need to send and receive. So long as a person successfully communicates, there is no such thing as “bad grammar” or people who “don’t know proper grammar.” If Jennifer says, “I ain’t got no shoes,” you will have a different impression of her than if she says, “I have no shoes.” But the first Jennifer’s speech is perfectly good English—to members of certain subcultures who speak one English dialect. If speakers communicate their intended meaning to listeners, then the words they use or the ways they construct their sentences are as valid linguistically as any other. The evaluations we make of someone else’s grammar or overall style of speech, then, are *cultural* evaluations. They are based on some peoples’ cultural norms of correct grammar, conceptions about the kinds of people who speak in a certain way, and so forth.

With this point about the equality of languages and dialects in mind, here we briefly cover two aspects of grammar: (1) sounds and their patterning, and (2) sound combinations and their meanings.

## Sound Systems

When we speak, our vocal tract emits a string of sounds. The sounds of a language, together with the way these sounds occur in regular and consistent patterns, make up the *phonological system* of the language. The study of sound systems is called **phonology**.

The particular sounds that speakers of a language recognize as distinct from other sounds are called **phoneme**. Phonemes are individual sounds that make a difference in the meanings of words. Linguists use slash marks / / to show that a particular sound is a phoneme in a given language. Thus, a few English consonants are / f /, / t /, / b /, / n /, / z /, and / l /. Some English

vowels are / a /, / i / (pronounced “ee”), / o /, and / u /. Thus, words consist of a string of phonemes, like / mi / and / yu / (although there is an *o* in the way we spell *you*, phonologically the “o” is absent).

Of course, languages have different phonemes, and the phonemes of some do not appear in others. If you know Spanish, then you know that / v / does not exist in that language, which is why native speakers of Spanish may pronounce *very* as *berry*. Japanese has no *r* or *l* sound, which is why Japanese people have trouble distinguishing them when they speak English. On the other hand, the Japanese language distinguishes sounds that English does not. Japanese has double consonant sounds that make a difference in the meanings of words, like / t / versus / tt / or / p / versus / pp /. Thus, (using English spelling), *kite* means “come” and *kitte* means “stamp,” which is one reason Japanese can be hard for many foreigners to pronounce correctly.

Further, differences that one language recognizes in sounds are not always recognized in other languages. English speakers hear differences between consonants that are voiced (your vocal cords vibrate to make a buzzy sound, as in / v /) and voiceless (your vocal cords do not vibrate, as in / f /). Thus, in English, *vat* and *fat* are different words, as are *bat* and *pat*. But in Kosraen, a language of Micronesia, the sound differences between / v / and / f /, / d / and / t /, / b / and / p /, and / g / and / k / make no difference in meaning. It is as if English speakers could not distinguish between *veal* and *feel*, between *dan* and *tan*, between *big* and *pig*, and between *got* and *cot*. In English, whether a consonant is voiced or voiceless makes a difference in the meanings of words in which they occur; in Kosraen, it does not.

One of the most interesting ways languages differ in phonology is using the pitch of the voice to convey meaning. (The *pitch* of a voice depends on how fast the vocal cords vibrate: the higher the frequency of vibration, the higher the pitch of the voice.) English speakers use pitch to convey different meanings, as you can see by contrasting the following sentences:

She’s going home.

She’s going home?

The first statement is turned into a question by altering the pitch of the voice. In the question, the pitch rises with the word *home*.

Speakers of English use pitch changes over the whole sentence to communicate a message; that is, the voice pitch falls or rises mainly between words, rather than within a word. There are many other languages in which a high,

**phonology.** The study of the sound system of language.

**phoneme** The smallest unit of sound that speakers unconsciously recognize as distinctive from other sounds; when one phoneme is substituted for another in a morpheme, the meaning of the morpheme alters.

As they are growing up, these children are learning the four tones of their native language, Chinese.



© James Peoples

medium, or low pitch used within an individual word, or even in a syllable, changes the fundamental meaning of the word.

Languages in which the pitch (or tone) with which a word is said (or changes in the voice pitch during its pronunciation) affects the meaning of a word are known as **tone languages**. Tone languages are widespread in Africa and in southeastern and eastern Asia. Chinese, Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese are all tone languages (Japanese and Korean are not), which is one more reason most Canadians, French, and Germans have trouble mastering these languages. As an example of how pitch can affect meaning, consider these words from Nupe, an African tone language:

*bá* (high tone) to be sour

*bā* (mid tone) to cut

*bà* (low tone) to count

Here, whether *ba* is pronounced with a high, mid, or low tone changes its meaning. Because the tone with which a word is pronounced changes its meaning, the pitch of the voice is a kind of phoneme in tone languages. It has the same effect as adding / *s* / in front of the English word *pot*, which totally alters its meaning to *spot*.

## Words and Meanings

Words are combinations of phonemes to which people attach conventional meanings. Any language contains a

finite number of words, each matched to one or more meanings.

**Morphology** is the study of meaningful sound sequences and the rules by which they are formed. Any sequence of phonemes that carries meaning is known as a **morpheme**. Why not just call them “words”? Because in analyzing meanings, morphologists need a more precise concept than *word*. For example, you know the meanings of the following sound sequences, none of which is itself a word:

un	ed
pre	s
non	ing
anti	ist

Both the prefixes in the first column and the suffixes in the second alter the meaning of certain other morphemes when they are attached to them.

**tone languages** Languages in which changing voice pitch within a word alters the entire meaning of the word.

**morphology** The study of the units of meaning in language.

**morpheme** A combination of phonemes that communicates a standardized meaning.

Sound sequences like these are “detachable” from particular words. For instance, adding the suffix *-ist* to *art* and *novel* creates new meanings: “a person who creates art” and “one who writes novels.” That *-ist* has a similar meaning whenever it is a suffix is shown by the made up word *cram*; by adding *-ist* to it, you instantly know that a *cramist* is “a person who crams.”

To analyze such compound words and their meanings, linguists have a concept that includes prefixes and suffixes such as *uni-*, *-ing*, and *-ly*. There are two kinds of morphemes in all languages. **Free morphemes** are any morphemes that can stand alone as words—for example, *desire*, *possible*, *health*, *complete*, and *establish*. **Bound morphemes** are attached to free morphemes to modify their meanings in predictable ways—for example, *dis-*, *bi-*, *un-*, *-er*, *-ly*, and *-ed*. Thus, by adding bound morphemes to the free morphemes in our examples, we get

desires	desirable	undesirable
possible	impossible	impossibility
healthy	healthful	unhealthy
completed	incomplete	uncompleted
establishing	establishment	antiestablishment

Just as phonemes are a language’s minimal units of sound, morphemes are the minimal units of meaning. Thus, we cannot break down the free morphemes *friend*, *vocabulary*, *linguistics*, and *anthropology* into any smaller units that carry meaning in modern English. Nor can we break down the bound morphemes *non-*, *-ish*, and *tri-* into any smaller units and still have them mean anything.

We make new compound words by applying a rule of compound-word formation, not by learning each compound word separately. For instance, take the English rule for forming a plural noun from a singular noun. It is usually done by adding either the bound morpheme /z/, as in *beads*, *colors*, and *eggs*, or /s/, as in *lamps*, *steaks*, and *pots*—all meaning “more than one.” Children learn the rule for plural formation at an early age, but it takes them a while longer to learn the many exceptions. Adults think it’s cute when children apply the morphological rules of English consistently to all words, saying “childs,” “mans,” “foots,” “mouses,” and “deers” for plurals and using “goed,” “runned,”

“bringed,” and “doed” to make a present-tense verb into a past-tense verb. But, of course, children are just applying the rules they have inferred from many other words.

Of all linguistic elements, free morphemes are the most easily transmissible across different languages. When groups who speak different languages come into contact, one or both groups often incorporate (“borrow”) some of the foreign words. Incorporation is especially likely to happen if one language’s words have no counterparts in the other, as is commonly the case for many nouns. Because of the spread of world trade and political systems during the last five centuries, English words have spread widely into other languages. Japanese and Korean have incorporated hundreds of English words, many from the realm of technology and commodities. In France, the use of English words became such a hot political issue that the government outlawed the “importation” of further English words.

However, English speakers should not become too proud of the spread of “their” words. English itself is a member of the Germanic subfamily of languages, along with modern Dutch, German, Norwegian, Icelandic, Swedish, Danish, and Afrikaans. Between two and three thousand years ago, all these languages were a single language, which linguists call proto-Germanic. As the Germanic peoples migrated to different regions, the proto-Germanic languages diverged until separate languages existed—modern speakers of the various modern Germanic languages can no longer understand one another.

Over the centuries, English adopted hundreds of words from the Romance languages (which originated from Latin), as English speakers who studied French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian know. Most young North Americans know Japanese words like *manga*, *anime*, *sushi*, and *wasabi*. Less well known is that the early English colonists who settled in the Americas adopted lots of words from Native Americans—words that are now incorporated into English (see A Closer Look).



## Communication and Social Behavior

Anthropological linguists are interested in how language is related to a people’s way of life. One topic is how language is *used* by different people with different roles interact with one another. And, as you know from social experience, language itself is only one way people send messages to one another. We begin with this topic: nonverbal communication.

**free morphemes** A morpheme that can be used alone.

**bound morphemes** A morpheme attached to a free morpheme to alter its meaning.



The earliest European settlers of eastern North America came from the British Isles. Except for French-speaking Quebec and parts of California, Texas, and the Southwest, most citizens of Canada and the United States speak English as their native language. Few of us know about the influence of the original native languages of North America—those spoken by American Indians—on the English vocabulary. Many familiar English words, phrases, and place names are derived from one or another Native American language.

The earliest Spanish and Portuguese explorers were surprised at how many of the plants and animals in the “New World” (North and South America and the Caribbean) were unknown to them. A few animals, such as deer and wolves, were enough like familiar European fauna that European words were applied to them. Others, however, had no European counterparts. Terms taken from North American Indian languages were adopted for many of these, including *cougar*, *caribou*, *moose*, *raccoon*, *chipmunk*, *opossum*, *skunk*, and *chigger*. Other “English” terms for animals are taken from the languages of South American peoples: *condor*, *piranha*, *tapir*, *toucan*, *jaguar*, *alpaca*, *vicuña*, and *llama*. Plants, too, were unfamiliar, and Native American words were adopted for *saguaro*, *yucca*, *mesquite*, *persimmon*, *hickory*, and *pecan*, to name only some of the most common derivatives.

As we shall see in Chapter 66, Indians of the Americas were the first to domesticate numerous food plants that now have worldwide importance. All the following crop names have Native American origins: *squash*, *maize*, *hominy*, *avocado*, *tapioca* (also called *manioc* and *cassava*, both words also taken from native languages), *pawpaw*, *succotash*, *tomato*, and *potato*. Indian words for natural features other than plants and animals also were adopted by European immigrants: *bayou*, *muskeg*, *savanna*, *pampas*, *hurricane*, and *chinook*. Terms in various Native American languages for clothing, housing, and other material objects have made it into English: *igloo*, *teepee*, *wigwam*, *moccasin*, *parka*, *poncho*, *toboggan*, *husky*, *canoe*, *kayak*, and *tomahawk*. *Caucus* and *powwow*, for meetings, are two other English words with native origins.

People everywhere name geographical locations. The earliest European settlers often named American places to honor important people in their home countries—for example, Charleston, Albuquerque, Columbus, Carolina, and Virginia (the latter named after the supposed condition of England’s Queen Elizabeth I). Other American place names are derived from European geography—Nova Scotia (new Scotland), New Hampshire, Maine (a province in France), and, of course, New York and New England.

Native American peoples had their own names for places and landscape features, and often these names were the ones that endured and appear on modern maps. River names with Indian origins include Mississippi, Ohio, Yukon, Missouri, Arkansas, Wabash, Potomac, Klamath, Minnesota, and Mohawk, to mention just a few of the most familiar. The lakes called Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Oneida, Tahoe, and Slave have Indian names, as do hundreds of other bodies of water in Canada and the United States. Whole states are named after Indian peoples, such as the Illini, Massachuset, Ute, Kansa, and Dakota, whereas names of other states and provinces are derived from native words, such as Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska. A few large cities with names derived from Indian languages are Tuscaloosa, Tallahassee, Natchez, Tulsa, Cheyenne, Miami, Chicago, Saskatoon, Ottawa, and Omaha. Seattle was named after a particular Indian leader, Seal’th, of the West Coast. Finally, the names of two whole countries on the North American continent have Indian roots: *kanata* (Canada) is an Iroquoian word meaning village (although it now is applied to a much larger community), whereas the area formerly known as New Spain took a name meaning “the place of the Mexica” (another name for the Aztecs) after winning its independence in 1823.

In sum, many “English” nouns have “Indian” origins. More generally, the languages people consider *native* to their region or country are a historical product of contacts and interactions. Our time perspectives—how far into the past we go when we think about language—are too short to recognize connections between our native tongue and other tongues.

SOURCES: Nestor (2003), Weatherford (1991)

## Nonverbal Communication

People send and receive messages using more than just phonemes, morphemes, and sentences. Facial expressions are enormously important in conveying emotions and intentions. We also routinely send both conscious (intentional) and unconscious (implicit) messages by how we move our bodies or parts of our bodies. *Kinesics* studies the role of bodily motions in communication. We can convey feelings and other emotions and messages by touching another person.

Some nonverbal facial expressions and bodily movements convey the same messages among all peoples, so presumably they have a biological basis. Pleasure, sadness, anger, puzzlement, and some other emotional responses are shown by similar facial expressions everywhere, so they convey similar meanings universally. Notice, though, that facial expressions can be used to deceive, as with phony smiles and feigned anger. Also, frequently a given facial expression is normatively appropriate (as in greeting someone), so the



Touching is one means of communicating meanings, including feelings. These Americans are enjoying one another's company. The woman who is not touching the man is the man's wife, which seems perfectly "normal" in some cultures.



© James Peoples

expression occurs regardless of the actual internal emotional state of the person.

People also communicate nonverbally by using space, meaning how closely persons who are interacting space themselves apart when standing or sitting or walking. *Proxemics* studies the meanings conveyed by space and distance. Edward Hall, who pioneered the field of proxemics with his books *The Silent Language* and *The Hidden Dimension*, noted that in the United States people communicate messages by how far apart they stand or sit while interacting. There is intimate distance (up to about 18 inches), personal distance (more than 2 feet to 4 feet), and social distance (over 4 feet), the latter applying mainly to formal situations. (Try violating these conventions by standing a bit too close to an acquaintance; just be sure to do so in an area where the person can back away from you.) It is usually offensive or a sign of aggression "to get in someone's face," as illustrated by barroom quarrels and player-umpire altercations.

Like speech, most forms of nonverbal communication are symbolic: a particular bodily motion or distance does not inherently convey a certain message, but does so only because of conventions, or common understandings. Because much nonverbal communication is arbitrary and conventional, there is great potential for misunderstanding when people do not share understandings about nonverbal messages—that is, when people have learned different conventions. Probably the potential for misunderstanding is even greater

with nonverbal messages than for spoken language. In speaking to a "foreigner," both of you generally know that you don't understand the other's language, so at least both of you are aware of your ignorance. But with nonverbal messages, both of you are more likely to think you do understand, so one or both of you might give or take offense when none is intended.

Miscommunication is especially likely with touching, the unspoken rules for which vary greatly from people to people and even from individual to individual. On one Micronesian island, married, engaged, or romantically involved couples never walk hand in hand, although close friends of the same sex frequently do so (carrying no implication of sexual preference). Public hugging, even in greeting or to say goodbye, is seldom seen; according to islander cultural norms, handshakes are sufficient. Touching someone on the head—including what North Americans consider an affectionate rub or friendly pat—is offensive.

Some scholars who study nonverbal communication distinguish "low touch" and "high touch" cultures. Such dichotomies are usually simplistic, but it is true that cultures vary greatly in how they define situations in which touching is normatively desirable or appropriate. There is often an implicit power dimension to physical contact as well: high-status people are much more likely to affectionately touch subordinates than the reverse—affectionate (or "phony affectionate") touching symbolizes familiarity, and touching by lower-status individuals is often seen as "too familiar."

Similar ideas apply to the use of space. Again, the possibilities for miscommunication are great when people with different cultural upbringings interact. Sometimes Middle Easterners or Latin Americans stand too close for North Americans' comfort zones. Simply becoming aware that cultural norms about body motions, touching, distance, and so forth differ from people to people can help us all avoid taking offense when none is intended. In a world where international migration, tourism, global business, and other forms of intercultural contact are exploding, awareness of such differences is both personally useful and socially valuable.

### Speech and Social Context

Part of socialization is learning how to communicate appropriately in given social situations. Different situations require different verbal and nonverbal behavior because how you speak and act varies with who you are talking to, who else is listening, and the overall situation in which the interaction is occurring. Much of your speech behavior is an aspect of the role you assume relative to other people such as friends, bosses, children, siblings, and teachers.

To speak appropriately, people must take the total context into account. First, they must know the various situations, or social scenes, of their culture: which are solemn, which are celebrations, which are formal versus informal, which are argumentative, and so on. Cultural knowledge includes knowing how to alter one's total (including verbal) behavior to fit these situations. Second, individuals must recognize the kinds of interactions they are expected to have with others with whom they have particular relationships, which is connected to their social roles. Should they act lovingly, jokingly, contemptuously, or respectfully and deferentially toward someone else?

These two elements—the particular culturally defined situation and the specific individuals who are parties to the interaction—make up the *social context* of verbal and nonverbal behavior. The field of **sociolinguistics** investigates mainly how speech behavior is affected by social context.

How the speech of the parties to a social interaction reveals and reinforces the nature of their relationship is seen clearly by terms of address. Whether you call someone by a first name or a title like “doctor” varies with the social context. Higher-ranking people are more likely to address lower-ranking individuals by their first name, or even by their last name used alone. Not only does this nonreciprocal use of address terms reflect social inequality, but it also reminds people of it each time they speak.

Spanish speakers have a similar understanding with polite address terms such as *Don* or *Señora*. They also have to choose between two words for *you*: the formal (*usted*) or the informal (*tú*), depending mainly on relative status.

Speech style and habits depend on status and rank in other ways. For example, there used to be greater differences between the speech of men and women in North America than there are today. Because of their fear of being considered unladylike, women were less likely to use profanity, at least in public. Men, likewise, were expected to avoid using profanity in the presence of women, so they would not “offend the ladies.” Certain words were regarded as more appropriate for women's use than men's, such as *charming*, *adorable*, and *lovely*. In modern times, there are fewer differences between women's and men's vocabularies, largely as a consequence of the women's movement and the popular media. Even today, though, some people make judgments about a stranger's class background or sexual orientation by how he or she speaks.

Other cultures exhibit customs in speech behavior with which most English-speaking people are unfamiliar. Here are some examples:

- Some languages accentuate the difference between the sexes more than English does. In languages such as GrosVentre (of the northeastern United States) and Yukaghir (of northeastern Asia), men and women pronounced certain phonemes differently. In Yana, an extinct language spoken by a people who formerly lived in northern California, many words had two pronunciations, one used by men and one by women. In a few languages, the vocabularies of men and women differ, with men using one word for something and women using a different word. In many languages, the speech of women and men differs in other respects such as the degree of forcefulness, whether they avoid confrontational speech, and their tone of voice.
- In parts of Polynesia and Micronesia, there used to be a special *respect language*, with which common people had to address members of the noble class. On some islands, the respect language had not only a different speech style but also different words. Often there were severe penalties for commoners who erred in addressing a noble, including beatings or worse if

**sociolinguistics** Specialty within cultural anthropology that studies how language is related to culture and the social uses of speech.

the offender was judged to have been intentionally disrespectful or challenging.

- On the Indonesian island of Java, there are distinct “levels” of speech involving different pronouns, suffixes, and words. A speaker must choose between the three levels—plain, more elegant, and most elegant. The speech style the parties to the interaction use depends on their relative rank and on their degree of familiarity with one another. In choosing which style to use with a specific person, a Javanese communicates not only the message of the sentence but also information about the quality of the relationship. Accordingly, changes in the relationship between two individuals are accompanied by changes in speech style.
- In Korean and Japanese, a complicated set of contextual norms (called *honorifics*) governs the degree of formality and politeness people normally use to show respect to those of higher social position. For instance, verbs and personal pronouns have alternative forms that speakers must choose between in addressing others. Relative status is the main determinant of which form to use. In Japanese, one verb form is used when the speaker is of higher status than the listener, another form when the two are of roughly equal status, and yet another when the speaker is a social inferior. Even today, honorifics sometimes apply when women and men address each other. Japanese and Korean use different forms of personal pronouns (like *I* and *you*) to reflect the relative status of the parties. For example, when a social superior is addressing an inferior, he or she often does not use the pronoun *I* as a self-reference but instead refers to his or her status relative to the person being addressed. For instance, a higher-status person may say “Look at teacher” instead of “Look at me,” or “Listen to father” instead of “Listen to me.” Reciprocally, one usually does not use the pronoun *you* with one of higher status but replaces it with a term denoting the superior’s social position—for example, “What would teacher like me to do now?” and “Would father like me to visit?” Confused foreigners trying to learn the subtleties of Korean and Japanese speech etiquette are usually advised to use the honorific forms to avoid giving offense unintentionally. Today, to a large extent, knowing how to speak is a matter of politeness and decorum, but in traditional Korea and Japan, honorific speech was socially and even legally enforced.
- All societies have customs of taboo, meaning that some behavior is prohibited for religious reasons or

because it is culturally regarded as immoral, improper, or offensive. There are linguistic taboos also. Some words cannot be uttered by certain people. For instance, the Yanomamö of the Venezuelan rain forest have a custom known as *name taboo*. It is an insult to utter the names of important people and of deceased relatives in the presence of their living kinfolk. So the Yanomamö sometimes give names like “toenail of sloth” or “whisker of howler monkey” to children, so that when the person dies, people will not have to watch their language so closely. Other name taboos are enforced only against specific individuals. Among the Zulu of southern Africa, for example, a woman was once forbidden to use the name of her husband’s father or any of his brothers.

As the preceding examples show, speech is affected by the social context, including how situations are culturally defined and the particular individuals who are speakers and listeners. Norms partly explain why people’s use of language varies with context—you are not expected to act and speak the same way at a party as you do in church or at work, for instance, and you know intuitively and unconsciously how to adjust your behavior to these different social scenes.

The choice of speech style, words, and phrases is governed by more than just norms, however. People have personal goals, and speaking in a certain way can help them get what they want. In everyday life, we strive to present the image of ourselves that we want someone else to perceive. The opinions that employers, friends, lovers and hoped-for lovers, coworkers, roommates, and even parents have of us depend partly on how we speak—our use of certain words and avoidance of others, the degree of formality of our style, whether we try to hide or to accentuate regional dialects, and so forth. How we speak is an important part of what social scientists call our *presentation of self*. It is part of how we try to control other people’s opinions of us.

Like other ways we present ourselves—including the jewelry we wear, how we sit and walk, how we design our hair or shave our head, where and what tattoos to place on our bodies—the way we speak is part of the way we tell others what kind of a person we are. Almost without knowing it, we adjust our speech style, mannerisms, and body language to manage the impressions other people have of us. Our cultural knowledge of these adjustments is mostly routine and usually unconscious (except at job or college interviews!).

We noted earlier that language is “powerful,” allowing people to communicate complex messages very efficiently.



Japanese honorifics include rules about formality and politeness, many of which are related to the relative status of the individuals interacting.



When used strategically, language can be powerful in another sense, that of influence or persuasion. By controlling *discourse*—what is said and how it is said—individuals and groups attempt to control public opinions. Those who control the content of messages potentially control the information available to other people, making language potentially an instrument of power.

Political speech illustrates the language of power. Professional consultants advise politicians on what (and what not) to say and how to say it to increase political advantage. This happens most obviously during elections. Candidates and political parties choose words that arouse positive emotions and attachments to themselves and their programs. In the United States, phrases like “socialist” and “socialized medicine,” “tax and spend liberals,” “big government,” “national security,” and “personal freedom” resonate with most conservatives. Liberal leaders favor “working people,” “environmental protection,” and “universal health coverage.” They speak of “giant corporations” with their “fat cat CEOs,” and of “reckless lending practices” by the “unregulated banking industry.” Both parties use the phrase “the American people want (need)” as often as possible, although in reality few Americans want and need precisely the same things as the rest of Americans. Every leader uses “strengthen families” and “grow the economy” to justify policies, although climate change legislation is portrayed as a “job killer” for some

and a “job creator” to others. During President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign, his words and tone attempted to bridge partisan divides and to build public support for his own ideas and policies. Like other national leaders, after becoming President, Obama learned that governing is even more difficult than running for office, since Congress is too often “gridlocked” by “partisan divides.”

## Language and Culture

Another interest of anthropological linguists is how the culture a people share is connected to the language they speak. This topic can be technical, so in this section we focus on only two areas that might tie language and culture together. First, some parts of language reflect social relationships and the importance people culturally attach to different things or categories. Second, possibly language shapes a people’s perception of reality and even their entire worldview.

### *Language as a Reflection of Culture*

Most anthropological fieldworkers try to learn the language of the community in which they work. For one thing, speaking in the local language facilitates interaction and may help create relationships of trust. But fieldworkers also know that learning language



helps them understand the local culture because many aspects of a peoples' language reflect their culture.

For instance, a complex classification tends to develop around things that are especially important to a community. If people frequently communicate about objects, qualities, actions, or persons, they are likely to have many names or labels for them and to divide and subdivide them into many detailed categories. Consider the tools used by occupations in North American society. A professional mechanic or carpenter identifies hundreds of different tools; the Saturday-afternoon home mechanic or handy spouse identifies several dozen; and the rest of us don't know what a feeler gauge or miter saw looks like. Numerous other examples could be cited, but there are no surprises here.

Notice, though, that not all specialized vocabularies are developed just to meet the needs of some people to converse easily or precisely about things that matter to them. They also serve as status markers for professions and other groups. Lawyers speak "legalese" only partly because they need to make fine distinctions between points of law that are obscure to the rest of us. Legalese is a secret—as well as a specialized—vocabulary. Entry into the select group of attorneys depends in part on mastery of a complicated vocabulary with all its nuances of meanings. Of course, attorneys also receive fees from interpreting real estate agreements and other contracts written by other attorneys. You might have noticed that college professors sometimes use esoteric words, complex sentence constructions, and "sophisticated" speech styles. (Even textbook authors sometimes do the same thing with their word choices and writing styles.) This is partly to increase the precision of communication, but it also serves to distinguish them from other people with less (or different forms of) education.

Members of various ethnic and "racial" categories often have their own ways of pronouncing words or styles of speaking. Speakers learn dialects based on ethnic identity at a young age from family and friends. But there may be more to speaking a dialect than simply speaking the way you learned while growing up. In Canada and the United States, many African and Hispanic Americans adopt a speech style as a symbol of pride in their identity. To show they are cool, some

young Anglos adopt phrases they hear from the media or from persons with African or Hispanic heritages. Hip-hop and rap have become mainstreamed because of their use of language as well as rhythm. In Hawaii, some Haoles use the word *brudda* to address native Hawaiians, thus demonstrating that they know the local lingo.

In sum, in a diverse society, occupational, ethnic, and other kinds of groups develop vocabularies and speech styles to facilitate communication, to help ensure the continuation of their privileges and rewards, to mark themselves off from everyone else, to symbolize ethnic and racial pride, to show how cool they are, and so on. What about differences *between* whole languages, spoken by members of *different* cultures? Similar ideas apply. To understand them, the concept of **semantic domain** is useful. A semantic domain is a set of words that belongs to an inclusive class. For example, *chair*, *table*, *ottoman*, and *china cabinet* belong to the semantic domain of "furniture." "Color" is a semantic domain that some cultures divide up endlessly, like blue with its many shades and red with all its hues.

In a similar way, different languages vary in the semantic domains they identify, in how finely they carve up these domains, and in how they make distinctions between different members of a domain. Some differences are obvious. For instance, tropical lowland peoples are not likely to have semantic domains like "snow" or "ice" in their native language, whereas some Arctic peoples have an elaborate vocabulary about snow and ice conditions. Further, the degree to which some semantic domain has a multilevel hierarchical structure depends on the importance of the objects or actions in people's lives: island, coastal, or riverine people dependent on fish are likely to have many categories and subcategories of aquatic life, fishing methods, and flood and tide stages, for instance. Can we go beyond such fairly obvious statements?

For some domains, we can. Some things or qualities seem "natural," meaning that the elements in the semantic domain are obvious to anyone. The differences even seem inherent in the things themselves. We therefore expect that people everywhere would construct these domains in similar ways. For instance, the wavelength and amount of light reflected from an object determine its color, so color is an inherent (natural) quality of a thing. Surely, anyone can recognize that blue and green are different colors. However, not every language recognizes such color differences.

Likewise, biological kinship is a natural relationship, in the sense that who an infant's parents are determines who will and will not be the baby's genetic relatives.

**semantic domain** A class of things or properties perceived as alike in some fundamental respect; hierarchically organized.

“Obviously” aunts and uncles are different kinds of relatives from parents. But not all peoples recognize such differences and make them culturally significant, so “relatives” is not a natural semantic domain. Because we return to this subject in a later chapter, here we want to show only that different cultures do not in fact make the same distinctions between relatives; that is, the way relatives are culturally constructed varies somewhat from people to people.

Consider the relatives that English-speaking people call *aunt*, *first cousin*, and *brother*. An aunt is a sister of your mother or father; a first cousin is a child of any of your aunts and uncles; and a brother is a male child of your parents. These individuals are all biologically related to you differently, so “naturally” you place them into different categories and call them by different terms.

But other distinctions are possible that you do not recognize as distinctions and that are not reflected in the kinship terms you use. Not all your aunts are related to you in the same way: some are sisters of your mother; others are sisters of your father. Why not recognize this difference by giving them each their own term? Similarly, your first cousins could be subdivided into finer categories and given special terms, such as terms meaning *child of my father’s sister*, *child of my mother’s brother*, and so on. And since we distinguish most other categories of relatives by whether they are male or female (e.g., brother versus sister, aunt versus uncle), why don’t we apply the sex distinction to our cousins?

How do we know that the way a people divide the domain of relatives into different categories is cultural rather than natural? Because different cultures divide the domain in different ways. People in many societies, for instance, call their mother’s sister by one term and their father’s sister by another term (although English speakers collapse both into one term, *aunt*). It is also common for people to distinguish between the children of their father’s sister and their father’s brother, calling the first by a term we translate as “cousin,” the second by the same term they use for their own brothers and sisters. Even stranger, from the English language’s perspective, are peoples who call the daughters of their maternal uncles by the term *mother* (just like their “real mother”), but not the daughters of their paternal uncles, for whom they use the term *sister*. (These various ways of categorizing kin, by the way, are not random; such labels are related to other aspects of a people’s kinship system—see Chapter 9.) Obviously, the way various peoples divide the seemingly “natural domain” of biological relatives is not the same world over.

We could provide other examples, but the overall point is clear. A language reflects how a culture divides

up the world. And cultures often divide the world differently, constructing categories of natural and social reality out of the “natural” properties of things and people.

The implications of this point are more important than you might think. If you know a word for something—an object, a kind of person, an emotion, a natural feature of the landscape—then you tend to think it is real. Giving something a label tends to make us think of it as a “thing.” These kinds of “things” are real in one sense: the word refers to *something* in the mind of the speaker, even if only to emotions or abstractions. But this reality might differ for someone who speaks a language that reflects a different culture.

Most readers are familiar with concepts like *democracy*, *family*, *marriage*, and *human rights*. But if you think critically about such concepts, you will realize they are problematic. For example, *human rights* focuses largely on the rights of individuals—or, rather, on certain kinds of rights. People have the “right” to freedom of religion but no right to food, shelter, or health care. Foreigners can gain political asylum in the United States if they are in danger of persecution because of their religious beliefs and practices, but not if they are starving or chronically hungry. *Families* seem real, but exactly who counts as family members? Who can become legally married? *Democracy* means “rule by the people,” but is it still democracy if some individuals and interest groups can legally give unlimited amounts of money to political causes because of “freedom of speech,” as the U.S. Supreme Court decided in 2010?

### Language, Perceptions, and Worldview

We’ve seen that many aspects of a language reflect the culture of the people who speak it. Could the converse also be true? Is it possible that knowing a given language predisposes its speakers to view the world in certain ways? Could the categories and rules of language condition people’s perceptions of reality and perhaps even their worldview?

Language could shape perceptions and worldviews both by its vocabulary and by the way it leads people to communicate about subjects such as space and time. Any language’s vocabulary assigns labels to only certain things, qualities, and actions. It is easy to see how this might encourage people to perceive the real world selectively. For instance, as we grow up, we learn that some plants are “trees.” So we come to think of *tree* as a single kind of thing, although there are so many kinds of trees that there is no necessary reason to collapse all this

arboreal variety into a single label. In such cases, language affects our cultural constructions of reality.

Also, language might force people to communicate about time and space in a certain kind of way. The words and rules of language could condition relationships between individuals and between people and nature. Potentially, linguistic constraints on the way people must speak to be understood by others can shape their views of what the world is like.

The idea that language influences the perceptions and thought patterns of those who speak it, and thus conditions their worldview, is known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (or the linguistic relativity hypothesis)**, after the two anthropological linguists who proposed it. One of the most widely quoted of all anthropological passages is Edward Sapir's statement, originally written in 1929:

[Language] powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.... The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.... The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

(Sapir 1964, 68–69)

Sapir and Whorf believed that language helps define the worldview of its speakers. It does so, in part, by providing labels for certain kinds of phenomena (things, concepts, qualities, and actions), which different languages define according to different criteria. Language thus make some phenomena easier to think about than others. The attributes that define them as different from other similar things become more important than other attributes. These attributes provide a filter that biases our perceptions.

In brief, the linguistic relativity hypothesis holds that people's perceptions, the verbal categories they use to think about reality, and perhaps their entire worldview are related to the language they learn while growing up.

The units of time sequence of the English language are a good example: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia. Of these, only days, months, and years are in any sense "natural," meaning they are based on natural occurrences (sunrises and sunsets, moon phases, annual cycles of the seasons).

Even these natural occurrences do not correspond with the English language's units of time. Days do not run from sunrise to sunrise but begin at midnight, which itself is literally "mid night" during only part of the year. Months no longer reflect lunar phases. New years begin in January rather than at solstices or equinoxes. Decades, centuries, and millennia are purely linguistic categories with no natural basis. Units used on watches—seconds, minutes, and hours—are linguistic units as well. How much is our perception of time affected by such arbitrary divisions imposed on our minds by language? Do the time units of calendars and watches "create" our views of time?

In the 1930s and 1940s, Benjamin Whorf suggested that language does indeed condition a people's conceptions of time. He noted that English encourages its speakers to think about time using metaphors derived from space. For example, we say "a long time" and "a long distance," although time is not really "long" or "short" in the same sense as distance. Also, English-speaking people talk about units of time using the same concepts with which they talk about numbers of objects. We say "four days" and "four apples," although it is possible to see four objects at once but not four units of time. Finally, English-speaking people classify events by when they occurred: those that have happened, those that are happening, and those that will happen.

Because they share a different language, however, the Native American Hopi speak about time and events differently, Whorf believed. With no tenses equivalent to English's past, present, and future and no way to express time in terms of spatial metaphors, Hopi speak of events as continuously unfolding, rather than happening in so many days or weeks. Whorf argued that the Hopi language led the Hopi people to a different perception of the passage of time.

Note some implications of linguistic relativity. If true, it implies that without knowing it, our perceptions and thought processes are shaped by the language community into which we happen to have been born. This means that the world is not *directly* perceptible through our ordinary senses because linguistic categories bias our interpretations of sensory inputs. Potentially, this "fact" makes it

**Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (or the linguistic relativity hypothesis)** The idea that language profoundly shapes the perceptions and worldview of its speakers.

difficult for anyone to know anything for sure. And, taken seriously, it would mean that human rational thought and reason are partially an illusion because individuals can reason only with the subjective concepts and patterns their language provides.

What shall we make of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Certainly, none of us as individuals creates the labels our language assigns to reality, nor do we create the constraints our grammar places on the way we talk about time and space. Rather we learn them from our linguistic ancestors, and we must adhere to these labels and rules if we are to be understood. Surely, this necessity biases our perceptions *to some degree*. The question is, how much? More precisely, how important is language as opposed to other influences on perceptions and views of reality?

For decades, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was not generally accepted, although most scholars were intrigued by the idea that language shapes thought. One reason for skepticism is that if language significantly shapes the way its speakers perceive and think about the world, then we would expect a people's perceptions and worldviews to change only at a rate roughly comparable to the rate at which their language changes. But worldviews typically change much more rapidly than language. In the past century, the English language has changed little compared with the dramatic alteration in the worldviews of most of its speakers. Despite the enormous economic and political changes that have swept Asia in the past several decades, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Vietnamese, and other indigenous languages are firmly in place. The fact that linguistic change or replacement is usually far slower than changes in worldviews suggests that language and culture are not tightly integrated.

Assume for a moment that language does, in fact, significantly affect how people perceive and think about the world. Then if some given language were to become truly global, that language's ways of perceiving and thinking would also dominate. Would this be a bad thing in that it reduces the cultural diversity of humanity? Or would it be a good thing in that it would *potentially* allow better communication between nations? (We present more facts and ideas on language and globalization in the Globalization box.)

Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics have investigated how speakers of different languages talk about space and location. (Here, we simplify their complicated and technical findings.) English speakers talk about space in multiple ways. Space can be relative to the location of the speaker or hearer—for example, “on my left” or “above you.” We also talk about space using absolute locations, especially when we discuss long distances—for example, “head north to get there” and “south of town.” These “cardinal directions” do not depend on which way an individual is now facing. When we provide someone with directions, we often combine relative and absolute references—for example, “turn left on Main Street and go west for about two miles.”

Other languages speak about directions differently. One Australian aboriginal language called Guugu Yimithirr uses only absolute references, comparable to English's cardinal directions. Thus, they might say, “There's a fly on your northern knee” (quoted in Brown 2006, 109). If you are a longtime resident of Hawaii, you probably know that directions are sometimes given with the Hawaiian words *mauka* (toward the mountains) and *makai* (toward the ocean). These words are not equivalent to cardinal directions because the direction of *mauka* relative to you depends on which side of the island you are on. In southern Mexico, a community of Mayans speaks a language called Tzeltal. Their main spatial reference is in terms of “uphill” and “downhill,” but these are more like cardinal directions to them because the overall slope of the land is consistent and they are seldom on the other side of mountaintops. So Tzeltal speakers describe movements on the landscape in terms of “ascending,” “descending,” or “going across.” If an object is on the ground, something else is located “uphill,” “downhill,” or “acrossways” from it. They have no left/right distinction, so a translation of the location of a house might be “to the downhill of you.” Apparently, language does affect their perceptions: when shown two mirror-image photographs, Tzeltal speakers usually say they are exactly the same.

Research on linguistic relativity is ongoing. Perhaps someday it will uncover unexpected and important effects of language on perception and even on worldviews.



The migration of peoples is one of the most important facts about humanity's past. When people move to a new region, they carry lots of "baggage"—not just their possessions, but also their genes, cultures, and languages. Until several hundred years ago, migration was the main way languages spread to new regions. For instance, when one people of China (who call themselves Han, speaking the language called Mandarin) developed a politically complex form of culture around 3,500 years ago, they began to conquer their neighbors to the south and west, and many Han migrated to new regions. By about 1,000 years ago, Han occupied most of the country we now call China. Their Mandarin language spread with them, displacing other peoples and their languages or assimilating them culturally and linguistically as they conquered them politically. Even today, China's 1.3 billion people speak around 200 languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Hunanese, Tibetan, and several other provincial languages with millions of speakers, as well as numerous languages of indigenous peoples.

In the past 500 or so years, large-scale migrations have continued. Among the largest-scale migrations are those that brought the bodies, cultures, and languages of western Europeans to the Americas, which to the Europeans was a New World. A great many of the several hundred indigenous languages of North and South America disappeared between the 1500s and the 1900s. The people who spoke them either died out from new diseases and violence or became linguistically assimilated into whichever European ethnic group came into political and economic dominance. Today, the vast majority of people who live in the Americas speak English, Spanish, Portuguese, or French. Most of those born into some indigenous Native American community also speak one of these four languages as a second language.

On a global level, no one knows how many of the languages that existed a few hundred years ago are extinct today. A recent estimate is that between 4,000 and 9,000 languages have disappeared since the fifteenth century. The United Nations estimates that roughly half of the remaining languages are endangered. In some cases, as among Native North Americans and the Australian aborigines, the main reason for linguistic extinction was the biological extinction of the speakers from disease and violence. In other cases, although the people whose ancestors once spoke their own language are alive today, the languages have died as the

groups became assimilated culturally and linguistically into their nation's majority.

To see how a language can wither away over several generations, consider the languages of immigrants. Some second- and third-generation immigrants continue to know the language of their ancestral land, but after that few descendants are likely to speak it. Once a language is no longer spoken in the home, it takes a conscious and dedicated effort to learn it, and over time fewer and fewer children will do so. If children are exposed to only the majority language in formal school settings as well as in their peer groups, their chances of learning the language of their ancestors dwindles. Only if there is an entire community of speakers—who use the language among themselves, who serve as linguistic models for young children, and who reward youngsters for speaking it well—is a language likely to survive. In present-day North America, the Amish are one such community, as are various big-city Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and numerous Latino communities. Cities like Vancouver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles include tens of thousands of Chinese who form enclaves where Cantonese or Mandarin is spoken as the first language. In the future, there will probably be many more such linguistic communities, such as the Hmong (refugees from Southeast Asia who were resettled in the United States in the 1980s), South Asians (in Silicon Valley, California), and Somalis (in central Ohio).

Each year, SIL International publishes *Ethnologue*, a rich source of information on the world's languages. According to the *Ethnologue* website, there are about 6,900 languages in existence, of which 4,400 are spoken only in Asia and Africa. One 2001 study notes that the vast continent of Asia—which contains two-fifths of the earth's land surface and three-fifths of its people—still contains thousands of languages, but most are very localized. In fact, more than half of Asia's languages have fewer than 10,000 speakers. *Ethnologue* estimates that more than 500 of the remaining languages are nearly extinct, meaning that only a few elderly people still speak them.

In Africa, where humanity began, 46 languages are nearly extinct. In Canada and the United States, about 260 indigenous (Native American) languages are still spoken. This sounds like a respectable number, but 85 of them have only a few elderly speakers and so are likely to be gone soon. In Brazil, where there were once probably hundreds of indigenous languages, at least 42 are extinct and 29 others are endangered, according to *Ethnologue*.

Unlike in the past, few people today are forced to give up their indigenous language. However, modern-day globalization does affect the survival of languages. When representatives from companies speaking different languages make deals, either they need to use translators or someone has to learn the other's language. When people on remote Pacific islands or in mountain villages of Southeast Asia rent DVDs or search the Internet, they are exposed to new languages. Globalization thus promotes the success of a few languages—namely, those used for communication in the global arena. Over time, communication in one of these languages becomes more and more useful. If, at the same time, the linguistic community that once sustained the local language is disintegrating, the local language is likely to become endangered.

Contrary to most English speakers' linguistic chauvinism, today Mandarin has more native speakers than any other language, around 900 million. But English is now the language most widely used in worldwide commerce, the international mass media, and globally popular culture. More than any other single language, English is learned as a second language in diverse countries from Japan to Mexico. In fact, far more people now speak English as their second language than as their first language. In places like southern Asia and the Pacific, where there are many hundreds of localized indigenous languages, English is usually the *lingua franca*—the language that people learn as their second language so that they can communicate widely with one another. And English nouns are commonly used for modern objects and technology.

Although English is the language most commonly used in international politics and marketing, the English-speaking world also is responding to global changes. In the 1970s and 1980s, the West feared competition from “Japan, Inc” and American colleges hired Japanese language teachers. The global reach of Japanese popular culture—*anime*, *manga*, *sushi*, horror films—continues to make Japanese “cool” to many young people. Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, China's annual economic growth rate of around 10 percent and its rising importance in international affairs led to the expansion of Chinese language programs in North America and Europe. In many American colleges, German and French instruction withered as enrollments in Chinese bloomed.

That English is so widely spoken as a second language is a result of the history of colonialism and the twentieth-century economic and political dominance of the United States in world affairs. It is certainly not because English is a superior language

or because it is easy to learn as a second language. Some countries known for their strong national identity resent the influx of English words—notably France, which actually has laws against the use of certain English words.

Some think that eventually the world's peoples will all speak only a few languages. For example, in his 2003 book *Language in Danger*, Andrew Dalby predicted that within the next couple hundred years, only around 200 languages will survive. Surviving languages will include those like English and Spanish that are now in global use as well as others that are or will become the national languages of their countries. All indigenous languages will be gone, including languages like Irish and Welsh.

But perhaps not. In many regions, people want to reaffirm their national or ethnic identities, and learning to speak the ancestral language of their homelands is one symbolic means of doing so. Schools in Wales now require Welsh. The desire to preserve the language of one's native land is a mark of national or ethnic identity. It is a symbol of a political or social commitment to the broader goal of preserving identities.

Thus, speaking a particular language can do more than send the messages encoded in words and sentences. With the spread of globalization, speaking a native tongue can tell people that you are proud to be who you are. In Europe, many people learn several languages because languages are emphasized in schools and because so many Europeans travel widely on their continent. Such multilingualism is almost certainly a positive force in the world. Perhaps more American school districts should realize that learning “foreign languages” is not a costly luxury in today's world.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Breakdowns in communication often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between individuals and nations. Given this fact, is the development of a single language that would reduce miscommunication necessarily a bad thing? Or is breakdown in communication really an important reason for conflicts, compared to other reasons?
2. Whether the widespread use of English as a second language will endanger other languages is debatable because language can be a major source of ethnic or national identity and pride. Under what future circumstances is English likely to rise to worldwide dominance?

SOURCES: Dalby (2003), Crystal (2003), M. Paul Lewis (2009 online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>), Sampat (2001), Walsh (2005)

## Summary

**1 Explain why the ability to speak and understand language is so remarkable and why language is such a powerful means of communication.** Along with culture, language is the most important mental characteristic of humanity that distinguishes us from other animals. Language shaped the evolution of our vocal tract, allows us to communicate abstract concepts, is necessary for complete social learning, and enables us to rapidly and precisely send and receive complicated messages.

**2 Identify five key properties of human language.** Five properties of language differentiate it from other systems of communication. It is composed of discrete units (sounds, words) combined in different sequences to convey different meanings. It relies on the shared, conventional understanding of arbitrary and meaningful symbols. Language is productive, allowing us to intuitively and unconsciously combine sounds and words creatively to send an infinite number of messages. The displacement property enables humans to communicate about things, events, and persons that are remote in time and space. Language's multimedia potential allows communicating in writing and movements (e.g., signing).

**3 Describe how words are formed from combinations of discrete sounds.** Phonology is the study of the sounds and sound patterns of language. When we speak, we combine sounds in patterned ways to articulate meaningful sound sequences (words). Knowing a language includes mastery of its discrete phonemes, based on the features of sounds that speakers recognize as making a difference in the meanings of words in which they occur. Among many other phonological differences, languages vary in the way they use voice pitch to convey meanings, as illustrated by tone languages.

**4 Explain why every meaningful string of sounds is not a “word.”** Morphology studies meaningful sound sequences and the rules by which they are formed. Any sequence of phonemes that conveys a standardized meaning is a morpheme. Free morphemes (usually words) can stand alone as meaningful sequences. Bound morphemes are not used alone but are attached to free morphemes during speech to alter meanings, as in suffixes for past tenses and plural nouns. When people learn a language, they learn its free and bound morphemes and their meanings along with the rules by which bound morphemes can be attached to free morphemes.

**5 Discuss nonverbal communication and how speech is affected by context and social relationships.** The meanings of body language and facial expressions used in nonverbal communication vary from people to people and are an important source of cultural misunderstandings. Sociolinguists study how speech is influenced by cultural factors, including culturally defined contexts and situations, the goals of the speaker, the presence of other parties, and so forth. Speech styles mark differences in rank and status, as between ethnic groups, classes or statuses, and males and females. Speech formality and overall style are parts of a person's presentation of self, so speaking communicates many meanings beyond the words themselves. Language is a strategic tool in competitions over political power and government policies.

**6 Discuss the concept of semantic domain.** Some aspects of language reflect the cultural importance of subjects, people, objects, and natural phenomena. The need to converse easily about some subject leads to the elaboration of semantic domains connected to that subject. In other domains, such as relatives, anthropologists have discovered surprising diversity in how various peoples classify kin and give them different labels according to different principles. The words and categories of language are thus related to a culture's constructions of reality.

**7 Describe the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, why is it important, and some of the controversies surrounding it.** According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the language a people speak shapes their perceptions of reality and thus predisposes them to view the world in a certain way. Vocabulary and other features of language might influence perceptions by leading its speakers unconsciously to filter out some properties of reality in favor of other properties. The conventions of language also might force individuals to talk about subjects such as time and space in certain ways if they are to be understood. Although language does, in some ways and to some degree, shape perceptions and world-views, the notion that language shapes perceptions and thought processes to a significant degree is not accepted by most modern scholars. Recent research concentrates on how specific linguistic domains affect perception and thought.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

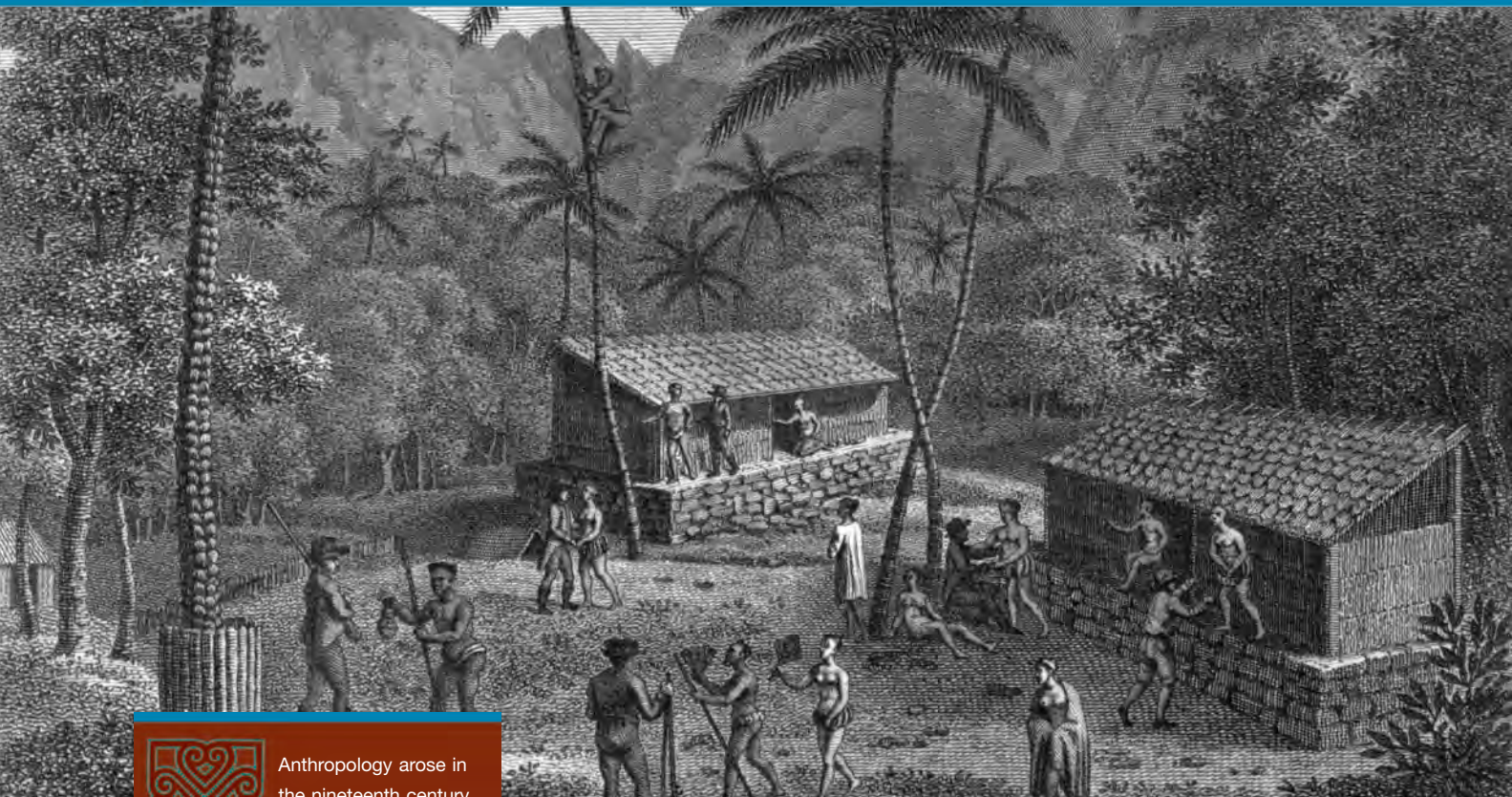
The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 4

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT



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Anthropology arose in the nineteenth century as a result of contacts between the West and peoples of other lands.

How were Polynesians related to other peoples and to Europeans? How does this drawing from the mid-1800s portray them?

## Main Issues Today

### The Emergence of Anthropology

*Late-Nineteenth-Century Unilineal Evolutionism*

*A Science of Culture?*

### Anthropological Thought in the Early Twentieth Century

*Historical Particularism in the United States (ca. 1900–1940)*

*British Functionalism, 1920s–1960s*

*The Tradition of Fieldwork*

### The Rebirth of Evolutionism in the Mid-Twentieth Century

### Anthropological Thought Today: Divisions

#### Scientific Approaches

*Evolutionary Psychology*

*Materialism*

#### Humanistic Approaches

*Interpretive Anthropology*

*Postmodernism*

#### Either, Or, or Both?

#### Why Can't All Those Anthropologists Agree?

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** the global forces that contributed to the emergence of anthropology.
- 2 **Describe** the main ideas of the nineteenth century unilineal evolutionists.
- 3 **Understand** the ways American historical particularism and British functionalism challenged unilineal evolutionism.
- 4 **Describe** the mid-twentieth century rebirth of evolutionary interests (neoevolutionism)
- 5 **Discuss** the main differences between the scientific and the humanistic approaches to modern anthropological thought.
- 6 **Describe** evolutionary psychology, materialism, interpretive anthropology, and postmodernism.
- 7 **Analyze** why contemporary anthropology has no single unifying theoretical orientation.

The anthropology that we know today developed out of the contact between Europeans and the rest of the world. Horses and ships carried Europeans to the Middle East, Asia, to the two Americas, and to the islands of the Pacific Ocean. There, Europeans contacted people who did not look, act, and think in familiar ways. Especially in the centuries after Columbus's voyages in the 1490s, European intellectuals struggled to understand these peoples and their strange and "primitive" ways of living. At first, their interpretations were based on their own Judeo-Christian worldview. But by the last few decades of the nineteenth century, advances in knowledge and the changes in worldview that we call science resulted in new ways of understanding humanity in all its variability. It was then that anthropology became an independent field of academic study.

When it began, cultural anthropology was distinct from other fields because of its focus on the peoples and cultures of other (non-European) lands. Interest in such peoples and cultures increased due to new global contacts, and no existing discipline concentrated on them. Currently, many anthropologists call far-away peoples with diverse ways of living "the Other" in contrast to Ourselves—the cultures of the West, as we say. Although the word is somewhat problematic (*Other* is a bit ethnocentric—Other to whom? to Us, of course), we use it in this chapter because it is a convenient shorthand for the non-Western peoples on which anthropology used to concentrate.



## Main Issues Today

Here it is impossible to discuss all the issues that concern cultural anthropologists in the twenty-first century. We must concentrate on only some of the major questions of today: Can and should cultural anthropology be a science, in the same sense that biology is a science? What are the most useful concepts and theoretical orientations to use in studying human cultural diversity? When we study another culture during fieldwork, whose representations should we use? Should the anthropologist/ethnographer decide what's important, that is, should anthropologists define the questions and propose the answers? Or, should the views of the Others themselves take precedence, that is, should the native point of view take priority?

Generally, those who think cultural anthropology is a science try to collect "data" about the Others to describe and explain cultures, much as biologists collect data to explain the diversity of life. The primary goal of scientific anthropologists is to find the general principles that influence cultures—that cause them to be the way they are. Scientific anthropologists often claim that the main goals of their discipline are to explain cultural differences and similarities and the main patterns of cultural change. In addition to collecting data through fieldwork, scientific types believe we must compare and contrast cultures of the past and present to discover these general principles. For the most part, they think the aims of science ought to guide our investigations. Quite often,

they claim that the views of the people whose cultures they study are not adequate explanations for their own actions, thoughts, and feelings.

In contrast, other ethnologists today are less concerned—in many cases, not at all concerned—with making their field a science. They tend to treat each culture as a unique product of such a vast number of influences that there really are no “general principles” that “cause” differences and similarities. Rather, each culture is a product of its own unique and specific past. In conducting fieldwork, they tend to believe that descriptions of Others vary with the personality, gender, and other characteristics of the fieldworker. Objectivity is impossible, they feel, so the use of the term *data* is misleading at best. Although the phrase is not perfect, here we call them “humanistic anthropologists.” Humanistic types tend to focus on portraying specific cultures with sensitivity. One issue humanistic anthropologists are concerned with today is *representation*: Who can legitimately speak for the Others? Should the anthropologist’s account of a culture be based on her or his own questions, or should the anthropologist serve more as a translator whose writings allow the Voices of Others to be heard and understood by Ourselves?



## The Emergence of Anthropology

Until a few centuries ago, the vast majority of Earth’s people had no knowledge of any people or any culture other than the one into which they themselves were born. Of course, there were some exceptions. In the fifth century B.C.E., the Greek historian Herodotus wrote about the peoples of Persia, northern Africa, and nearby regions. Much later, in the 1200s, the Venetian trader Marco Polo reached China (then called “Cathay”) via the ancient Silk Road that had connected Rome and China since before the time of Christ. Marco Polo’s descriptions of his adventures in China made his book popular among the European literary elite. Descriptions like those of Herodotus and Marco Polo were rare and often treated skeptically. Some parts of Marco Polo’s account were so surprising to his European readers that many of them did not believe his tales, such as the one about the Chinese burning black rocks as fuel.

In the 1500s, the nations of Europe began to send large numbers of traders, missionaries, military personnel, and officials to other continents. During the next 400 years, Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, and other European nations established formal colonies in large parts of Africa and Asia and in most of the

Americas. European visitors produced hundreds of written descriptions about the customs and beliefs of the peoples of the Americas, Asia, Africa, and scattered islands of the Pacific. From such books, articles, and letters sent back home, scholars learned that vast continents across the lands and oceans existed and that they were populated by people who were definitely Other in their customs and beliefs.

Between around 1500 and the mid-1800s, most Western scholars believed in the essential accuracy of the story of creation recounted in the Judeo-Christian Bible. In the biblical account, Earth was only a few thousand years old; one biblical scholar claimed that Earth was created in 4004 B.C.E. Because God created everything in only six days, humanity was the same age—as old as Earth itself. Further, the biblical creation story contained no substantial reference to any land occupied by the kinds of Others that Europeans were encountering. Who were all these people of the Americas and Africa? How could Western thinkers make sense of these “savages” and their ways of living? What implications did their existence have for the understanding of Ourselves? Did their existence challenge the worldview derived from Judeo-Christian teachings?

By the mid-1800s, other puzzles had sprung up. For example, in Europe and North America, people discovered stone tools and other signs that ancient people had lived there. Some tools were side by side with animals that were long extinct, suggesting that those people and animals were contemporaneous. In Germany’s Neander Valley, a partial skeleton of a humanlike creature was unearthed. Who made these ancient, prehistoric tools? Were they made by people like those of today? Were the Neanderthal bones human, and, if so, what did they mean?

In Europe, some people (early archaeologists) noted that there was a regular sequence of toolmaking: the earliest were made of stone, later tools included some of bronze, and still later iron was used. This sequence came to be known as the Three Ages: Stone, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. Each age had a greater variety of tools than the preceding age, and the materials used in each stage seemed superior to those of the earlier age. It looked like the lands where Western civilization now existed once contained “simpler, more primitive” peoples. In the United States, early Anglo settlers of Ohio and surrounding states commented on the existence of large earthen mounds, wondering who could have constructed these ancient monuments—certainly not the ancestors of the savage “Indians” who then lived in these regions! (Of course, future work showed conclusively that the



This painting by Raphael shows the expulsion of Eve and Adam from Paradise. Well into the nineteenth century, the biblical account of history provided the dominant framework explaining the existence of “natives” in other lands and the nature of their culture.



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mounds were made by “Indians,” whose cultures later proved to be about as complicated as those of Europe itself.)

Until the mid-1800s, the Judeo-Christian worldview framed most interpretations of contemporary primitives and archaeological remains. Perhaps the “savages” of other lands were the degenerated descendants of Noah’s wayward son, Ham. Maybe they were remnants of one of the lost tribes of Israel, as some scholars claimed about the Polynesians. Possibly, the Devil buried the Neander bones and prehistoric artifacts to undermine believers’ faith. Whatever the specific explanation, the customs and beliefs of distant, unfamiliar peoples generally were interpreted in terms of the biblical account of world creation and human history.

Then, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, in geology and biology a new set of beliefs about how to understand the world emerged. The findings of geology and biology led to a whole new worldview about Earth, life in general, and human life in particular, which is now accepted by the majority of scholars from all continents. Geology and biology helped bring humanity within the grasp of the *scientific* worldview, in which human beings and human cultures are understood to be the result of some process that is entirely natural rather than supernatural.

In geology, James Hutton and Charles Lyell demonstrated that Earth itself was not merely thousands but many millions of years old (today, we know that our planet is about 4.5 billion years old). In biology, Charles Darwin revolutionized popular ideas about life. Rather than each plant and animal being separately made by a Creator, Darwin proposed that one species arose out of another by an entirely natural process. He documented this process in his 1859 book, *On the Origin of Species*.

Darwin’s natural process is *evolution*. Evolution means that over a long period of time, one species changes into a new species or into several new species. Some species die out altogether, leaving no descendant species. But often, before its own extinction, a new species changes (evolves) into one or more other species. Thus, multiple new species evolve, and they eventually change into even more species. Given enough time, all the diversity of life on Earth can be explained by this process of natural transformation. From simple beginnings, the natural process of evolution created all the forms of life that surround us today. All it takes are slow changes and time—millions and millions of years of time. When geology demonstrated the age of Earth, it showed that our world was old enough for diverse and complicated life-forms to evolve from simple beginnings.



Of course, Darwin's main impact was on biology and the field now called paleoanthropology. Darwin established the possibility that the human species evolved from an ape-like ancestor, and his idea was confirmed in the twentieth century (see Chapter 1). Darwin's ideas about origins and changes in the natural world influenced how Western intellectuals viewed human *cultural* existence as well as *biological* existence. If biological life-forms could evolve, then could cultural forms also have arisen through a process of change? Simple forms of organic life had transformed into more complex forms of life. Analogously, in cultural existence, some scholars reasoned that more complex ways of life had developed out of earlier, simpler ways of life.

During these same centuries in Europe and North America, the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment (the Age of Reason) led to belief in progress—the notion that human life has gotten better and better over the course of many centuries. The idea of progress in the realms of technology and ideas led to optimism about the human future.

In summary, nineteenth-century scholars interested in human culture had access to two major kinds of information: (1) written accounts left by Westerners who visited other lands, including colonies of the European nations; and (2) tools that ancient, long-disappeared peoples from Europe and North America had left in the earth. Through Darwin's theories and the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, scholars assimilated ideas about origins, evolution, and progress. They realized there was a relationship between the various peoples in the written accounts and the ancient people who had made the prehistoric tools and monuments. The long-disappeared prehistoric peoples of Europe and the Americas were similar to the peoples described in the accounts of Western visitors to other continents. Just as stone tools were the earliest form of technology, so "primitive" peoples still alive in the nineteenth century were living representatives of the earliest forms of culture.

## Late-Nineteenth-Century Unilineal Evolutionism

In the late nineteenth century, a few scholars became interested in how and why cultures had changed over the course

**unilineal evolutionism** The nineteenth-century theoretical orientation that held that all human ways of life pass through a similar sequence of stages in their development.

of many centuries and millennia. The ideas of evolution, progress, stages, and survival were the keys. Just like plants and animals, cultures had evolved. The earliest "simple" ("primitive") cultures had given rise to ever more "complex" ("more advanced") cultures. This cultural evolution represented progress or development: later cultures were, in some *objective* sense, superior to earlier cultures. (Here, *objective* means that there is a universal standard by which superiority can be judged, an assumption that later anthropologists questioned.)

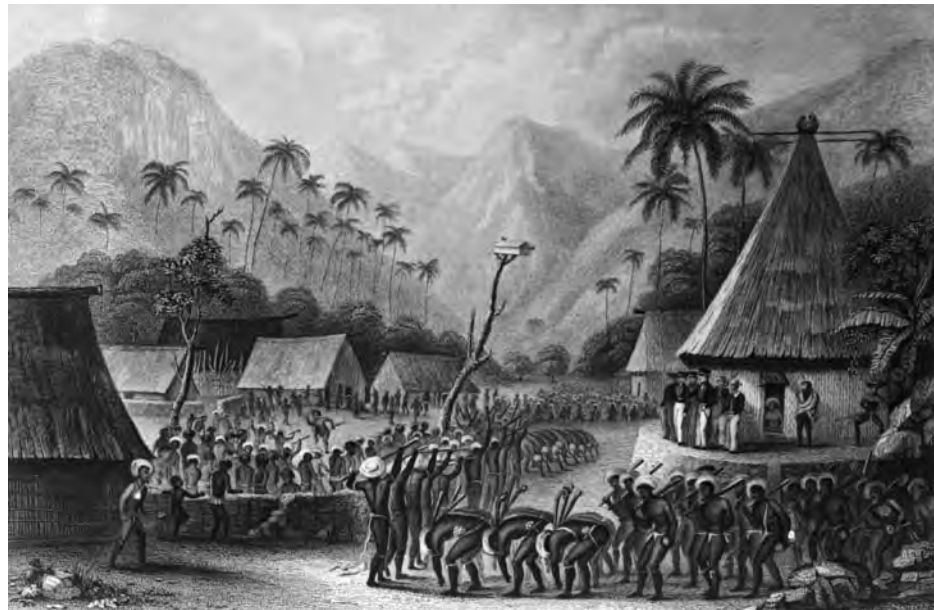
The approach of these early anthropologists is called **unilineal evolutionism**. At the time, founders of this approach could not have known that future generations of anthropologists would challenge most of their goals and methods.

Briefly stated: as human cultures evolved, they passed through a series of stages. Examples of each stage could be found in the peoples described in all those written accounts and also in the artifacts that prehistoric people had left behind, in or on the ground. Although nineteenth-century Western civilization represented the highest stage of cultural evolution, on other continents lived peoples whose cultures remained in earlier stages. The cultures of these peoples had survived into the present because they had evolved at slower rates than the cultures of more advanced peoples. Such peoples were "survivors" of earlier stages of culture, meaning they were living relics ("survivals") from humanity's distant past.

For example, the evolutionists thought that survivors of the very earliest stages of cultural evolution still existed in remote places like Australia and Polynesia. In other places, remnants of later, intermediate stages can be found: the Fijian people of the Pacific and the Iroquois Indians are living representatives of the middle stage of cultural evolution, which the American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan called *barbarism*. In still other regions, later evolutionary stages exist: the Incas of South America and the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese are "civilized" people. Civilization is a higher cultural stage than the stage represented by the Fijians and Iroquois. By carefully studying and comparing peoples who exemplified all the stages, evolutionists believed they could reconstruct the nature of the various stages and figure out what had led one stage to progress to the next.

The unilineal evolutionists are usually considered the first true cultural anthropologists. They had a subject matter that was by and large separate from that of other disciplines—the cultures and societies of peoples who lived in foreign lands (the "Others"). They had a

In their effort to see how all the Other cultures related to one another and to the West, unilineal evolutionists arranged cultures into a sequence of stages. One scholar placed the Fijians of the Pacific in the middle stage called *barbarism*. This 1840 drawing is of a Fijian “Club Dance.” Notice how the drawing does make the people of Fiji look barbaric.



reasonably coherent objective—to reconstruct and understand the stages through which human cultures had traveled along the road to civilization. They used a methodology that was then in its infancy—comparing and contrasting peoples in various stages of development to discover the nature of the stages and the relationships between them. In brief, cultural anthropology became an academic discipline in the West because it had its own subject matter, objectives, and methods.

Consider just one application of unilineal evolutionism. In 1871, the Englishman E. B. Tylor published the landmark book *Primitive Culture*. In it, he investigated the origins and development of religious beliefs. Where did religion come from? Tylor argued that religious beliefs originated out of peoples’ attempts to explain certain experiences. For example, immediately after someone dies, the physical body still exists even though the life of the person has ended. What explains the difference between a living and a dead person? Being ignorant of the actual causes of death, early humans reasoned that living people have a spiritual essence (a “soul”) that animates or gives life to the physical body. When the soul leaves the body, the person stops breathing and moving and, hence, dies. Also, people have dreams, trances, and visions in which they see images of all kinds of things and events. Logically, but falsely, early peoples concluded that the things are real and that the events actually occurred. Tylor called the form of religion that this reasoning produces *animism*. Peoples with animistic religions believe in spiritual beings, including nature spirits living in

mountains, trees, water, heavenly bodies, and animals; spirits of deceased persons (ghosts); spirits that cause illness; spirits that possess someone and make them insane; and a multitude of other spirits.

Tylor thought animism was the earliest (primeval, most primitive) form of religion from which all others arose. He reasoned that living peoples who still had animistic beliefs were survivors of this earliest stage of religion. Therefore, anthropologists could learn about the earliest form of religion by studying living peoples who were still animistic. How did animism evolve into its later forms? Over time, early peoples reasoned that some spirits were more important or influential than others. Eventually, such spirits were elevated to higher positions. They became gods of various things and activities such as gods of sun, moon, sky, rain, earth, clans, war, agriculture, love, fertility, and so forth. There were many such gods, as well known from Greek and Roman mythology. This stage of religion is called *polytheism*, meaning religions that include a belief in many gods, each with his, hers, or its own sphere of influence.

What about *monotheism*? This form of religious belief was represented by the Judeo-Christian heritage of the West. It was also familiar from Islam, which had been known to Europeans for more than a millennium. Tylor argued that monotheism evolved when one of the gods of polytheism acquired dominance over other gods. Eventually, over centuries, the other gods came to be seen as false gods or not to exist at all. Not surprisingly, Tylor believed that monotheism was the most evolved form of religion.

Tylor's three stages of religion—animism, polytheism, and monotheism—illustrate the main ideas of the unilineal evolutionists. Examples of each stage survived in many scattered places—in fact, on all continents. One stage evolved into another, not just in one region or continent, but in many. For example, animistic religions evolved into polytheistic religions among many peoples, and, in turn, polytheism evolved into monotheism several times. The fact that the same sequence of stages occurred again and again among widely scattered peoples seemed to imply that human cultures developed in regular, recurrent patterns. If so, then human cultural evolution followed some sort of “law,” meaning that similar processes were resulting in similar changes, analogous to Darwinian evolution.

### A Science of Culture?

Following this logic, most unilineal evolutionists thought that the new field of anthropology could and should be a science. They believed the development of culture could be explained much as biology explains the evolution of living organisms. Tylor (1871, 2) wrote that human “thoughts, wills, and actions accord with laws as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combinations of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals.”

Few anthropologists of today agree with this statement because, unlike waves and chemicals, humans have active minds of their own. Many contemporary thinkers do not believe that what Tylor called a “science of culture” is possible. Some do not think it is desirable, because one kind of human should not treat other kinds of humans as “objects for study.”

The unilineal evolutionists made significant contributions to the development of anthropology. Thanks largely to their writings, by the early twentieth century, anthropology became a full-fledged academic discipline. Scholarly fields that investigate various aspects of humankind were already established in European and American universities as departments or schools of religion, theology, art, philosophy, classics, history, anatomy, and so forth. But a discipline whose focus was the physical and cultural diversity of humanity was not recognized until the last decades of

the 1800s. In the United States, the first anthropology course was taught in 1879 at the University of Rochester. In 1886, the first anthropology department was founded at the University of Pennsylvania. It was followed near the turn of the century by university departments at Columbia, Harvard, Chicago, and California (Berkeley).



## Anthropological Thought in the Early Twentieth Century

Despite their contributions, many assumptions that the unilineal evolutionists seemed to take for granted were questionable. In the early decades of the twentieth century, their ideas were largely rejected, partly because their methods were flawed and much of their information was erroneous. In the English-speaking countries, anthropologists in America and Great Britain set out in different directions, as we now discuss.

### Historical Particularism in the United States (ca. 1900–1940)

At the end of the 1800s and for the next three or four decades, the American anthropologist Franz Boas and his students questioned the methods and the findings of unilineal evolutionism. Boas was so influential in the United States that he is often called the “father of American anthropology.” In his view, each and every culture has its own separate past and each culture is “one of a kind”—that is, different from all others. Because each culture was affected by almost everything that had happened to it in the past, and because different things had happened to different cultures, each culture is unique.

This approach is usually called **historical particularism** (or **historicism**). Notice that if it is true that each culture is the *distinctive* product of its *unique* history, then it is difficult to identify any general principles that affect all cultures. Rather, each culture must be studied on its own terms.

Clearly, the unilineal evolutionists did not study each culture “on its own terms.” In making their comparisons and formulating their stages, they imposed their own “terms” (e.g., complexity, progress, stages) on other cultures. Take the notion of complexity, for example. In the realm of technology, most people *might* agree that guns and bullets are more complex than bows and arrows, which, in turn, are more complex than spears and throwing sticks. But what can *complex* mean when applied to other

**historical particularism** The theoretical orientation emphasizing that each culture is the unique product of all the influences to which it was subjected in its past, making cross-cultural generalizations questionable.





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Often considered the “father of American anthropology,” Franz Boas challenged the unilineal evolutionists’ concept of stages. In doing so, he made many lasting contributions, including popularizing the notion of cultural relativism and marshaling evidence that cultural differences and biological differences are largely independent of each other.

customs and beliefs, like those about marriage, political organization, or religion? In what sense is the religion Tylor called monotheism more complex than polytheism? Boas held that such features are merely *different* from culture to culture. By any *objective* criterion, one form religion does not represent “progress” over another.

The stages of the nineteenth-century evolutionists derived from ethnocentric assumptions, Boas thought. They placed their own cultural existence at the top of the (imaginary) cultural ladder, looked around for peoples whose cultures represented the “earlier stages,” gave the stages labels like “savagery,” slotted particular cultures into their preconceived classifications, and then concluded that they were discovering the laws of cultural development using the methods of science.

As an example of Boas’s point, consider American unilineal evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan identified three stages of cultural evolution, which he labeled “savagery,” “barbarism,” and “civilization.” He viewed civilization as the highest form, of course. But many peoples, such as Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese, would have claimed—did claim—that it was Morgan’s own people who were the “barbarians.” So, although it might be possible to speak of progress in technology, it is difficult to do so for cultures as wholes. Does monotheism represent “progress” over animism or polytheism? Perhaps it does, but you are more likely to think so if your own religion is monotheistic. And if your criteria for defining “progress” is ethnocentric, then your concept of “stages of progress” obviously is almost useless.

These arguments seemed to mean that the unilineal evolutionists were wrong: cultures do not develop along a single series of progressive stages, culminating in nineteenth-century Western civilization. Instead, each culture changes along its own unique path, depending on the particular influences that affect it. To understand a culture, therefore, we must study it *individually*, not as a representative of some hypothetical stage, which Boas thought existed only in the minds of the evolutionists. Anthropologists must free themselves from preconceived ideas and assumptions and give up speculative schemes of evolution and ethnocentric definitions of progress.

The historical particularists also claimed that it is very difficult to place the customs and beliefs of *different* peoples into the *same* stage of progress. In most cases, the customs and beliefs of widely scattered peoples only appear to be similar. They are, in fact, different, the particularists believed. For example, Tylor probably would have said that Japanese Shinto and Chinese Daoism are both examples of animism because both religions believed in a multitude of spirits. In contrast, the ancient religions of both Greece and Polynesia had many gods and so would be classified as polytheistic. But are Shinto and Daoism the same “form” of religion just because Shintoists and Daoists believe in many spirits? And how can you claim that the religions of ancient Greece and Polynesia have the same “form” and therefore belong in the same “stage”? What would the Chinese and Japanese, or the ancient Greeks and the Polynesians have said about such comparisons? What do today’s Muslims, Jews, and Christians say if someone claims their monotheistic beliefs are the same “form”?

In short, to say that the customs and beliefs of two or more Other cultures are the “same” or “similar” because they look the same to Us is to ignore a host of differences between these cultures. The Greeks and Polynesians had



different gods, who did different kinds of things to and for people. For the historicists, this is enough to consider them different forms of religion. (Carried to an extreme, of course, this means that every religion has a different form from every other religion, which makes every religion unique.) The only way to get a valid notion of stage would be to study the development of each religion separately, which might lead to the discovery of the stages of evolution for each religion. But these stages, if found, would probably not be universal. The same applies to other elements of culture, Boas thought.

These simple points had major implications for how Westerners studied all those Others. If it is true that each culture is unique, then it is difficult to compare cultures. If every culture has a past that is fundamentally different from the past of every other culture, then it is not likely that general laws or principles exist that apply everywhere. This would make a genuine science of culture difficult because science attempts to find general principles or processes that explain the natural (or cultural) world,

Boas thought the basic assumptions of the evolutionists were flawed, mainly because their ideas about progress and stages were ethnocentric. But he also noted that the ways the evolutionists investigated other cultures—their methods—led them to errors. Today, nineteenth-century evolutionists often are called “armchair anthropologists” because they themselves had not lived among any of those “savages” and “barbarians” (with a few exceptions like Morgan, who actually studied the Iroquois firsthand). Instead, for the most part, they relied on descriptive accounts written by people who too often were untrained, who presented their “impressions” rather than “hard facts,” and who were biased in their perceptions of Others.

Boas thought that professional anthropologists must abandon the comforts of their office armchairs and engage in firsthand interactions with members of other cultures. The main need of the infant field of anthropology was more factual information about other cultures, not unsupported speculations in faculty offices and classrooms. Anthropologists themselves must conduct *ethnographic fieldwork*. This was the only way they can be somewhat confident that they have their facts correct. And only after anthropologists are sure that their facts are correct should they begin to even try to make general statements or to theorize about cultures. Boas, in brief, wanted more and better descriptions of more cultures.

Boas thought it essential that fieldworkers remain objective as they observe and record the customs and beliefs of other cultures. Fieldworkers must enter the

communities and lives of the Others with an open mind. Above all, they should not be ethnocentric because ethnocentrism inevitably leads to errors. If a fieldworker visits another people with an attitude of superiority, he or she is not likely to come away with accurate, objective information. Fieldworkers who go into the field with preconceived notions are likely to observe and report on things consistent with their own preconceptions and not notice or report on contradictory things.

According to Boas, fieldworkers should adopt an attitude of cultural relativism. While living among Others, we must be methodological relativists (Chapter 2), temporarily suspending our own values, morality, standards of hygiene, ways of interpreting actions, and so forth. Not only does a relativistic attitude help us fit into the community, but it also minimizes the chances that we will misinterpret or misunderstand people because we see them through the filter of our own culture’s perceptions and biases.

Boas himself conducted firsthand fieldwork among two Native American peoples, the Inuit (“Eskimo”) and the Kwakiutl. He sent many of his students at Columbia University out for fieldwork experiences, including Margaret Mead, who became famous for her 1928 book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. For decades, Margaret Mead was the one anthropologist most people knew about. Again and again, she discussed how different the various peoples of the world are, so much so that the idea that there was a Human Nature became widely questioned. Mead also was one of the intellectual founders of modern feminism, because she emphasized the multitude of differences in how cultures regard relations between the sexes.

Because of the influence of Boas and his students, in American anthropology today, living among and participating in the lives of the people under study is the main method by which one becomes a professional and acquires a positive reputation in the discipline. The tradition of fieldwork is one of Boas’s lasting legacies.

In addition to learning more about cultures, firsthand fieldwork has another benefit. The traditional customs, beliefs, and languages of many of the world’s peoples had already disappeared because of diseases, genocide, assimilation, and other effects of global contacts. Surviving cultures and languages were vanishing or changing rapidly. Boas believed it was the duty of anthropologists to record disappearing traditions before they were gone forever. Many students of Boas, like A. L. Kroeber and Robert Lowie, did fieldwork among Native American peoples, whose cultures they believed were especially endangered.

Finally, Boas did as much as anyone to show that biological differences and cultural differences are largely independent of each other, that is, the culture of a human group is a product of social learning and tradition, not of genetic heritage (see Chapter 2).

In sum, historical particularism made four enduring contributions to modern anthropology: (1) it discredited the overly speculative schemes of the unilineal evolutionists; (2) it insisted that fieldwork is the primary means of acquiring reliable information; (3) it imparted the idea that cultural relativism as a methodological principle is essential for the most accurate understanding of another culture; and (4) it demonstrated and popularized the notion that cultural differences and biological differences have little to do with each other. These contributions helped to shape modern cultural anthropology.

Historical particularism gave rise to other movements in the first half of the twentieth century, all of which shared its emphasis on cultural uniqueness and relativism. One of the most influential is called **configuralism**. One of Boas's students was Ruth Benedict, whose 1934 book, *Patterns of Culture*, is considered a classic. Benedict argued that, from the vast array of humanly possible cultures, each particular culture develops only a limited number of “patterns” or “configurations” that dominate the thinking and responses of its members. Each culture develops a distinctive set of feelings and motivations that orients the thoughts and behaviors of its members. (Note the emphasis on cultural uniqueness.) These configurations give each culture a distinctive style, and the thoughts and actions of its members reflect its configurations. Behavior that one people consider crazy or abnormal might be acceptable or even ideal among another people. (Note the emphasis on cultural relativism.)

For example, Benedict wrote that the Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast of North America are individualistic, competitive, intemperate, and egoistic. This cultural configuration affects Kwakiutl customs. They stage ceremonies known as *potlaches*, in which one kin group gives away enormous quantities of goods to another. The aim is to shame the rival group because if the rival is unable to return the presentations on certain occasions, its members suffer a loss of prestige. In fact, to avoid losing prestige, the recipient group is obliged to return gifts of even greater value. Over time, the presentations might snowball until the members of one group, in their ceaseless quest for prestige, are materially impoverished (or so Benedict imagined). The whole complex of behaviors connected to the potlatch reflects the cultural configuration of the Kwakiutl—the Kwakiutl are so caught up by the

prestige motivation that groups impoverish themselves to achieve this goal. To describe the Kwakiutl, Benedict used the term *Dionysian*, after the Greek god known for his drinking, partying, and other excesses.

Benedict contrasted the Kwakiutl configuration to the Zuni of the North American Southwest. Zuni control their emotions, she claimed. They are moderate, modest, stoical, orderly, and restrained in their behavior. They do not boast or attempt to rise above their peers but are social and cooperative. This “Apollonian” cultural theme, as Benedict called it, permeates all of Zuni life. Unlike a Kwakiutl leader, a Zuni man does not seek status; indeed, a leadership role practically has to be forced on him. So, according to Benedict, each culture has its unique patterns and themes, which makes it possible for a person that culture A labels a megalomaniac to be culture B's ideal person.

Although modern anthropologists agree that different cultures emphasize different themes or patterns, most think that Benedict overemphasized the effect of culture on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of its members. It is misleading to characterize cultures in simple terms, such as that Kwakiutl are Dionysian (prone to excess), whereas Zuni are Apollonian (moderate in all things). To do so easily leads one people to develop stereotypes about the “personality” or “character” of another people. For example, some Americans say the Japanese have conformist personalities because they seem to submit to the authority of their bosses and appear devoted to their companies. In most such opinions, one's own culture is assumed the standard, and others are judged on the basis of that reference point. Thus, according to common American stereotypical labels, Irish have fiery tempers, Italians are “excitable,” Swiss are humorless, and Swedes are sensual. But “the” Zuni, “the” Irish, and “the” members of other human communities are not simple products of their culture's “configurations.” Rather, the personality and character of the members of a culture are highly variable, and the relationship between culture and the behavior of individuals is complicated (see Chapter 2).

Historical particularism changed the way anthropologists thought about culture and conducted research, but it has limitations. Think about the claim that each culture is unique—like no other. Certainly, if differences between

**configuralism** Theoretical idea that each culture historically develops its own unique thematic patterns around which beliefs, values, and behaviors are oriented.

cultures are what we are interested in, we can easily find them then legitimately claim that no two cultures are alike. So at some level, the claim that “each culture is unique” is correct. So also is the claim that no two individuals brought up within the same culture are exactly alike. Yet they *are* alike in some ways. It is true that in *some ways*, no culture is like any other. But also, *in some ways*, a given culture does have things in common with some other cultures. More generally speaking, there are similarities as well as differences between ways of life. Historical particularists tended to overlook the similarities and to neglect the investigation of factors that might explain them.

Consider also the claim that, because each culture is the unique product of its particular history, one cannot generalize about the causes of cultural differences. According to historicism, there are no “general causes” of cultures. Rather, there are multiple causes, whose relative importance are impossible to disentangle. Besides, causation varies from people to people, depending on their particular history.

But others disagree. To say that the natural environment is important in culture X, religion in Y, values in Z, and so forth, is to say little more than that everything is related to most everything else. The holistic perspective (see Chapter 11) assumes that culture is “integrated.” However, it is possible that some influences are more important than other influences in all or most human populations. For example, some scholars claim that how people interact with their natural environment is *generally* more important than religion or values in causing people to live the way they do. Recognizing interrelationships and integration does not imply that every factor has equal weight as a causal influence.

By the 1940s, the interests of many American anthropologists returned to discovering the general principles of human cultural existence. Meanwhile, another way of studying human societies and cultural diversity developed in Europe.

### British Functionalism, 1920s–1960s

At about the same time that historicism was popular in the United States, a very different approach developed in Great Britain. Generally called **functionalism**, its main

tenet was that social and cultural features should be explained mainly by their useful functions to the people and to the society—that is, by the benefits they confer on individuals and groups. Because humans are above all social beings who live in families, communities, and other kinds of organized groups, most aspects of their culture and society serve to help individuals meet their needs and/or to contribute to the maintenance of the society itself.

One British functionalist was Bronislaw Malinowski. He emphasized the needs of individuals. To Malinowski, the main purpose of culture is to serve human biological, psychological, and social needs. What are these needs? Most biological needs are rather obvious: nutrition, shelter, protection from enemies, maintenance of health and—if the society is to persist—biological reproduction. Humans also have psychological and social needs such as love and affection, security, self-expression, and a sense of belonging. The purpose of culture is to fulfill these needs. Unlike other animals, humans have few inborn instructions or instincts that tell us how to meet our needs. Instead, as we grow up in our culture, we learn the behaviors, social rules, values, and ways of perceiving the world that guide our actions and our thoughts (see Chapter 2).

Some parts of culture meet individual needs directly, such as knowledge of how to acquire food or make shelter. Other aspects function to raise and socialize new generations of group members such as educational practices and family life. Still others encourage people to adhere to group values and rules that make cooperation possible such as religious beliefs and practices and creative arts. Thus, even if a given feature of culture does not *directly* serve individual needs, it still contributes to the maintenance of the entire cultural system without which human survival would be difficult.

No one can deny that an important function of culture is to help people meet their “needs.” However, in some kinds of societies, some individuals and groups have their needs met more completely than others. Further, culture itself can create perceived needs (you can think you need something when you don’t really). And the social and economic conditions under which people live make them need some things that people of other times and places did not need. If you were an attorney in Britain or a college student in Japan in the 1970s, you would not need a computer, but you would today, if you are to be successful. Finally, it is likely that perceived “needs” grow as the capacity for meeting them increases, as all economists know. Thus, the idea of “needs” is more of a problem than it appears to be: “needs” do vary from place to place and time to time.

**functionalism** Theoretical orientation that analyzes cultural elements in terms of their useful effects to individuals or to the persistence of the whole society.

Bronislaw Malinowski was an influential British functionalist. He is best known for his ethnographies about the Trobriand Islanders. Like the American Franz Boas, Malinowski insisted that cultural anthropologists conduct firsthand fieldwork themselves.



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Another influential functionalist from Great Britain was A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. Instead of emphasizing the needs of individuals, Radcliffe-Brown focused on the needs of societies. For him, maintaining orderly social relationships—between family members, friends, members of the same village or town, leaders and followers, and the like—is the main function that must be met if societies are to exist and persist. He imagined that a human society is like a living organism in which each organ has a function to fulfill that contributes to the life of the whole body. In studying a body, a physiologist not only looks at each organ individually, but also considers its role in the life process of the whole organism. Just as organisms cannot stay alive for long unless their organs function properly, so a society cannot persist unless its various institutions play their proper roles in social life. Radcliffe-Brown felt that most customs and beliefs a people share help their society remain in *equilibrium* (a steady state, with not too much conflict or rapid change).

From today's perspective, it is clear that societies are not very much like living organisms. Individuals have minds and motives of their own, unlike cells and organs. And few societies are in equilibrium for very long. Societies change constantly. The rate of change and the direction of change vary, and functionalism had relatively little of lasting value to say about change.

Despite these shortcomings, the British functionalists did make lasting contributions to anthropology. Emphasizing the importance of social relationships between individuals and of living in organized groups

leads us to pay more attention to how groups are organized and how they relate to one another. Radcliffe-Brown's emphasis on equilibrium led us to pay more attention to how the parts of a society and culture fit together, and therefore made us attentive to cultural integration.

### The Tradition of Fieldwork

Like the American historicists, the British functionalists helped establish the tradition of firsthand fieldwork. Malinowski is famous mainly because of his fieldwork and ethnographic writings about the Trobriand Islanders of the western Pacific. Some of his books, like *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *The Sexual Life of Savages*, are ethnographic classics. Not only is fieldwork the best means of obtaining reliable information about a people, but it is also a necessary part of the training of anthropologists, Malinowski believed. We cannot claim to understand people, or the diverse cultures in which people of various places grow up, until we have immersed ourselves in the experience of some culture other than our own.

Malinowski thought the main objective of fieldwork is to see the culture as an insider to the culture sees it. In an often-quoted passage from his famous 1922 ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski (1922, 25) wrote: “[T]he final goal, of which an Ethnographer [*sic*] should never lose sight ... is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world.” This idea of



what fieldwork is all about remains influential—though controversial—today.

In order to “grasp the native’s point of view,” fieldworkers usually make visits that last at least a year, and they often return to the community many times. Also, fieldwork involves deep involvement in the daily lives of the people. Where possible, fieldworkers should master the local language, live with the local people, participate in games and voyages, become familiar with how members of families relate to one another, observe lots of ceremonies and rituals, record myths and legends, and—generally—learn all they can about a culture from interacting with people and participating in their lives. This way of learning about another culture is generally called *participant observation*, and it is the most important method for many fieldworkers.

Because of the influence of early-twentieth-century anthropologists like Boas and Malinowski, the fieldwork experience is today an essential part of the graduate training of almost all cultural anthropologists. Fieldwork demonstrates that you can *do* anthropology yourself as well as *study* the anthropological research and theories of your teachers. It shows that you can contribute original knowledge about Others, and in most colleges and universities, making new contributions is essential for success in one’s academic career.

Until 20 or 30 years ago, most fieldworkers were from either North America or Western Europe. As a consequence, most ethnographies describing the ways of life of diverse peoples were written by Western anthropologists, who for the most part were trained in Western universities. But anthropology today has gone global. People of many nationalities representing many cultures are now anthropologists, interested in writing about the very people whom Western ethnographers used to monopolize. This has led to new issues, and in the future new ways of representing Other cultures are likely to emerge (see the Globalization box).

For many, fieldwork transforms them as persons. After being intensively exposed to another way of living, we often come away with a different perspective on Ourselves. Even anthropologists have trouble overcoming their own biases and not looking at Others through ethnocentric lenses. Fieldwork is the closest

most of us come to dissolving the differences between Us and Others. This is another reason most professional anthropologists conduct fieldwork. That, and the fact that most of us like it.



## The Rebirth of Evolutionism in the Mid-Twentieth Century

The objections of Boas to unilineal evolutionism were powerful ones, but other approaches to cultural evolution came back into fashion in the 1940s and endure today. The problems with the “old” (unilineal) evolutionism were its flawed assumptions and inadequate methods. Some mid-twentieth-century scholars thought they corrected the assumptions and adopted more sophisticated methods. They developed a “new evolutionism,” or **neoevolutionism**, so called because their objectives were much the same as the objectives of the nineteenth-century evolutionists, but their methods and specific theories were different. Two North American anthropologists were the most influential neoevolutionists.

Writing mostly in the 1940s–1960s, Leslie White thought that the nineteenth-century evolutionists got some things right after all. The technologies (tools, technical knowledge, skills) that people use to acquire nature’s resources have, in fact, improved over the centuries. “Improved” how? Improved in the sense that people with better technologies are able to harness more energy per person per year. That is, some technologies are more productive or efficient than others, so people can produce more useful products with them. White held that it is, in fact, possible to measure cultural evolution *objectively*: cultural evolution occurs as the amount of energy harnessed from the natural environment increases. So, in principle, it is possible to define cultural evolution without resorting to questionable criteria, which, if true, overcomes one of historical particularism’s objections.

White went further. Over long periods of time, as humans discovered and invented new technologies that increased the quantity of energy captured, changes in the organization of societies and in the ideas and beliefs of their members followed. To use White’s own terminology, changes in the “social system” and the “ideological system” occur as a consequence of improvements in the “technological system.” Generally speaking, over time, the social and ideological systems have grown more complex. What does *complex* mean?

**neoevolutionism** “New evolutionism,” or the mid-twentieth-century rebirth of evolutionary approaches to the theoretical study of culture.

As we've seen, anthropology arose after Western Europeans contacted Other peoples—natives, the British often called them—of Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas, and the Pacific. For nearly a century, the theoretical and field research of most Western anthropologists occurred with little regard for how the Natives would react to the research and its publication. For the most part, the neglect of local reactions was not because researchers did not care about the people, but because so few of them were literate enough to read our writings. Most theorists, of both the scientific and humanistic camps, were interested in what Malinowski called the “native’s point of view,” but they did not worry too much about the natives’ views of the scholarly books and articles anthropologists wrote about them.

Today, anthropology itself has globalized. Countries whose peoples we study have universities with their own anthropologists who write about their own country or their own people. National or regional governments are sometimes reluctant to allow Western fieldworkers to come in. Many people who appear in our ethnographies now read what we write and are often critical of our findings and, occasionally, of how they are used. Some are resentful because their customs, beliefs, opinions, and Voices are represented by outsiders rather than by themselves. Some believe (usually mistakenly) that anthropologists grow wealthy by writing about them, while they are paid relatively little when they assist us. To phrase the general point as a question: What happens to anthropology when its subjects begin investigating themselves? (One answer: Invite them to investigate Us—Our families, religions, politics, education, medical practices, and the like.)

Anthropologist Takami Kuwayama discusses these and related issues in his 2004 book, *Native Anthropology*. He points out that most academic disciplines have spread across national boundaries, thus becoming global. As this happens, unequal relationships develop between those scholars born in Western nations in which the disciplines originated and scholars from other regions.

A major issue for a global anthropology is *representation*: Who is best qualified to describe the culture of a people, to translate their customs and beliefs into a form that is intelligible to outsiders? Some anthropological scholars from the West are reluctant to give up their claim to represent the Others, even when educated Others challenge their findings. Kuwayama notes that because the most well-endowed and prestigious universities are in Western Europe and North America, the representation that prevails may be based on political concerns rather than accuracy or completeness.

For example, simply because Western ethnographers are outsiders to local cultures, they sometimes claim to be more

objective than Native anthropologists, who tend to see their own customs and beliefs through their own cultural lenses. Or, Westerners may say that Native anthropologists have an interest in making their own people look good to outsiders, so they romanticize local customs by de-emphasizing facts that they fear will leave readers with negative impressions. In brief, some claim that a Native is more likely to have a political agenda to pursue, while outsiders supposedly are more interested in accuracy.

You can imagine what most Native anthropologists think of such opinions. The dilemma—who speaks for the Natives?—seems unresolvable. As we discuss later in this chapter, some modern anthropologists say that the Voices of the Natives should usually carry more weight. Others claim that anthropology is a science that seeks to generalize through comparisons, and there is no reason to think that any Native is better qualified to compare than an outsider.

Kuwayama offers a solution to the dilemma of writing about cultures in a global community. He proposes that anthropology develop a forum in which all opinions about an issue of fact or interpretation can be aired on an equal footing. At present, if you are to speak authoritatively (have others take your views seriously), you must publish. You must write scholarly books and find someone to publish them. Better, you must get your articles published in scholarly journals that are peer reviewed (that is, the article is critically analyzed by others who are recognized experts in the subject, who decide whether your article is meritorious enough to be published). Many Native anthropologists have less access to the world of publishing than most scholars in the major universities. Therefore, the information they gather and the opinions they offer are usually underrepresented in the global community of anthropological scholars. The fact that English has become the primary language of discussion does not help the situation. Finally, in publishing as in other realms of life, sometimes it’s whom you know rather than what you say that determines whether something you write appears in print.

Kuwayama suggests that more people be given an opportunity to have their Voices heard. Exactly how this opportunity will be offered is unclear, even to Kuwayama. But he notes that worldwide access to the Internet is increasing dramatically and that it is more inclusive than other forums because anyone can post to it. (Interestingly, this is exactly the reason so many scholars mistrust the Internet: except for the restrictions placed on content from countries such as China, there are few controls over it, so “anyone can post to it,” which is why so much of it is “garbage.”) Someday, there may be a wiki-anthropology.

SOURCE: Kuwayama (2004).

It means that the scale (size) of societies increases dramatically, occupational specialization develops, large-scale trade and long-distance exchange grow, political centralization occurs, and inequality between classes becomes greater. Again, White argued that all these social changes are largely independent of the anthropologist's own prejudices and preconceptions, so they also are objective measures of evolution.

White believed that improvements in technology and the resulting increase in the ability of people to harness energy *caused* most important changes in human cultures. For example, he argued that the transition to agriculture *caused* civilization to develop in some regions, and the discovery of how to harness the energy of coal *caused* the rise of industrial society in Great Britain. For this reason, White is often called a *technological determinist*, meaning he believed that technology causes (“determines”) most everything else in culture that is important. What causes changes in aspects of culture like family organization and political structures? To White, these were part of the “social system” and largely responded to changes in technology. What about aspects of culture like religion, philosophy, worldview, and art? To White, these were part of the “ideological system,” and by and large they changed to reflect and justify changes in the social system.

In summary, White boldly generalized that as technology develops, the social system evolves to take advantage of the increased energy available and new ideologies arise to explain and justify the new technological and social arrangements. So, cultural evolution is in fact a regular, patterned process about which anthropologists can generalize by making objective comparisons and contrasts. Each culture is not entirely unique, and we can legitimately provide explanations that do not depend on the “native point of view.” White agreed with E. B. Tylor that anthropology should be “the science of culture,” and White made this the title of a book he published in 1949.

Another neoevolutionist, Julian Steward, agreed with White that how people acquire natural resources and cope with their environment is the most important part of a people's way of life. But, more than White, Steward's theory emphasized the natural environment, which provided food and other necessary resources. Steward's ideas eventually gave rise to the modern field of cultural ecology, which studies how humans relate to the environment. We discuss such studies in Chapter 6.

Men like White and Steward made attempts to explain culture in scientific terms respectable again. For White, the general principle needed to explain cultural evolution is technological determinism. For Steward, interactions between humans and their environments are the most

important causes of cultural differences and similarities (although these interactions are quite complicated). White and Steward are two of the most important intellectual ancestors of the various scientific approaches in Western anthropology today.



## Anthropological Thought Today: Divisions

Boas's early criticisms of the unilineal evolutionists illustrate a division that continues to this day. First, the evolutionists thought that anthropology should be like the natural sciences in its goals. But Boas thought it was mainly a “historical science” or a “descriptive science.” By these phrases, Boas meant that anthropologists should try to give complete and objective *descriptions* of different cultures, but that developing general *theories* about culture was premature and possibly would never happen.

Second, the evolutionists wanted to establish the general principles that governed cultural development. But the historicists mistrusted most generalizations, especially broad and sweeping ones like “all cultures pass through similar stages.” The closer you come to getting inside another culture, they argued, the more details you perceive and, hence, the more different it looks from other cultures. Most similarities are only superficial, like the “similarity” between polytheism in ancient Polynesia and Greece.

Third, the evolutionists uncritically placed similar cultures in the same stage of progress (like the Iroquois and the Fijians, both in “barbarism”). But the historicists insisted that the evolutionists' idea of progress was ethnocentric and that therefore stages were artificial creations. If there are no universal stages, or even widespread stages, then the regularities of cultural development that the nineteenth century scholars perceived were not real, but only the result of their assumptions and methods.

Fourth, the evolutionists compared and contrasted cultures from all parts of the world and found the “same” customs among widely scattered peoples. But the historicists reasoned that because each culture's history is different from the history of every other culture, it follows that each culture is unique and distinctive. This means that it is very misleading to place several cultures into the same category because there are always differences between them. For example, if you say that the ancient Polynesians and Greeks have the “same form” of religion, which *you* label as polytheism, then that label is *yours*, not theirs. To call the two religions the same is to misrepresent and distort them. It denies the religions, and the people who



## Scientific Approach

Primary goals are explaining cultural differences and similarities and why and how cultures change.

Humans are part of nature, different only in degree from other animals; emphasizes relationships with environment.

Regularities and consistent cross-cultural patterns exist, which can be discovered through empirical observations and systematic comparisons.

Methods emphasize observation of group patterns and comparisons; the ethnographer determines what is important for the purposes of scientific generalization.

## Humanistic Approach

Main goal is describing and interpreting particular cultures, to achieve an insider's view and/or represent the Voices of the people themselves.

Humans are unique because they are cultural and linguistic beings, different in kind from other mammals; emphasizes symbols.

Particular cultures are so complex that each must be understood on its own terms; comparisons distort the cultures that are compared.

Field methods emphasize participation and relationships with local people; descriptions emerge out of interactions between fieldworkers and so are never completely objective; comparisons distort, mislead, and falsely objectify.

believe and practice it, their distinctiveness. It denies the Others their own Voices. It privileges the voice of the anthropologist, meaning that it assumes the anthropologist's ideas are more valid than the ideas of Others about what they do and how they think.

The Concept Review compares some of the main differences between the scientific and the humanistic approaches. Notice that they differ in their conceptions of goals, human uniqueness, the validity of comparisons among cultures, and the methods used in fieldwork.

The same general kinds of issues persist today. There are many, many contemporary schools of thought, which we cannot cover. Despite this diversity, one important division today is between cultural anthropologists whose interests and methods are more similar to science and those whose interests and methods are more humanistic.

Given the complexity of humanity, and even of a single culture, the answer is always going to be: "It all depends." Scientifically oriented scholars ask, "On what, mainly?" If the answer turns out to be "on everything else" (and this is exactly what some modern scholars say), then the scientific approach probably will not be able to achieve its goals. There can never be a "general theory" that answers their big questions because the word *theory* implies that only a small number of general principles are responsible for most of the important differences, changes, relationships, and other phenomena. *Theory* implies only a few underlying causes or principles or forces. If societies are indeed products of "everything that happened to them in the past," then we cannot point to a few events or processes and say that these are *generally* important in *most* societies *most* of the time. Human existence would be too chaotic and random to be explained by any general theory.



## Scientific Approaches

Those who adopt one of the **scientific approaches** to the study of Other cultures seek to discover the general forces that make cultures the way they are, that is, they want to *explain* human ways of life. They are interested in big questions: What are the primary causes of social and cultural differences and similarities? What makes societies and cultures change and/or change at different rates? What are the relationships among the major components of a peoples' way of life such as resource acquisition, family organization, political structure, and religious beliefs and rituals? When two cultures come into contact, what kinds of forces affect the outcome?

## Evolutionary Psychology

As our first example of the scientific approach, in the late 1970s, some anthropologists adopted a theory then known

**scientific approaches** Theoretical notion that human cultural differences and similarities can be explained in the same sense as biologists explain life and its evolution.  
**evolutionary psychology (sociobiology)** Scientific approach emphasizing that humans are animals and so are subject to similar evolutionary forces as other animals; associated with the hypothesis that behavior patterns enhance inclusive fitness.



In the 1970s, the work of Harvard's Edward O. Wilson and other sociobiologists became influential in ethnology. Famous for his work on ants and other social insects, Wilson argued that human behaviors and beliefs are shaped by natural selection. Human societies and cultures therefore can be explained by evolutionary processes similar to those operating in other animal species.



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as **sociobiology**. Social scientists now usually call it **evolutionary psychology**. It emphasizes the similarities between humans and other animals, arguing that humans are subject to the same kinds of processes that operate in other parts of nature. Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson was instrumental in the development of this theoretical framework in the biological sciences. He was interested in animal social behavior. For example why do so many animals (e.g., lions, ants, many ungulates) live in herds or other groups whose members help one another by cooperating in hunting or emitting alarm calls that warn the group of a nearby predator?

Why are such behaviors puzzling? In the animal kingdom, most biologists have long believed that natural selection usually produces organisms that are genetically *selfish*, meaning that unselfish (*altruistic*) behavior in animals is rare, existing only under very special circumstances. For instance, most cooperative social behaviors such as alarm calls are costly to the individual animal, yet the benefits accrue to the entire group. A prairie dog calling to alert its neighbors to a predator might call the predator's attention to itself and thus stand a greater chance of getting eaten. How could natural selection produce animals that act altruistically, when altruistic behavior is so costly to the altruistic animal? Natural selection should select against altruism because an altruistic animal will have less chance of survival and reproduction than the selfish ones.

Wilson, along with other biologists such as Richard Dawkins and William Hamilton, solved this puzzle by

noting that the beneficiaries of altruistic behaviors are not individual organisms, but genes. Because genes are the units that are transmitted to offspring through reproduction, only genes that make more copies of themselves in the next generation can survive. Sociobiologists argue that genes tend to program the bodies that temporarily house them to act in ways that improve their biological *fitness*—that is, in ways that increase their frequencies in the next generation. To paraphrase Dawkins, a body and its behavior are a gene's way of making more copies of itself. Some evolutionary psychologists claim that this statement applies to humans as well as to other animals. Taken seriously, this means that *your* body and behavior are your genes' ways of making more copies of themselves.

The main contribution of sociobiology was the insight that related individuals share a greater proportion of their genes with one another than they do with nonrelatives of the same species. For example, a female can potentially increase the fitness of one or more of her genes if she aids her brother, if that brother carries the same genes. By helping her brother, she herself may reproduce less, but this cost can be more than offset if her help improves her brother's fitness enough to offset her own loss of fitness. Thus, natural selection increases the fitness of any gene that programs its body to help a relative if the cost in fitness (to the gene) is lower than the benefit to the same gene housed in the relative's body. So, an individual animal can behave altruistically after all, but only if the benefit of the altruism helps a relative far more than it costs the

“altruist” (note that the behavior is not truly altruistic because it increases the fitness of the gene).

Some anthropologists believe that such ideas contribute to explaining human social behavior. For example, you and I have a genetic interest in the welfare of our relatives. All else equal, the more closely related we are, the more we care for them, and people care most for those individuals who are the main vehicles for transmitting their genes—their own offspring and offspring’s offspring. We care little, or less, for nonrelatives and will assist them only if they somehow return benefits to us or to our relatives. They do this mainly by reciprocity, that is, they return our help immediately or at some later time if we can count on their presence in the future. Evolutionary psychologists claim that selfishness motivates most human actions, although the selfish motive is sometimes disguised when we help family members or friends in expectation of future returns.

More generally, evolutionary psychologists note that, for most of human history, the most important social groups (bands, discussed in later chapters) were largely composed of relatives who cooperated in foraging, food sharing, child care, and other activities. They also point out that far more human societies allow a man to have several wives than allow a woman to have several husbands, which is consistent with sociobiology, for reasons we discuss in Chapter 8. They claim that evolutionary psychology explains many of the following widespread human behavioral and mental predispositions:

- Xenophobia—We may hate or mistrust strangers because, as obvious nonrelatives, they cannot be trusted.
- Warfare—Braver men who protect the group are more likely to attract more wives and/or have more sex and hence more offspring.
- Male unfaithfulness to wives or promiscuity—Males get more children and therefore more fitness without the costs of raising the children.
- Female preference for marrying high-status/wealthy males—Women get access to more resources through such marriages, thus improving the fitness of their offspring.

Critics of such ideas charge that these and other so-called predispositions are more the product of socialization than of genes because they vary markedly from people to people. Even if evolutionary psychology “helps” in understanding such widespread patterns, critics say that it tells us little or nothing about the reasons different peoples exhibit them strongly, only weakly, or not at all. So, this “help” is minimal at best and may even be harmful if it makes us

falsely believe we now understand something. And, at any rate, the insights of sociobiology apply mainly if “all else is equal,” which it never is in human societies. Finally, many self-sacrificial acts of devotion by individuals, such as suicide bombers and *kamikaze* pilots who kill themselves because of devotion to their faith, values, or homelands, are problematic for evolutionary psychology.

Numerous other arguments exist both for and against evolutionary psychology, some of which we cover in later chapters. For now, note that it is an excellent example of the scientific side of cultural anthropology: it holds that people are subject to the same principles and pressures as other animals—most important, to the forces of natural selection.

## Materialism

Another modern scientific approach—more popular than evolutionary psychology—is **materialism**. It claims that the satisfaction of human material needs and desires is the most important influence on how societies are organized and what people think and believe. People face the same kinds of material needs as all mammals: we must receive adequate intakes of food and water, regulate our body temperature (by building shelters and wearing clothing), reproduce, cope with organisms that cause disease, compete successfully, and so forth. To satisfy these needs efficiently, people have to organize their societies in certain ways to cooperate or to succeed in competition with other societies. Many other elements of a people’s culture are determined by or are greatly influenced by how people organize their activities to survive and persist in their environments. In essence, materialists think that how a people make their living in their environment is the most important influence on the rest of their cultural existence.

If one thinks that relationships with the environment and acquisition of material resources are primary, then those aspects of culture that help people acquire resources will strongly affect all other aspects. More than any other animal, people depend on *technology* to exploit resources, compete, and cope with other problems of environmental adaptation. Technology includes not just the physical *instruments* (the tools) used to produce food, provide shelter, and generally manipulate the environment. Equally important,

**materialism** Theoretical orientation claiming that the main influences on cultural differences and similarities are technology, environment, and how people produce and distribute resources.

technology includes the *knowledge* (skills) about the environment, about resources, and about the manufacture and effective use of tools that people have acquired by learning from previous generations.

Because humans rely on tools and knowledge to acquire food and harness other resources, technology is among the most important aspects of culture everywhere. Materialists believe a peoples' technology strongly affects other parts of their culture, including family life, political organization, values, and even worldviews, much as White argued in the 1940s. Yet most materialists of today disagree with White's view that increased energy capture made possible by technological improvements has generally made human life better, leading to cultural progress. In contrast to White, most modern materialists believe technological changes have improved the lives of *some* people in *some* respects, but that changes in technology have had mixed results overall.

Population size and the rate of population growth are also important causal forces because they affect technology, resources, conflicts, working hours, and other things. Some materialists believe that long-term population growth and the changes it forces groups to make in their relationships with the environment and with other human groups are the most widespread cause of cultural evolution (see A Closer Look).

In their emphasis on the importance of physical/biological needs, technology, environment, and population size, modern materialists resemble earlier thinkers such as Malinowski, White, and Steward. However, modern materialists are more sophisticated than their precursors. For example, for the most part, early theories about causation were *linear*, meaning that one thing makes another thing the way it is; thus, A "causes" B, or A "determines" B. But modern materialists are more likely to view technology, environment, population, and culture as having *feedback* relationships with one another. That is, as their numbers increase and people interact with their environment using their technology, they change the environment. In turn, these changes lead people to alter their technology and continue population growth, which then further alters the environment, and so on. For example, as people exploit a resource, they may deplete its supply. Future genera-

tions must then either work harder to acquire the resource, develop a new method of acquiring it, or switch to an alternative resource. Other cultural changes accompany these changes in resources.

We discuss some of these processes in later chapters. For now, note three of the main arguments of materialists: (1) many customs and beliefs of a particular culture can be explained by how they help people live in the natural world; (2) population growth and intensification are major factors that drive cultural evolution; and (3) generally, and in the long run, material forces like overall environment, resources, technologies, and population densities are more important than ideas and beliefs like religion and worldview, values, and symbols.



## Humanistic Approaches

Many ideas of both evolutionary psychology and materialism are not seriously questioned. Most people do transmit their genes by having children, and most of us are more likely to help relatives than strangers. But whether the biologically determined "predispositions" identified by evolutionary psychology are all that important is debatable. Some deny that such universal human predispositions exist at all. Or, if they do exist, then trying to explain them has the effect of "justifying" (in the disguise of "explaining") racial hatreds, violence, sexual inequalities, and the like. The notion that human beings are innately selfish is odious to many and probably to most anthropologists.

Likewise, no one denies that people have material needs. But whether such needs are "basic" and "shape" all of human existence is debatable. Some think humans differ from other animals in that these needs can be satisfied in such a multitude of ways that cultural differences cannot possibly be "reduced to material need and want satisfaction." They deny that material factors can explain any specific culture, much less cultural differences and similarities and long-term changes. In fact, they doubt that culture has any *general* explanation. Many believe that any scholar who tries to "explain" culture or cultures dehumanizes people by treating them as objects.

Most scholars who adopt the **humanistic approach** doubt or deny that any general theory can "explain" culture in the same way that evolutionary theory explains life or that Einstein's relativity theory explains the physical world. Humanistic anthropologists are skeptical of general theories for many reasons. One is that humanity's social and cultural worlds are just too

**humanistic approach** Theoretical orientation that rejects attempts to explain culture in general in favor of achieving an empathetic understanding of particular cultures.

Many materialists argue that growth in human numbers was and is a major source of long-term changes in human ways of life. Until about 10,000 years ago, humans were hunters and gatherers, eating only wild plants and game animals. The human population was sparse and people spread out over the land in small, mobile groups to exploit food and other resources without interfering with other groups. There were individual quarrels and violence over personal grievances, but relatively little serious, prolonged conflict between groups over valuable resources.

When human numbers increased over many decades or centuries in a given region, each local group had less and less food and fewer resources unless they took steps to cope with their growing population. Materialists call this *population pressure*, which exists whenever population numbers increase enough to force people to change how they use resources and to invent different technologies. Any given generation is unlikely to notice population growth and the changes that result from it, but over a long period of time these changes cause great transformations.

In most regions during humanity's prehistoric past, population growth leveled off when the available land could not support more people: group members died from disease or inadequate food, migrated out, and/or limited the number of children they had. In some regions, though, the natural environment was able to provide more resources. People made more resources available by working harder or longer, discovering new technologies to increase production, or domesticating plants and animals. In brief, in some places, the environment responded to human work, or to technological innovations, or to efforts to control the food supply. There were five or six such regions (discussed in Chapter 6) where people responded to population pressure by developing new technologies and devoting most of their work to cultivate only a few species of plants and animals. After many centuries, these plants became *crops* and these animals became *livestock*. Thus, agriculture began.

Once agriculture developed, the land could support even more people, so populations continued to grow. Again, only a few environments were able to sustain growth for many centuries. These environments were most commonly the valleys of large rivers that flood seasonally and deposit fertile silt carried

downstream from highlands and mountains. These included the river valleys of ancient Mesopotamia, the Nile of Egypt, the Yellow River of China, and the Indus River of Pakistan and India. Flooding renewed the soil, so by careful management and irrigation, people of these regions produced enough food to feed their ever-growing numbers.

In such places where population growth continued for many centuries, the land filled up with more people and more settlements. Eventually, some group or its leaders calculated that they could benefit by engaging in threats or aggressive fighting with their neighbors in order to add new territories and acquire more resources. Organized group fighting (warfare) became more frequent and intense and eventually led the cultures of the entire region to change. Once one local group engaged in aggressive warfare, others had to take defensive measures to protect themselves. They began living in even larger settlements so they could mobilize more warriors more quickly. They made alliances with some neighboring groups to deter aggression from enemies, thus enlarging the size of the social unit whose members cooperated for purposes such as warfare and trade. Political leaders became more powerful to control the allocation of resources or to assume leadership in warfare or both. Chiefs and eventually kings and emperors rose to power, and strong class distinctions emerged. This process led to the cultural evolution of the form of society we know as *civilization*. The effects of civilization on human life were mixed: some classes and individuals grew wealthy and powerful, while the majority in lower classes suffered deprivation, forced labor, war deaths, and diseases.

Notice that the word *progress* does not apply to the development of civilization in this materialist theory: some people became better off, some worse off than in precivilized societies. Notice also that this particular theory of cultural evolution holds that one force—population pressure—caused most of the important changes in human ways of living. As we shall see, other contemporary anthropologists believe that theories like this one are far too simple and dehumanize people by seeing them as “results” of some larger process rather than as active agents in creating their own cultures.

SOURCES: Cohen (1977), Harris (1979), Sanderson (1999, 2007).

complicated for one theory to explain them. All those cultures of all those Others cannot be reduced to a single formula, they claim.

Humanistic scholars say that another reason for rejecting general theories is that humans are quite unique. *Homo sapiens* is such a special kind of animal that the methods

and analysis that biology uses to explain other life-forms do not apply to us in any significant respect. Human uniqueness, as we already know, lies mainly in our heavy dependence on social learning and our capacity for complex communication—that is, in both culture and language.



Other animals live in the natural world, with its food sources, predators, mates and potential mates, and so forth. Of course, humans also eat, drink, sleep, and engage in sex. But, humanists point out, we also live in a *cultural* world: what, when, and how we eat, drink, sleep, and have sex are largely determined by the culture into which each of us happens to have been born. People live in the natural world, but they also “culturally construct” their worlds and have a “worldview” (Chapter 2). Their constructions and worldviews are about as important in affecting their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings as living the real world itself.

Language also makes us unique, humanists say. Language provides words with which we classify and categorize objects, people, events, actions, qualities, and so forth. Because of language, we construct categories of events, people, groups, objects, plants, and so on. These categories vary from culture to culture and are entirely learned, not at all natural. Language even provides us with words for things that have no material existence at all, such as ghosts and demons. If the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis (see Chapter 3) has any validity and generality, then our language conditions our perceptions of the world itself, so every people exist in a perceived world that is like that of no other people. Last, language allows us to lie to one another, which makes it possible for some people to manipulate and control other people. These features of language are all unique to humankind, and because of them we create our own reality as well as respond to actual reality.

All of this means that human reactions to the world (to nature) and human beliefs about the world are products of culture and language. If true, this implies that, at most, material factors like environment, technology, and population affect culture only by *limiting* (constraining) how a people act, think, and feel. Material factors cannot *determine* (cause) actions, thoughts, and feelings because these factors themselves are in part products of actions, thoughts, and feelings. Neither causes or “explains” the other, which makes untangling causes and effects pretty much impossible, humanistically inclined anthropologists argue.

When materialists claim that nature’s resources are important influences on cultures and societies, a critical humanist may respond that resources are not entirely natural. Consider food resources, for instance, which materialists think are so important. Influenced by religious prohibitions and cultural notions of what’s edible and what’s too disgusting to consume, various peoples of the world refuse to eat cattle, pigs, dogs, horses, and insect larvae—exactly the same flesh considered so



© Sylvia Howe/Anthro-Photo

Cultural materialists often hold that how people harness and utilize resources is the main influence on their culture. Humanistic anthropologists counter that whether something found in nature is a resource and, if so, how that resource is used vary from culture to culture. The sacred cattle of Hinduism, for example, are not the same kind of food resource in India as are cattle in North America or Africa.

delicious by many other peoples. If food and other resources are culturally defined and culturally meaningful as well as simply biological nutritious, then in human life resources are both cause *and* effect. Long ago, our cultural ancestors built (culturally constructed) the cultural world in which we live our lives. We live within this cultural world as well as within the natural one.

Thus, some humanistic anthropologists think that Tylor’s and White’s “science of culture” is not possible: humans and their societies are too complex and too diverse, and humans live partly in worlds that their language and culture construct for them.

Other humanists do not believe that anthropology should even *try* to be scientific. In their view, scientific anthropology “objectifies” cultures; that is, in its efforts to generalize, science places cultural features into categories (e.g., forms of marriage, types of religions) that are the categories of the anthropologist, not those of the people themselves. Humanists often make this point by saying that scientifically oriented anthropologists “rob people of their voices.” They mean that scientific anthropologists are arrogant to the extent that they believe they know better than the Other people themselves what is important in their lives and what was important in shaping their culture.

A similar objection by some humanists is that scientific approaches “deny that people are agents.” This means that scientific anthropologists by and large view people and groups largely as *responding* (in predictable ways) to conditions, not as *actively* trying to come up with new ways of responding to conditions. Materialists treat people, and especially “Other People,” as automatons who pretty much act in ways that are determined by their natural environment and other people around them.

Thus, some humanistic anthropologists believe that the scientific perspective is not only mistaken but also not desirable. It treats Others as mere objects, often ignoring their views of what they are doing and falsely treating them as automatons rather than agents. In a sense, they say, the scientists deny the Others their humanity. At least, these are some things that many humanistic anthropologists *claim* is true for materialists and other scientific anthropologists.

You might well wonder: *If* all this is true, how is it that materialist scholars have been so misguided about the importance of environment, technology, adaptation, and so forth? Some humanists claim that materialist thinking is a product of Western cultural values and beliefs. Because the West places such high value on material welfare and consumption, materialists mistakenly impose these same values and beliefs on other cultures. Living in a competitive and capitalistic society predisposes materialists to see “economic man” in cultures where he does not exist. The materialist theory is a kind of ethnocentrism, they claim.

Some materialists respond in kind. They point out that most academics are members of the privileged class, in status, wealth, or both. Because most academics (including humanistic anthropologists) so seldom have to worry about filling their stomachs, or sheltering themselves from heat, snow, and rain, or protecting themselves from enemies, it is easy for them to believe that such concerns are not important in other cultures either. The humanists’ failure to realize the broad importance of material factors is related to their own wealth and privilege. The humanistic approach is a kind of ethnocentrism, some claim.

Even more than the scientific approach, it is difficult or impossible to collapse humanistic anthropology into a few schools or ways of approaching Others. Here, we discuss only two. Interpretive anthropology has been around for several decades, whereas postmodernism has become popular in anthropology only since the 1980s.

## Interpretive Anthropology

**Interpretive anthropologists** emphasize the uniqueness and individuality of each human culture. Every culture

has its own ways of doing things, its own worldview, its own values, and so forth. Even if two or more cultures look similar, close examination usually shows that the meanings they attach to behaviors, objects, and concepts are different. This uniqueness makes comparisons between different cultures misleading. In this and other respects, interpretive anthropology is similar to historical particularism. And because science attempts to generalize through comparisons and contrasts, it follows that anthropology is more of a humanistic discipline than a scientific one. It has more in common with literature and art than with biology or psychology, according to the interpretive approach.

Interpretive anthropologists emphasize the symbolic dimensions of culture. All social behavior has a symbolic component, in the sense that participants constantly must behave in ways that others will understand. All social interaction, therefore, is symbolic and meaningful. Meanings exist only by virtue of common agreement among the parties to the interaction—whether the interaction involves making conversation, making change in a store, or making bumpers in an auto plant. Neither participant can tell an observer how he or she knows what the other participant “means” by this or that behavior. Yet participants consistently behave in ways that others understand, and they consistently interpret the behavior of others correctly.

The job of the anthropologist is not to explain elements of a culture but to explicate one element through others. That is, the anthropologist shows how one thing in a cultural system makes sense in terms of other things in the same system, because interpretation *is* seeing how things make sense when understood in their context. (Analogously, a dictionary explicates the meanings of words in terms of other words. Only if one knows the meanings of many words in the dictionary can one use them to decipher the meanings of unknown words.) We seek to understand a people’s way of life as they understand it. In the words of the late Clifford Geertz (1983, 58), who shaped the entire approach, we seek to grasp “the native’s point of view,” “to figure out what the devil they think they are up to.” This involves acquiring intimate knowledge of a

**interpretive anthropologists** Contemporary theorists who analyze cultural elements by explicating their meanings to people and understanding them in their local context; generally emphasize cultural diversity and the unique qualities of particular cultures.

particular culture so that the ethnographer can make sense of the culture for those who do not know it.

According to many interpretive anthropologists, the search for generalized explanations of human ways of life is futile. So many factors contributed to the formation of a culture, and these factors interacted in such complex and unpredictable ways, that we must concentrate on understanding the unique elements of each way of life. In this respect, interpretive anthropologists exemplify the humanistic perspective.

## Postmodernism

**Postmodernists** generally believe that the methods and assumptions of all science—including fields such as biology—are themselves culturally situated and culture bound. This means that science, as most people understand it, is not objective in its theories and even in its facts (“data”). Rather, it is carried out by scientists who are products of a particular cultural upbringing. Like all knowledge, scientific theories are affected by conditions in the scientists’ own culture.

For example, a postmodernist might say that evolutionary psychologists were socialized in cultures that practically celebrate selfishness. In free-market economies, everyone is supposed to be looking out for themselves and consuming commodities and competing. So the evolutionary psychologists raised in this economic system think people everywhere act this way and claim that these alleged biological imperatives apply to humanity in general. Such theories are culture bound, in the same way Boas showed that unilineal evolutionism was culture bound (ethnocentric).

How can the proponents of science be so misguided? Postmodernists point out that scientific thinking and methods became prominent during the Enlightenment period (also called the Age of Reason) of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western Europe. Enlightenment philosophers emphasized rational thought as the key to advancing knowledge about the world, from the solar system to humanity. Tradition and especially religion were viewed as impediments to discovering Truth. Emotions could also get

in the way, especially if they keep otherwise rational thinkers from accepting the reality of a fact or principle just because they don’t like it or its implications.

For example, if you are a male, you might refuse to accept evidence showing that not all societies are patriarchal. You reject or discount the evidence because it is not consistent with what religion has taught you and it makes you feel guilt or other kinds of emotional distress. Your refusal to accept the evidence is not “rational,” so it gets in the way of improving your knowledge. This would not matter very much for your society unless, of course, men hold the power in that society and most of them feel and believe as you do. Enlightenment thinkers tried to free thought from the shackles of religion and emotion, so that Reason and Science could reveal the world to us as it really is.

Postmodernists do not think there is anything very special about the Enlightenment version of rational thought. They say that all of human knowledge originates in a particular social, economic, and political context. *Scientific* knowledge is no exception. Science is a product of a particular cultural tradition—that of the West—and therefore reflects the economy, family organization, political ideology, worldview, and so forth of Western society. Science, in fact, is just one among hundreds of other systems of cultural knowledge. At the extreme, postmodernists hold that science has little more claim to absolute Truth than the ideas and beliefs of other peoples. All are valid on their own terms, but none is “privileged” or has any exclusive claim to objectivity. If scientists themselves don’t realize this, it is because they are inside their own knowledge system and so do not grasp the implicit assumptions of their rationalistic and mechanistic worldview.

Postmodernists also think the most important thing about the context of knowledge is power relationships. Prevalent beliefs and ideas in a community reflect lines of power, largely because those with power have the most influence on which ideas and beliefs become “prevalent.” To illustrate with a modern example, most North Americans attach positive value to abstractions like private property, free-market capitalism, democracy, and various individual rights and freedoms. These values reflect, and support, the interests of some people over other people. Much scholarly knowledge—the kind taught in colleges and universities—is like this, postmodernists claim. For example, evolutionary psychology is often taught as a credible or even correct theory in biology courses, although many postmodernists believe its theories support sexism and patriarchy.

**postmodernists** Those who follow the philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes the relativity of all knowledge, including science; focus on how the knowledge of a particular time and place is constructed, especially on how power relations affect the creation and spread of ideas and beliefs.

In anthropological fieldwork, there is often a power dimension to the relationship between the fieldworker and the local people. Most fieldworkers are able to command more resources and thus can influence people to talk about things they'd rather not discuss (although there are ethical standards in fieldwork, covered in Chapter 5). Postmodernists mistrust most older ethnographies, and generally they prefer accounts in which the fieldworkers openly discuss their personal relationships with members of the community. They also prefer ethnographies in which the ethnographer gives her or his readers access to the local Voices.

As mentioned, postmodernism penetrated anthropology in the 1980s and has attracted more converts in our discipline than in any other social science. One reason for the popularity of this perspective in anthropology is its apparent consistency with cultural relativism. However, critics of the approach became vocal in the late 1990s. Do postmodernists adopt the tenets of their own ideas in their personal lives? If science is “just another” kind of knowledge, do postmodernists refuse to ride in airplanes or use microwaves? How have their own ideas escaped the influence of power relationships? And are *their* ideas also culture bound?

Postmodernism reminds us that rationality and science do not provide all the answers and do not ask all the necessary questions. It leads us to ask where our ideas come from and who might gain and lose from them. Perhaps most important, it warns anthropological thinkers of the dangers of becoming arrogant about our objectivity. Scientifically oriented theorists can easily forget that they are cultural beings and that their own ideas about the human world are culturally conditioned.

camp. So, in part, the diversity of modern approaches reflects the fact that human beings and their cultures are complex and multifaceted, so the orientation most useful to understand one facet (e.g., subsistence) may not prove very useful to understand another (e.g., worldview).

In the interest of balance, in the remainder of this book, we try to avoid choosing between the two orientations by taking the following approach. Like evolutionary psychologists and cultural materialists, we think *it is important* that people are part of nature. But we recognize that different elements of a culture are influenced to different degrees by material conditions. The way an economy is organized is greatly influenced by the local environment, climate, technology, and the size and density of the human population. But the ways the members of a culture resolve their disputes, raise their children, perform their rituals, or act toward their fathers-in-law are less influenced by material conditions or are influenced by them only indirectly. The legends they recite, the specific objects they use as religious symbols, and the way they decorate their bodies may have little to do with material forces. Such elements of a cultural system may be only loosely tied to the natural world and to material needs and wants. If so, we cannot account for them without considering people's desires for a meaningful existence, an emotionally gratifying social life, an intellectually satisfying worldview, creative self-expression, and so forth.

So, we avoid the either/or dilemma by pointing out that different orientations are useful for studying different dimensions of culture. Still, people who are new to anthropology are often puzzled by the diversity of approaches within the field. We therefore conclude this chapter by suggesting answers to the question posed in the following section.



## Either, Or, or Both?

The differences between the scientific and humanistic orientations are sometimes presented as conflicting: Humanists often accuse scientists of dehumanizing people in their effort to explain them, whereas scientists claim that humanists are deceiving themselves if they think they can get inside some Other culture.

To some extent, different approaches exist because of the differing interests of anthropologists. For example, scholars whose research areas include subjects such as human-environment relationships, economic systems, or long-term evolutionary changes in societies are likely to find a materialist approach useful. Those who study dimensions such as mythology, art, oral traditions, or worldviews are more likely to fall into the humanistic



## Why Can't All Those Anthropologists Agree?

Physicists, geologists, and other natural scientists generally agree on a set of laws or principles that govern the world. In geology, for example, processes such as sedimentation, plate tectonics, volcanic eruptions, fossilization, and so forth are fairly well understood and account for the main geological features of our planet. Biologists, likewise, believe that the process of evolution produced the diversity of all life on Earth, although the relative importance of natural selection and random events in this process remains uncertain.

Cultural anthropology lacks a comparable set of general principles (as do the other social sciences except



economics). Consider one basic question of the scientific orientation: What are the important causes of the differences and similarities among the world's known cultures? If you could ask 100 anthropologists this question, you would get a multitude of answers. Materialists would mention forces such as climate, resources, population sizes, and technology. Humanistically oriented scholars would say the question itself is wrongheaded because anthropologists should be trying to interact with members of particular cultures and gain an insider's view of them—not to “explain” them. Many would respond that there is no generalized explanation because cultures are so complex and diverse that the most important causes in culture X are not at all important in culture Y. Still others would hold that the question is ethnocentric, and in some cases racist, because it reduces people in other cultures to the status of “objects” of our explanations.

Why don't anthropologists agree about the answer to this question and numerous other basic questions about humanity? Several factors contribute to the absence of consensus.

First, we humans are conscious and self-aware beings who state a variety of reasons for why we do and think what we do and think. The zoologist studying an animal's behavior observes and records the behavior, and then typically tries to identify the elements of the natural and social environment to which the behavior is adapted. But anthropologists must listen to the reasons people themselves give for their behavior. People talk back, and anthropologists must take their talk, as well as their actions, into account.

Second, for ethical reasons, anthropologists do not set up controlled experiments to study how people respond. Suppose—following Steward's lead—we want to study how the natural environment affects cultures. We cannot hold everything constant except the supply of food, water, or shelter and then see how people react when the supply of food, water, or shelter is varied. The only way the anthropologist can “control” conditions is by looking around the world for “natural experiments”—places where the natural environment is similar and peoples with different histories live. We can choose a sample of peoples who live in environments that appear to be similar and then see whether the peoples who live in these places have similar cultures. For example, we might compare indigenous peoples who live in the world's deserts: the Sahara of northern Africa, the Kalahari of southern Africa, the American Southwest, the Gobi of northeast Asia, and so forth. To conduct such a comparative study, we would have to rely on the ethnographic reports written by a multitude of earlier ethnographers, whose reports resulted from their observations and discussions with peoples in the various deserts.

Suppose our comparative study finds, as it will, that the cultures are similar in some respects but different in others. Then other problems arise: natural environments are only similar, never identical. Did we fail to detect a small but critical difference in the environment that might explain the cultural differences? Or, are the differences due to nonenvironmental factors? Likewise, cultures are only similar, never identical. Shall we call customs and beliefs that differ in minor ways between the cultures the “same,” or are the subtle differences between them sufficient to call them “different”? Suppose we decide that some behavior, like sharing food within a village, is the “same” behavior in the cultures. But then we discover that people in several of the cultures give different reasons for the behavior—in culture X, people say they want to help one another, whereas in culture Y, they say they give only because they expect to get something back later. Are both of these behaviors still “sharing food”? Or, should we consider them different because people's stated motivations differ? Such questions are *inherently* difficult to answer when dealing with human beings, and anthropologists cannot sort them out in laboratories or other experimental settings.

Third, fieldworkers study members of their own species. Because they are human, fieldworkers enter their research experience with a culture of their own. This culture inevitably affects their objectivity and, hence, their interactions with the community, their perceptions of what is important, and so forth. Conversely, individuals in the community have their own perceptions, opinions, and biases about the fieldworker. Among the many factors that affect how the community reacts are the fieldworker's physical characteristics, gender, and personality as well as the kinds of questions asked and the historical experience of the community with individuals of the anthropologist's own society. Although most fieldworkers attempt to overcome their own cultural biases and to fit into the community, complete objectivity is impossible. In fact, some contemporary anthropologists think that any ethnography is a “construction”—built out of interactions that another fieldworker would not experience—not a simple report on “facts” about a given group. (We have more to say on such issues in Chapter 5.)

Another possible reason anthropology lacks a common theoretical orientation and an agreed-upon set of principles is quite likely because people become anthropologists for a wider variety of reasons than people become, say, physicists. Some of us study anthropology because of our curiosity about why the human species is so diverse culturally. Others go into the field to further

the cause of social justice—by educating themselves and others about racism, ethnocentrism, colonialism, or sexism, for example. Some want to immerse themselves in travel and interaction with people who are different from themselves, and they become anthropologists because the field provides them with such opportunities. The very broad scope of anthropology (see Chapter 1) helps account for the variety of reasons people choose it as a career: you can study agriculture, family life, political organization, medicine, art, religion, folklore, and almost anything else having to do with humankind. Naturally, people who study topics as diverse as these are unlikely to agree on their theoretical orientations to the field as a whole. Indeed, many of them consciously reject any form of theoretical orientation, preferring to concentrate on researching particular cultures.

In sum, there are four major reasons modern cultural anthropologists have such varied orientations to the study of culture:

1. Our subjects—other human beings—are conscious beings who are aware of their own behavior and state their own reasons for why they do what they do. Human subjects talk back.
2. Anthropologists cannot set up experiments that enable them to control the conditions under which people live, allowing their behavior to be manipulated. Anthropologists observe people as they live their everyday lives.
3. Complete objectivity is impossible to achieve when a researcher is studying humans, both because researchers are culture-bearers and because the subjects of the study react to fieldworkers in varied ways. Ethnographers are different, and they encounter different problems as they work in different places.
4. The broad scope of the field and the enormous diversity of reasons people study anthropology make it unlikely that consensus will emerge. Cultural anthropologists are among the most diverse of scholars.

## Summary

**1 Discuss the global forces that contributed to the emergence of anthropology.** Anthropology originated as a distinct academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, after colonialism intensified contact between peoples of European ancestry and the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific. Darwin’s theory of evolution was one of the main notions that allowed Western intellectuals to make sense of the peoples and cultures of other lands. It seemed to imply that the history of life on Earth was progressive, with simpler organisms evolving into more complex ones.

**2 Describe the main ideas of the nineteenth century unilineal evolutionists.** The nineteenth century unilineal evolutionists applied the notion of evolution to cultures. Using written accounts as their main source of information about Other cultures, they arranged cultures into a sequence of progressive stages, from simple to complex, with Western civilization at the pinnacle. Anthropology thus began as the academic field that studied how humankind progressed out of rude beginnings into a more “civilized” cultural existence.

**3 Understand the ways American historical particularism and British functionalism challenged unilineal evolutionism.** In the early twentieth century,

both American and British anthropologists developed new approaches. The American historical particularists, led by Boas, demolished the speculative schemes of the unilineal evolutionists by arguing that concepts such as “complexity” depend on one’s point of view and thus have little objective meaning. Boas popularized the notion of cultural relativism that remains a hallmark of ethnology today. In Great Britain, functionalists such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown tried to show how the various parts of a culture and its social system serve to meet the needs of individuals and society. Both the historical particularists and the functionalists emphasized the importance of first-hand fieldwork as the surest path to objectivity and as essential for the training of anthropologists.

**4 Describe the mid-twentieth century rebirth of evolutionary interests (neoevolutionism).** In the middle decades of the twentieth century, neoevolutionists like White and Steward returned to cultural evolution, avoiding most mistakes of the nineteenth-century scholars. White emphasized the importance of technology, Steward of adaptation to the local environment, in making cultures the way they are. Both men thought that a people’s methods of acquiring resources (energy, food, and so forth) from nature are the main influences on culture. Both also believed that anthropology should and can be a science.

**5 Discuss the main differences between the scientific and the humanistic approaches to modern anthropological thought.** One very broad division among modern anthropologists is whether their field is primarily a scientific enterprise or a humanistic study. Scientifically oriented scholars believe that people are subjected to the same kinds of natural forces as other animals and that genuine explanations of differences and similarities and long-term changes are possible and desirable. Humanistically inclined anthropologists believe that humanity is such a very unique kind of animal that special tools are required to understand our species and that attempts to explain humans are futile and dehumanizing.

**6 Describe evolutionary psychology, materialism, interpretive anthropology, and postmodernism.** Evolutionary psychology (sociobiology) and materialism are examples of scientific approaches. Evolutionary psychology emphasizes that humans are part of nature and that, like other animals, most of our behavior helps us transmit our genes to future generations. Materialists argue that how a given people organize their groups and pattern their activities to acquire energy and materials from their natural

environment is the major explanation for other aspects of their cultural system. In contrast, humanistically oriented anthropologists mistrust all generalized explanations of cultural phenomena. Interpretive anthropologists emphasize the uniqueness of each culture and favor studying, appreciating, and interpreting each culture individually. Postmodernists think that science in general has no particular claim to Truth and that many scientific ideas taught by schools and colleges reflect power relationships in the wider social and cultural context.

**7 Analyze why contemporary anthropology has no single unifying theoretical orientation.** Contemporary anthropologists do not agree among themselves on many fundamental questions, including even the major objectives of their field. Their lack of consensus is understandable, given that their (human) subjects are self-conscious and willful beings; that anthropologists cannot experiment with people's lives; that total objectivity in fieldwork is impossible; and that the field studies such diverse subjects that a single theoretical orientation is unlikely to be able to encompass all of them.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 5 METHODS OF INVESTIGATION



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## **Ethnographic Methods**

*Ethnographic Fieldwork*

*Problems and Issues in Field Research*

*Fieldwork as a Rite of Passage*

*Ethnohistory*

## **Comparative Methods**

*Cross-Cultural Comparisons*

*Controlled Comparisons*



Margaret Mead's highly innovative field studies in Samoa and New Guinea made her one of the most widely read anthropologists of the twentieth century.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** the two major objectives of cultural research and the two broad categories of methods used.
- 2 **Understand** that ethnographic research requires two different methods of study.
- 3 **Describe** the methods used to study the culture of a contemporary or living group of people and the problems these researchers face.
- 4 **Describe** the method used to study the past cultures and the problems involved in ethnohistoric research.
- 5 **Understand** the purpose of comparative research, how comparative methods differ from ethnographic methods, and the problems involved.
- 6 **Explain** cross-cultural comparisons and their problems.
- 7 **Describe** controlled comparative studies and their problems.

Anthropological research has two purposes: (1) to collect and record descriptive data about the cultures of specific peoples (**ethnography**), and (2) to explain the past and present diversity found in cultural systems in the world (**ethnology**). Recognizing that the cultural system of a people is constantly changing, research is further divided into studies that describe a culture at one period in time (**synchronic**) and research that studies the changes in culture of a people over time (**diachronic**). As a result, research can be grouped into four broad categories, each with its own methodologies (see Table 5.1). However, it is important to note that any particular study may actually involve the use of two or more methodologies. For example, it is very common for ethnographic studies to combine both

ethnographic field research and ethnohistoric research, as seen in Table 5.1.

**TABLE-5-1** Research Methodologies

	Ethnography	Ethnology
Synchronic	Ethnographic Fieldwork	Cross-Cultural Comparisons
Diachronic	Ethnohistoric Research	Controlled Comparisons



## Ethnographic Methods

There are two sources of cultural data about a particular people: the living members of the society and written accounts or other records about that group of people. Collecting cultural data by studying and interviewing living members of a society is called **ethnographic fieldwork**. Studying a people's culture using written accounts and other records is termed **ethnohistoric research**.

### Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork, the most commonly used research method, involves the collection of cultural data from living individuals. The researcher lives with

- ethnography** The description of a specific culture.
- ethnology** The study of human cultures from a comparative perspective.
- synchronic** The description of a culture at one period in time.
- diachronic** Studies of changes in a culture over time.
- ethnographic fieldwork.** Collection of information from living people about their way of life; *see also fieldwork.*
- ethnohistoric research** The study of past cultures using written accounts and other documents.

or close to the people being studied and interacts with them on a day-to-day basis for a long period, usually a year or more. Not infrequently, the anthropologist has to learn the group's language and behave according to the group's social norms. By its very nature, fieldwork fosters a close personal relationship between the researcher and members of the society being studied. This social closeness between researchers and the people they study distinguishes anthropologists from other social scientists.

Anthropologists have always used fieldwork as the primary method for collecting cultural information. Over the past century, the objectives of fieldwork have changed and with it the data-gathering techniques. Today, a number of techniques are used in the course of any research project.

**Interviewing** is the most basic method of collecting cultural data. The anthropologist asks questions and elicits answers from members of the society being studied. Interviews may be structured or unstructured. A *structured interview* consists of a limited number of specific questions. It may take the form of a questionnaire the researcher fills in as the questions are answered. This type of interview is best suited for collecting general quantitative data about the group. For example, most research begins with a census of the community: the number of people in each family, their ages and relationships, and basic economic information about the family. In this manner, the researcher constructs demographic and economic profiles of the group. Structured interviews are also used to create genealogies. Most research requires a clear knowledge of how group members are related to one another. Genealogies are important in understanding the social and economic behavior of individuals beyond the immediate family. There are, however, limits to the utility of structured interviews.

In *unstructured interviews*, the researcher asks open-ended questions, hoping that the respondent will elaborate on the answers. The questions may be general, about family life, marriage, a particular religious ritual, or economic activity. Most cultural data are collected through unstructured interviews. In these interviews, the researcher learns the cultural explanations for information collected in the structured interviews.

Although it is the source of most cultural data, interviewing has severe limitations. The problem usually is not with the answers given by the members of the group, but rather with the questions asked by the researcher. What is relevant or irrelevant to the proper understanding of a particular cultural phenomenon depends on the culture of the individuals involved. Initially, the researcher does not understand

the cultural context of the data and thus does not know what questions need to be asked and answered. The early stages of a research project are often characterized by “shotgun” questioning as the anthropologist seeks to learn enough about the culture to ask the right questions. Through interviewing, a researcher can gain a good basic knowledge of a culture's major structural features. However, no matter how knowledgeable and willing the respondents might be, verbal descriptions in themselves are incomplete and do not enable the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of the people or an understanding of the true dynamics of their culture.

To understand the limitations of interviewing, ask yourself this question: If an anthropologist from another culture asked you to describe a baseball game, what would you say? How complete would your description be? Chances are, if you are an avid fan, you could relate enough information for the anthropologist to gain a basic understanding of the game. You could tell how many players are on each side and explain the basic rules about balls, strikes, runs, errors, and innings. However, from memory alone, it would be impossible to explain everything that might occur during a game. Every baseball game, like every other cultural event, is to some degree unique. From memory alone, it is impossible for you to explain everything that might actually occur during a game. The best you could do is give the researcher an idealized model of a baseball game. Certain facts would be left untold, not because you were hiding them but because they are either so commonplace or so unusual that they are not part of your consciousness concerning the game. Interviews alone can give the researcher only a simplified overview of a particular cultural phenomenon, an idealized model.

If researchers want to truly understand baseball, they cannot simply talk to someone about it; they need to see a game. In fact, researchers should observe several games and discuss what occurred with a knowledgeable person. It would be even better for researchers to participate, at least in a minor way, in some games. Only by combining interviewing with observing and participating can one begin to more fully understand the rules and dynamics of the game. So it is with the study of any cultural phenomenon.

**interviewing** Collecting cultural data by systematic questioning; may be structured (using questionnaires) or unstructured (open-ended).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropologists relied primarily on interviews alone to collect cultural data. This technique was well suited to the anthropological objectives of that time. The traditional lifestyles of non-Western peoples were rapidly changing in many parts of the world, and anthropologists were concerned about collecting as much cultural data as possible before knowledge of these ways of life disappeared. This was particularly true in North America, where Native American groups had already been placed on reservations, and their economies and cultures had drastically changed. Anthropologists wanted to learn about earlier Native American lifestyles before all knowledge of the pre-reservation period was lost. Researchers could not observe, let alone participate in a bison hunt or the organizing of a war party. The only way the pre-reservation culture of these peoples could be studied was by interviewing individuals who had grown to adulthood before the reservations were created. Today, we refer to this early use of interviewing alone as **recall ethnography**. In a relatively short period, anthropologists were able to collect, and thus preserve, a vast body of general descriptive data on Native American cultures.

In the 1920s, anthropologists' interest began to shift from just recording descriptions of the general culture of a society to attempting to understand the basic dynamics of cultural systems. In other words, anthropologists wanted to see how these systems worked and how their parts fit together. A leader in this change was Bronislaw Malinowski, mentioned earlier in the discussion of functionalism in Chapter 4, who popularized a new data-collection technique called **participant observation**. Anthropologists no longer merely recorded and analyzed people's statements. To a greater or lesser extent, they took up residence with the people they were studying and began trying to learn about the culture by observing people in their daily lives and participating in their daily activities.

Participant observation has often been misinterpreted, even by some anthropologists who have taken it too literally. It does not mean becoming a full participant in the activities of the people—in other words, “going native.” The emphasis of this technique is more on observation than on

participation. Participant observation usually does require that one live in the community because only by doing so can one observe and record the behavior of individuals as they go about their daily work, visit their friends, interact with their relatives, participate in rituals, and so on. These observations of behavior serve to generate new questions. Why does a man share food with some families but not with others? Why do some women wear their hair in a particular style? Does a particular color of clothing have any meaning? Some behaviors have significance; others do not. For example, variations in hairstyles may be merely the result of personal preferences, or they may reflect status differences. Color may or may not have special significance. In American society, black symbolizes mourning, but in other societies, covering one's body with white clay symbolizes the same emotion. Participant observation allows the researcher to collect more detailed data than does interviewing alone and thus it makes possible a deeper understanding of interrelationships between cultural phenomena.

Firsthand observations of the members of a society also enable the researcher to see how people diverge from the culturally defined, idealized model of behavior. An incident that occurred while Malinowski was working in the Trobriand Islands illustrates the divergence between cultural norms—the way people say they ought to behave—and the way they actually behave. One day, Malinowski heard a commotion in the village and discovered that a young boy in a neighboring village had committed suicide by climbing a palm tree and flinging himself onto the beach. In his earlier questioning of the islanders, Malinowski had been told that sexual relations between a man and his mother's sister's daughters were prohibited. On inquiring into the suicide of the young boy, Malinowski found that the boy had been sexually involved with his mother's sister's daughter and that such incestuous relationships were not rare. So long as such liaisons were not mentioned in public, they were ignored. In this particular case, the girl's ex-boyfriend had become angry and publicly exposed the transgression. Although everyone in the village already knew of this incestuous relationship, by making it public the ex-boyfriend exposed his rival to ridicule, thus causing him to commit suicide. It is doubtful that such behavior could have been discovered by only interviewing individuals.

## *Problems and Issues in Field Research*

Every fieldwork experience is unique. Thus, specific problems differ, depending on the personal characteristics of the researcher, the nature of the community, and

**recall ethnography** The attempt to reconstruct a cultural system at a slightly earlier period by interviewing older individuals who lived during that period.

**participant observation** The main technique used in conducting ethnographic fieldwork, involving living among a people and participating in their daily activities.

the particular questions being studied. There are, however, three difficulties that, to varying degrees and in different ways, affect virtually every field research situation: (1) stereotyping, (2) defining the fieldworker's role in the community and developing rapport, and (3) identifying and interviewing consultants.

### *Stereotyping*

When we think of stereotypes—preconceived generalizations concerning a particular group of people—we usually think only of their effects on the perceptions of one party of a relationship. Anthropologists ask themselves how they can overcome their own stereotypes and cultural biases about the people they study. Stereotyping, however, is a two-way street. Every society has beliefs or stereotypes concerning members of other societies and of ethnic and racial groups. Thus, although the goal is for anthropologists to put aside their personal stereotypes sufficiently to research the cultural system of another people with some degree of objectivity, those with whom the ethnographer will be living and studying will not have put aside their own biases and beliefs about other people. Although most anthropologists have been and still are of European ancestry, most subjects of anthropological research are non-European peoples. Even if a particular anthropologist is of Asian, African, or Native American ancestry, a similar problem exists because anthropologists seldom belong to the local community they study and thus are outsiders. As a result, an anthropologist who enters another community must contend with local stereotypes about the ethnic or racial group with which the anthropologist is identified.

In the case of anthropologists of European ancestry, local stereotyping has most frequently been derived from contact with only a limited range of individuals such as missionaries, soldiers, government officials, tourists, or people involved in economic development projects. Regardless of the nature and intensity of this contact, most non-Western peoples have well-developed ideas about the expected behavior of such individuals. The tendency of local people to attempt to fit the ethnographer into one of their existing stereotypical categories can at times prove a burden for fieldworkers. Anthropologists' behavior seldom conforms to the model that the local people have developed. Thus, an anthropologist attempting to gain social acceptance in such a society is typically met with suspicion, if not at times with hostility. The types of questions anthropologists ask about behavior and beliefs frequently arouse suspicions further and elicit guarded answers. Why does this researcher want to know about our family structure, political organization, and ritual secrets? What is the person going to do with this

information? While the anthropologist is trying to understand the community, the members of the community are attempting to understand the anthropologist's motives. Depending on the nature of previous contacts, some types of questions may provoke more suspicion than others. For example, a minority or tribal group involved in some illegal or illicit activity—such as smuggling, poaching, or growing drugs—may wonder whether the anthropologist will inform government authorities. Members of groups that have been exposed to Western culture frequently assume that the ethnographer's objective is to make money and that researchers become wealthy by publishing books.

In other cases, members of the community may be aware that Europeans and Euro-Americans do not approve of or believe in certain types of behaviors, and few people will disclose information on topics they think will be met with disapproval or scorn. This reticence is particularly evident for certain types of religious beliefs and practices. As a result of the extensive activities of Christian missionaries, most non-Western peoples are well aware that Westerners usually deny the validity of witchcraft and the existence of werewolves. Members of societies that hold such beliefs are usually hesitant about discussing these subjects with Westerners. They are understandably reluctant to talk openly about an uncle who they believe can turn himself into a deer or a snake with someone who will probably view what they say as ridiculous. Likewise, they probably would hesitate to say that their father had been killed by a witch if they thought the researcher did not believe in witchcraft.

### *Developing a role and rapport*

Often against a background of suspicion and distrust, an anthropologist has to develop a rapport with the members of the community. *Rapport* in this sense means acceptance to the degree that a working relationship is possible. Although ethnographers are rarely totally accepted by the people among whom they work, over a period of time, most anthropologists succeed in gaining some degree of trust and friendship, among members of the group.

The particular role or roles that anthropologists eventually define for themselves within a society vary greatly with the circumstances of the particular situation. Depending on the amount and nature of research funding, an anthropologist may be an important economic resource for the community, paying wages to interpreters and assistants or distributing desirable goods as gifts. Anthropologists who have a car, truck, or other means of transportation frequently find themselves providing needed transportation for members of the community. Ethnographers may also



**E**thics, research, and intellectual and privacy rights. What culture topics should or can an anthropologist study? What cultural data collected should or can be published? In the early days of anthropology, these were solely ethical questions. However, over the past few decades, these questions have increasingly become legal questions involved with intellectual property rights as well as privacy rights of indigenous peoples.

While anthropologists are increasingly researching urban western societies, for the most part the communities studied by cultural anthropologists have been and still are those of relatively small non-Western indigenous peoples who are often powerless relative to the members of the societies who control the countries in which they live. Because of the nature of their research, anthropologists are often aware of behaviors within these communities that are not known to outsiders and which could be used by nonmembers to exploit or otherwise damage the community.

Once published or otherwise made public, the researcher loses control of the information collected. Recognizing the often venerability of the people we study, anthropologists have long been concerned about the possible misuse of the research data. The code of ethics of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) has long emphasized that the primary obligation of the researcher is to the community being studied and not the discipline. For the most part, cultural anthropologists have been extremely diligent in attempting to protect communities studied from possible exploitation by outside groups. In many cases, researchers have not published or otherwise made public, certain types of cultural data which they think might be potentially harmful to the community. Margaret Mead (1932) for example disguised the identity of a Native American community she studied by giving them a pseudonym, the "Antlers." However, "harm" is a highly subjective term. Cultural data that a western trained academic might judge as "harmless" may not be seen as "harmless" by members of the community being studied. This difference in perspective has become more apparent in recent decades as indigenous peoples have increasingly asserted their political and legal rights. Today, these questions as to the topics we should or should not study and the cultural data we should or should not publish are no longer just moral or ethical questions, but increasing legal issues as well.

Cultural Anthropology developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a response to the destruction of the small indigenous societies in world, particularly those in the

Americas and the Pacific. Since these peoples had no writing systems, these societies were disappearing leaving no record of their cultural accomplishments, behaviors, beliefs and cultural knowledge. To anthropologists, an important part of the collective cultural achievements of humanity was being lost. With every passing year, individuals in many of these communities were dying, taking with them important knowledge that would be lost forever. Thus, early anthropologists worked with a sense of urgency attempting to create permanent records of virtually every aspect of the cultures of these vanishing peoples. In their zeal to save a record of these practices for posterity, they did not at the time think in terms of native intellectual property rights or rights of privacy and even frequently circumvented attempts by indigenous communities to protect this knowledge. Their justification was that these societies were going to disappear in a generation or two, thus no harm was done or could be done.

The research of Leslie White, one of the most prominent American anthropologists of the mid-twentieth century, illustrates anthropological research practices of this era. From the late 1920s until the mid-1950s, White was actively involved in field research among the Pueblos of New Mexico. In 1962, he published *The Pueblo of Sia New Mexico*. In western society, religious beliefs and practices usually fall into the public domain; in other words, no attempt is made to hide or disguise them from others. The same is not true in many non-Western societies. Religious beliefs and practices are frequently the exclusive property of formally organized groups, or societies and their initiated members. In his introduction, White (1962:17) notes ". . . the pueblo, as a community, takes a firm stand on the question of secrecy. . . ." This was particularly true concerning the teaching and rituals of their religious societies. However, ". . . there are occasional individuals who realize full well that the culture of their people is disappearing and who realize full well that the culture of their people is rapidly disappearing and who feel that a record of it should be made and preserved. It is the ethnographer's task to 'scent out' such individuals. . . ." He further states that "So great is the necessity of secrecy that an individual is unwilling to have a member of his own family know that he is helping an anthropologist." Thus, White was well aware of the fact that what he was publishing was not public knowledge and something that the members of the pueblo would have strongly disapproved of, had they known.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, Charles Mountford, an Australian anthropologist and photographer, conducted research among the Pitjantjatjara people of Australia's Northern Territory. Of particular interest to Mountford were their religious

provide comic relief by asking "silly questions," behaving in a funny manner, making childlike errors in speaking the language, and generally being amusing

to have around. Researchers may also be a source of information about the outside world, disclosing information to which local people would not otherwise have

rituals and sacred sites. In 1976, the same year as his death, Mountford published what most consider his major study, *Nomads of the Australian Desert*. The Pitjantjatjara quickly filed a lawsuit seeking a permanent injunction against the distribution of the book in the Northern Territory of Australia where they lived. The Pitjantjatjara argued that at the time of his research, Mountford had promised them that he would not make available to inappropriate individuals the sacred information that had been related to him. Now, thirty years later, the book made available secret ritual data, complete with photographs. They were not concerned that non-Pitjantjatjarahad access to this information and knowledge, but that their own children, women, and uninitiated men could now learn about them and that this would undermine the religious and social stability of the community. The court ruled in their favor. In 1982, following the announcement that Mountford photographic slide collection would be sold at auction, the Pitjantjatjara Council again filed a law suit to block their display and sale, arguing that the slides were taken by Mountford for his own personal use. The court ordered the auctioneer and the owner of the slides to deliver up possession of the slides so that representative of the Pitjantjatjara Council could inspect the slides. Slides dealing with secret or sacred material were selected out and the court ordered that these slides and related materials in the collection were the property of the Pitjantjatjara Council. These two cases are the first legal cases in which the intellectual property rights of an indigenous group were legally recognized in a Western court.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, indigenous communities throughout the world began attempting to reclaim much of their lost autonomy and authority. To this end, increasingly well educated and political sophisticated native leaders have made use of the courts, the existing political systems, and public opinion in the protection of their rights. Through their efforts in 2007, the U.N. General Assembly adopted “The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.” Although the declaration is primarily concerned with the rights of indigenous peoples relative to the economic, social, and cultural policies of their national governments, two articles in the declaration pertain to the issue of cultural research. Article 11 states that indigenous peoples have “. . . the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of the cultures, such as . . . artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.” It further states that “States shall provide redress through effective mechanism, which may include restitution, . . . with respect to

their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.” Article 31 further states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seed, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.” Although this is a nonbinding resolution, meaning that compliance is voluntary, it does establish a new standard to which anthropologist are morally obligated to adhere. While the code of ethics of the American Anthropological Association has long stated that researchers should have the informed consent of the community being studied, the declaration added a new dimension to these ethical requirements. In 2009, the code of ethics of the AAA was revised adding the provisions that “There are circumstances where disclosure restrictions are appropriate and ethical, particularly where those restrictions serve to protect the safety, dignity or privacy of participants, protect cultural heritage or tangible or intangible cultural or intellectual property.” It further states “Anthropologists should not work clandestinely or misrepresent the nature, purpose, intended outcome, distribution or sponsorship of their research.” In other words, research such as that of White and Mountford would not meet the professional ethical standards of today.

Cultural knowledge is increasingly being viewed in terms of intellectual property and the dissemination of certain knowledge as a violation of property rights. Many native groups, such as the Hopi and Navajo in the United States and the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders in Australia, in attempts to protect their collective intellectual properties and privacy, have adopted formal policies for particular types of research and the use of research materials. The questions as to what topics a researcher may study, what information a researcher may publish, and what constitutes informed consent of the community are no longer defined solely by the code of ethics of the AAA and other professional organizations, but by law and formal polities created by indigenous groups themselves. As a result, research is increasingly becoming a collaborative effort for the mutual benefit of both the researcher and community being studied.

access. Sometimes community members are as curious about the anthropologist’s society as the anthropologist is about theirs. Or the anthropologist may be

considered just a harmless nuisance. During the course of research, the typical fieldworker adopts most of these roles, plus many others.



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Among the earliest anthropological researchers and writers was Francis LaFlesche (1857-1932), an Omaha Indian from Nebraska.

### Identifying and interviewing consultants

Ethnographers learn a good deal about people simply by living among them and observing and participating in many of their activities. However, observation and participation alone are insufficient. We want to know not only what people are doing but also why they are doing it. Because certain realms of culture are not observable (e.g., religious beliefs, myths, stories, and social values), the researcher has to interview members of the group.

An individual who supplies the ethnographer with information is called a **consultant, (informant)**. Field research involves the help of many consultants, who sometimes are paid for their services. Just as no one individual is equally well informed about every aspect of our own cultural system, so no one person in another society is equally knowledgeable about every aspect of that society's way of life. Women are more knowledgeable

than men concerning certain things, and vice versa. Shamans and priests know more about religious rituals than other people do. The elderly members of the community are usually most knowledgeable about myths, stories, and histories. Thus, the anthropologist has to attempt to identify and interview those most knowledgeable about the particular subject or subjects being studied. Individuals whom the local community considers to be expert in some particular area are known as **key consultants, or key informant**.

A number of factors affect the quality and accuracy of the data collected through interviewing. It is important to always remember that the members of the community are just like any other group of people. Whether they are fully cooperative or not, individuals differ in their abilities to recall specific facts. Still other individuals are actually misinformed, or for various reasons deliberately misinform the researcher. There is a widespread belief among many younger Native Americans that their "ancestors" frequently and deliberately gave anthropologists misinformation about their culture. Did this happen? It undoubtedly did occur. Also, Native American people love to joke, and a naïve researcher would be a likely victim of their humor. For example, Osage men wear a roach made out of deer tail and turkey beard or porcupine hair on their heads at dances. During a dance, an Osage was overheard telling an inquisitive visitor that these roaches were made of horse tails, and that a young Osage man proved his manhood by cutting the hair for his roach from the tail of the meanest horse he could find. In this case, the Osage was simply joking. Undoubtedly, many cultural researchers have also been "victims" of such humor. Cultural barriers also make it difficult to collect certain types of data. For example, collecting genealogies is not always as easy as it might seem because in many societies, it is customary not to speak the names of the dead. Among the Yanomamö Venezuela and Brazil, not only is it taboo to speak the names of the dead, but it is also considered discourteous to speak the names of prominent living men, for whom kinship terms are used whenever possible. When ethnographer Napoleon Chagnon persisted in his attempts to collect genealogies, the Yanomamö responded by inventing a series of fictitious genealogical relationships. Only after five months of intensive research did Chagnon discover the hoax. When he mentioned some of the names he had collected during a visit to a neighboring village, the people responded with "uncontrollable laughter" because his informants had made up names such as "hairy rectum" and "eagle shit" to avoid speaking the real names. Some of this misinformation has probably worked its way into the ethnographic literature. However, to avoid these and other difficulties,

**consultant, (informant)** a member of a society who provides information to a fieldworker, often through formal interviews or surveys.

**key consultant (informant)** A member of a society who is especially knowledgeable about some subject and who supplies information to a fieldworker.

anthropologists try to interview a number of individuals separately about specific points to gain independent verifications.

### *Fieldwork as a Rite of Passage*

Fieldwork is important to cultural anthropologists not just because it is our primary source of data on human cultures but also because it is a key aspect of the anthropologist's education. It is one thing to read ethnographies about other ways of life, but it is something quite different to live among and interact with individuals from another cultural tradition daily for a year or longer. As we have seen, anthropologists usually live in the native community, submerging themselves in the social life of the people, living in native dwellings, eating local foods, learning the language, and participating as fully as an outsider is allowed in daily activities. Living as social minorities, usually for the first time in their lives, anthropologists depend on the goodwill of people whose norms and values they neither totally understand nor completely accept. Under these conditions, the researcher has to adjust their behavior to fit the norms and behavior patterns of the people they are studying. This modification of the fieldworker's own behavior is a necessary part of learning about the community. During the course of their research, anthropologists will violate, or at least be perceived as violating, some of the societal norms of behavior. Such incidents may destroy the rapport gained with some key consultants or result in the researcher being ostracized. In serious cases, the fieldworker may become the target of physical violence.

When in the field, except on rare occasions, the anthropologist is the uninvited guest of the community. Regardless of how researchers may rationalize their work as being for the long-term good of the community, science, or humanity in general, they are basically there to serve their own needs and interests. If a serious problem develops between the anthropologist and members of the community, the fieldworker must bear the primary responsibility and blame.

The fieldwork experience tests and taxes the attitude of cultural relativity (as discussed in Chapter 1) that anthropologists teach in their classrooms. It is easy to discuss the concept of cultural relativity in a university setting, but it is more difficult to apply this concept when actually living with another group of people. Regardless of which society it is, certain cultural aspects will offend one's own cultural norms and values. For example, according to the anthropologist's own social norms, some local people

might "abuse" certain family members or certain powerful leaders might "exploit" lower-ranking members of the society. As the fieldworker develops friendships, this "abuse" or "exploitation" frequently becomes personalized. Under what circumstances, if ever, an anthropologist should attempt to intervene and try to impose her or his cultural standards on the members of another society poses a real and personal dilemma. In theory, such intervention is never permissible, but in real-life situations, the answer is not always so clear.

Many people experience a kind of psychological trauma when surrounded by people speaking a language they cannot fully understand and can speak only imperfectly, eating foods that are strange, seeing architecture that is alien, and observing people using gestures and behaving in ways they either do not comprehend or do not approve of. The strange sounds, smells, tastes, sights, and behaviors result in disorientation. Out of their normal cultural context, fieldworkers do not understand what is happening around them, yet realize that their own actions are often misunderstood. The symptoms of **culture shock** are psychological and sometimes even physiological: paranoia, anxiety, longing for the folks back home, nausea, hypochondria, and, frequently, diarrhea.

The attempts by ethnographers to maintain their relativistic perspective and objectivity in their daily interaction with members of the other society usually compound the normal trauma of culture shock. Socially isolated and unable to release their frustrations and anxieties through conversations with sympathetic others, they often have to cope with their psychological difficulties alone.

For many anthropologists, much of their time in the field is extremely traumatic, and as a result, most anthropologists view fieldwork as a rite of passage. More than any other aspect of their training, fieldwork transforms students of anthropology into professional anthropologists. Although many overemphasize the importance of fieldwork, it is undeniably a significant educational experience. Most individuals return from their fieldwork with a different perspective on themselves and their own culture. Fieldwork often teaches us as much about ourselves and our own culture as about the culture of the peoples we are studying.

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**culture shock** The feeling of uncertainty and anxiety an individual experiences when placed in a strange cultural setting.



## Ethnohistory

The study of past cultural systems through the use of written records is called **ethnohistory**. Since the late nineteenth century, anthropologists have used written materials in their studies, but the importance of this research has been widely recognized only since the 1970s. The growing interest in ethnohistory has come with the realization that non-Western societies have changed far more dramatically over the past few hundred years than had previously been thought.

Like historians who study their society's past, ethnohistorians make use of such materials as published books and articles, newspapers, archival documents, diaries, journals, maps, drawings, and photographs. Not surprisingly, many scholars treat history and ethnohistory as if they were synonymous. There are, however, critical-yet frequently overlooked-differences between ethnohistory and history.

- An ethnohistorian is primarily interested in reconstructing the cultural system of the people. The actual historical events themselves are of interest only because they cast light on the cultural system or changes in the system.
- Historical events have little significance outside the cultural context of the peoples involved. Ethnohistorians study nonliterate peoples. Thus, whereas historians can use accounts recorded by members of the society being studied, ethnohistorians have to use accounts recorded by members of other literate societies. As a result, the problem of interpreting accounts is far more difficult for the ethnohistorian than for the historian.

The problem of interpretation raises an additional question about the validity of particular reports. Not only do we have to ask about the accuracy of the account, but we also have to ask how knowledgeable the recorder was about the cultural context of the events. Ethnohistorians use certain criteria to evaluate the potential validity of an account. How long did the writer live among these people? Did the observer speak the language? What was the observer's role? Soldiers, missionaries, traders, and government officials have different views, biases, and access to information.

The difficulty with ethnohistory is that no hard-and-fast rules can be used in evaluating these data. The longer an individual lived among members of a particular society

and the better the person spoke the language, the more reliable the account should be; however, this cannot be automatically assumed. In some cases, the writer may have had little interest in the people, perhaps because the contacts were only related to a job. This attitude is evident in the accounts of many traders and government officials. In other cases, the account may be self-serving, with individuals attempting to enhance their careers. Thus, sometimes soldiers and government officials falsified their official reports. Ethnocentrism is still another factor. Missionary accounts, in particular, often demonstrate overt bias against local customs and beliefs; one has to remember that individuals become missionaries because they are avid believers. Nevertheless, some of the most objective accounts of other societies were written by missionaries who were scholars themselves.

Thus, in ethnohistoric research, there is no simple way to evaluate a particular document or account. At best, a single event may be recorded in several independent accounts that can each be used to verify the accuracy and interpretation of the others. Unfortunately, multiple observations are the exception, not the rule.

A final limitation on the use of ethnohistoric materials is that seldom are all aspects of a particular society evenly reported. For example, data on economic activities may be the most abundant, whereas information on religious ceremonies and beliefs may be absent or limited. As a result, ethnographic studies based on ethnohistoric research alone usually lack the depth and balance of studies gained from field research. Despite its problems and limitations, however, ethnohistoric research provides us with the only clues we have to the past of many societies, as well as the key to a vast store of cultural data hitherto untapped.



## Comparative Methods

So far, we have discussed only how anthropologists collect cultural data on peoples, past and present, using fieldwork and historical materials. We have some cultural data available on more than 1200 societies. As shown in the following chapters, anthropologists have used these data to demonstrate a wide range of cultural variability among human populations. However, we are not interested in merely describing particular cultural systems and the range of variability they display. We are also interested in attempting to explain why these differences exist. In other words, anthropologists want to make generalizations concerning cultural systems. Generalizations cannot be made based on the

**ethnohistory** See **ethnohistoric research**.

study of a single society; we need methods by which many societies can be compared in a systematic way. The objective of comparative studies is to test hypotheses.

Comparative research dates back to the earliest day of anthropology. The research of the unilineal evolutionist of the late of the nineteenth century, Tylor and Morgan, (discussed in Chapter 4) was based on comparative studies. However, there were some serious methodological problems in this early comparative research which resulted in the abandonment of this approach. In 1937, a group of social scientists at Yale led by George Peter Murdock produced the Outline of Cultural Materials, the first universal systematic scheme to topically classify cultural variables. This led to the establishment of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) in 1949. HRAF created the “Collection of Ethnography,” mainly published books and articles on about 400 different societies in the world, which are indexed for 710 subject categories. This allows for quick retrieval of relevant cultural material on specific topics. Later, between 1962–1967, Murdock compiled his *Ethnographic Atlas*, in which he coded cultural variables on 100 topics for 1167 different societies, allowing researchers to analyze the correlations between a limited range of cultural variables without consulting the ethnographic literature. HRAF and the *Ethnographic Atlas* revolutionized comparative studies (see <http://www.yale.edu/hraf>).

### Cross-Cultural Comparisons

By far, the most frequently used comparative method is **cross-cultural comparisons**. In this method, hypotheses are tested by examining the statistical correlations between particular cultural variables, using synchronic data drawn from a number of societies. Historical changes in the societies examined are ignored; the societies are compared at whatever period they were studied or on which relevant cultural data exist. The HRAF, for example, allows one not just to compare variables between twentieth-century peoples throughout the world, but with imperial Romans, sixteenth-century Aztecs, and many other earlier societies as well. This research method involves three steps. First, the researcher must state the idea as a hypothesis—that is, state it in such a way that it can be supported or not supported (“tested”) by data drawn from a large number of human populations. Second, the ethnologist chooses a sample of societies (usually randomly) and studies the ethnographies that describe their way of life. Third, the data collected from these ethnographies are

classified and grouped in such a manner that the correlations between variables may be shown statistically. What the researcher is attempting to find is the pattern of association: Do two or more cultural variables consistently occur together or not? In most cases, these tasks are far more difficult than they may sound.

To illustrate how the cross-cultural method is used to test a hypothesis, we shall examine the relationship between sorcery and legal systems within a group of societies. Sorcery is discussed in some detail in Chapter 13. Here, it is sufficient to know that sorcery is the belief that certain people (sorcerers) have power, either supernatural or magical, to cause harm to others. Some anthropologists believe that sorcery serves as a means of social control in societies that lack a formalized legal apparatus—courts, police, and so forth—to punish wrongdoers. They argue that people will be reluctant to cause trouble if they believe that a victim of their troublemaking has the ability to use supernatural power to retaliate against them. Overall, societies without a formal legal system should have a greater need for a mechanism such as sorcery to control behavior. So, if the hypothesis that sorcery is a mechanism for social control is correct, we ought to find that sorcery is more important in societies that have no formal means of punishment than in societies with a specialized legal system.

To see whether this hypothesis is true across a variety of societies, we use the cross-cultural method. We determine for many societies (1) the relative degree of importance of sorcery and (2) whether the society has a formal apparatus for punishing wrongdoing. We make a table in which all the possible combinations of the two cultural elements are recorded:

Sorcery	Specialized Legal Apparatus	Absent Present
Important	A	B
Unimportant	C	D

In the cells of the table, we record the number of societies in which the four possible combinations are found. If the hypothesis is supported, we should find that cells A and D contain the greatest number of

**cross-cultural comparisons** A methodology for testing a hypothesis using a sample of societies drawn from around the world.

societies. If the hypothesis is not supported, we should find that the distribution of societies in the cells is random, or that cells B and C contain the greatest number of societies, or some other distribution.

In 1950, Beatrice Whiting conducted such a study by surveying the ethnographic literature for 50 societies. Her results were as follows (Whiting 1950, 87):

Sorcery	Specialized Legal Apparatus	Absent Present
Important	30	5
Unimportant	3	12

On the basis of this comparison, we might conclude that the hypothesis is supported because most of the societies fall into the cells predicted by our hypothesis. We would not worry about the eight societies (the “exceptions”) that appear in cells B and C. The hypothesis did not claim that social control was the *only* function of sorcery, so the importance of sorcery in the five societies in cell B might be explained by some other factor. Nor did we claim that sorcery was the *only* way that societies lacking a specialized legal apparatus had to control their members, so the three societies in cell C might have developed some alternative means of social control. (Although outside the scope of this text, statistical tests are available that show how confident a researcher can be that such associations did not occur by chance.)

Some confusion is caused by cross-cultural tabulations such as this. One of the most common is to mistake correlation for causation: Simply because two cultural elements (X and Y) are usually found together does not mean that one (X) has caused the other (Y). Y could have caused X, or both X and Y could have been caused by some third element, W. In the preceding example, it was assumed that the absence of formal legal punishments “caused” many societies to need some other social control mechanism, and that sorcery became important to meet this need. On the basis of the data in the table, we might also conclude that societies in which sorcery is important have little need for a formal legal apparatus, so they fail to develop one.

This approach suffers from several disadvantages, the most important of which is the problem of bias by the researcher, who must decide, for example, whether sorcery should be considered “important” or “unimportant” among some people. Borderline cases might get lumped into the category that supports the researcher’s hypothesis.

Using cross-cultural methods to see whether some specific hypothesis applies to a large number of societies is thus easier today than ever before, but some difficulties still exist. One seems to be inherent in the method itself, which dissects whole cultures into parts (“variables,” as we called them) and assigns a value (or “state”) to each part. In the preceding example, the variables were sorcery, which had two states (important, unimportant) and specialized legal apparatus, which also had two states (present, absent). To test the hypothesis that the states of these two cultural elements are consistently related, we ignored everything else about them. We also ignored everything else about the societies in the sample, such as their family systems and their economies.

A more familiar example makes the point clearly. One element of cultural systems is the number of gods in whom people believe. For purposes of some specific hypothesis, the possible states of this variable might be monotheism (belief in one god), polytheism (belief in many gods), and no gods. Any researcher who included modern North America in the sample would probably consider our primary religion-Christianity-as monotheistic. Most of the Middle East also would be considered monotheistic. The problem is: Can North American monotheism be considered equivalent to Middle Eastern monotheisms? If we consider them the same, we ignore the differences between the worship of the Christian God, the Jewish Yahweh, and the Islamic Allah. When we lump these three varieties of monotheism together into a single kind of religion, we distort them to some degree.

Cross-cultural studies examine data ahistorically, or without reference to time. In other words, the cultural system of a particular society is treated as timeless or unchanging. Thus, in cross-cultural studies and the *Ethnographic Atlas*, there is “a” cultural system coded for the Cheyenne: Cheyenne cultural system circa 1850. However, the culture of a society is constantly changing. For example, today the Cheyenne live in houses, drive cars and trucks, and participate in a wage-money economy. In 1850, the Cheyenne lived in hide-covered tepees, rode horses, and hunted buffalo. In 1650, the Cheyenne lived in permanent earth lodge villages, traveled by foot or canoe, and depended on farming and hunting for their subsistence. Although Cheyenne cultural systems have continuity, all aspects of their culture have changed, to some degree, over the period just described. Thus, in reality, there is no “Cheyenne culture,” but an ever-changing system. The ahistorical studies used in cross-cultural research create an artificially static picture of the cultural system of a society.



Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all monotheistic and have common historical roots. But Christians and Jews do not pray by prostrating themselves toward Mecca, as these Muslims are doing. Should cross-cultural researchers consider all of them one kind of religion, or not?



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### Controlled Comparisons

In contrast to cross-cultural comparisons, controlled comparisons make use of diachronic data, comparisons of known changes in certain cultural variables, while controlling for historical and environmental factors. This allows the researcher to define general cultural patterns and test hypotheses. Although a number of early researchers produced such studies, it was not until 1954 that Fred Eggan formally defined controlled comparisons as a distinct research method. Since then, as ethnohistoric research became an important ethnographic research tool, these studies have become far more common. Controlled comparisons, like cross-cultural studies, can be extremely complex. We illustrate this method with a simple example.

As we discuss in Chapter 9, people organize their family lives in various ways. Two common ways are matrilineal descent and patrilineal descent. In matrilineal societies, family group membership is inherited through your mother; you belong to your mother's family. In patrilineal societies, group membership is inherited through your father; you belong to your father's family. Anthropologists have long attempted to explain why some societies are matrilineal and others patrilineal. Cross-cultural research has shown that a relationship exists between matrilineality and patrilineality and the relative economic importance of males and females in the society. However, cross-cultural studies can show us only correlations between descent and other synchronic aspects of the cultural system. For

example, these studies can tell us what types of economic systems are most frequently found with matrilineal or patrilineal societies. Cross-cultural studies cannot measure the long-term effects of external changes on matrilineal or patrilineal societies. Is matrilineality or patrilineality more adaptive in some situations than in others? If so, what types of situations favor matrilineal societies, and which favor patrilineal societies? To examine this question, we must turn to controlled historical comparisons.

Michael Allen (1984) has asserted that matrilineal societies in the Pacific were more successful than patrilineal societies in adapting to European contact. Is there a way to test Allen's assertion? First, we must restructure this statement as a testable hypothesis. What do we mean by success? The term *success* is subjective and cannot be directly measured. We have to convert this term into some measurable quantity. One quantifiable measure of the success of a particular system is the relative ability of a society to maintain or expand its population over time. Thus, our hypothesis would be: given the same disruptive external pressures, matrilineal societies maintain their population levels better over time than patrilineal societies. Now we need to find groups of matrilineal societies and patrilineal societies that experienced a comparable intensity of external contact over a period of time and compare their relative populations at the beginning and end of the period. If Allen is correct, the matrilineal societies should have a larger population at the end of the period than the patrilineal societies.



In January 1778, two British ships under the command of Captain James Cook discovered the Hawaiian Islands. They stayed only three days before continuing on to the northern Pacific. In the winter of 1778–1779, they returned and for seven weeks sailed among the islands without making landfall. Finally, on January 17, 1779, they landed on the large island of Hawaii. This second landing was greeted by thousands of Hawaiians, including King Kalani'opu'u. Cook was presented with a great feathered cloak and cap and was greeted with rituals, including a multitude of people prostrating themselves before him and chanting “Lono.” On February 4, Cook and his ships departed with a spectacular sendoff. However, the weather quickly turned bad and one ship sprung its mast, forcing the expedition to return to the island for repairs. The Hawaiians did not welcome this return. Hostilities soon developed, and a battle took place in which Cook was killed.

Scholars have long thought that the Hawaiians identified Cook's visit as the return of their god Lono. Using ethnohistoric and ethnographic data, Marshall Sahlins reexamined this interpretation in his 1981 study, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, and reached the same conclusion.

Lono was a mythical god-king who the Hawaiians believed periodically returned to the islands and ruled in human form, usurping power from the earthly kings who were representatives of the rival god, Ku. Several earlier Hawaiian kings had been identified as Lono ruling on Earth. Every year, during a period

called *Makahiki*, a series of rituals were performed and dedicated to Lono. Lono symbolically returned to the islands at the beginning of Makahiki, at which time the priests of Lono took control of the temples from the priests of Ku. During the four lunar months that followed, the priests of Lono were in charge of rituals. Makahiki ended with Lono symbolically sacrificed and returned to the sky. With Lono gone, control returned to the king and the priests of Ku, the earthly representatives of Ku.

Sahlins found that as Cook sailed among the islands for seven weeks, the timing and direction of his movements coincidentally corresponded with the mythological movements of the god-king, Lono. His landing on January 17 took place at the start of Makahiki; his departure on February 4 corresponded with the end of Makahiki. According to Sahlins, the Hawaiians identified Cook as the personification of Lono, an interpretation further strengthened by Cook when he told them during his departure that he would return the next year.

Cook's untimely return to repair one of his ships was ominously interpreted by the king and priests of Ku as Lono returning to claim earthly powers. Not surprisingly, the Hawaiian priests had him killed and viewed the killing as the ritual sacrifice of the rival god-king Lono, which they symbolically reenacted every year.

When Gananath Obeyesekere, a Sri Lankan anthropologist, first heard Sahlins present this interpretation of Cook, he was “taken aback.” Why would the Hawaiians think that this European was a god? Drawing from his own knowledge of

The farming Native American tribes of the eastern United States present an almost ideal case for testing Allen's assertion. They had similar cultural systems, except that some were matrilineal and others were patrilineal. Their collective histories of contact with Europeans were also basically the same. During the historical period, all these societies suffered the effects of epidemic diseases, warfare (with Europeans as well as intertribal), severe territorial dislocation, political domination, and social discrimination.

Now the problem is determining an appropriate time frame to examine and finding comparable population data. One problem with ethnohistoric research is that the researcher is forced to use the data available in the records. It is not until about 1775 that sufficient population data are available in missionary, military, and explorer accounts to estimate the populations of all these tribes with any accuracy. In 1910, the U.S. Bureau of the Census conducted a special Native American census, which was the first truly

comprehensive census of Native American societies in the United States. Thus, the time frame we will use is from 1775 to 1910. Using ethnographic data, we can then classify particular societies as either matrilineal or patrilineal and determine their populations at the beginning and end of this period:

	1775	1910	Percent
Matrilineal societies	88,590	82,714	93
Patrilineal societies	36,400	13,463	37
Totals	124,990	96,177	77

From this table, we can see that during this 135-year period, the matrilineal societies declined by only about 7 percent of their total population, whereas patrilineal societies lost 63 percent of their population. If maintenance of population is a measure of a society's success,

southern Asian peoples, he could not think of a single example of Sri Lankans or other southern Asian peoples seeing the newly arrived Europeans as gods. To Obeyesekere, this was an example of European myth building in which the European explorer/civilizer becomes a “god” to the natives.

In 1992, Obeyesekere published *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, in which he challenged Sahlins’s interpretation. In his criticism of Sahlins and other Western scholars, Obeyesekere touches on a broad range of theoretical and substantive issues. We cover just two of the major points.

Obeyesekere argues that it was the English who first mythologized Captain Cook. He had already made two successful and daring voyages into the unknown waters of the Pacific. Because of published accounts of these trips, Cook had become—in the eyes of the British—the very image of the ideal explorer/civilizer. A competent, courageous, generous, decent, and humane individual who understood and was well liked by the native peoples he encountered, Cook embodied all the qualities and greatness of civilized humanity. His violent death at the hands of a strange and savage people to whom he had brought the prospects of civilization served only to enhance his mythic stature. In his research, however, Obeyesekere found that Cook, particularly on his third and final voyage, was not the Cook of British mythology. Cook could be brutal with both the natives and his crew as well as arrogant and not always competent. Obeyesekere also found little contemporary evidence that the members of the

crew thought the Hawaiians viewed Cook as a god. The idea that Hawaiians identified Cook with Lono dates from early-nineteenth-century accounts that were compiled long after the events.

Obeyesekere further argues that still prevalent in Western academic thought is the idea that non-Western peoples, such as the Hawaiians, think differently. According to Obeyesekere, “Implicit . . . is a commonplace assumption of the savage mind that is given to prelogical or mystical thought and in turn is fundamentally opposed to the logical and rational ways of thinking of modern man.” Thus, the “childlike” natives lacked rational reflection. Even when anthropologists accept the idea that other people can act rationally, level-headedness is constrained by the boundaries of their own cultural beliefs; “their thought processes are inflexible; [and] they cannot rationally weigh alternative or multiple courses of action.” Thus, Obeyesekere further argues that these implicit and sometimes explicit assumptions about the nature of other peoples underlie the interpretation that Hawaiians thought Captain Cook was a god and that that god was Lono.

In his critique of Sahlins, Obeyesekere raises a critical issue. Does anthropology reflect a Western cultural bias? Are anthropological interpretations of other peoples’ behavior a reflection of implicit Eurocentric beliefs about others?

*SOURCES:* Sahlins (1981), Obeyesekere (1992), Sahlins (1995)

then matrilineal societies in the eastern United States were more successful than patrilineal societies.

As is the case with all comparative studies, findings such as these raise more questions than they answer. Are these population figures and the historical experiences of these societies truly comparable? If they are comparable, is the significant factor differences in descent form, or is it some other cultural factor we have not considered? We need to add at this point that not all matrilineal societies in this study were equally successful in maintaining their population levels, and that a few patrilineal societies studied increased in population during this period. There is room, then, for argument. If, in the final analysis, however, we decide that our findings are valid and that matrilineal societies are, under certain conditions, more adaptive than patrilineal societies, we still cannot directly say why.

Cross-cultural comparisons and controlled comparisons give us distinctly different measures of cultural

phenomena. They address different questions and test different hypotheses. They are complementary, not competitive, methodologies.

Some anthropologists, those who take the humanistic approach (see Chapter 4) believe that both types of comparative studies distort each cultural system in the sample so much that the whole method is invalid. They think that ripping each element out of the particular context in which it is embedded robs it of its significance because each element acquires its meaning only in its unique historical and cultural context.

Despite these and other problems, comparative methods are the only practical means available for determining whether a hypothesis is valid among human cultural systems. Those who use these methods are aware of the difficulties, yet they believe that the advantage of being able to process information on large numbers of societies outweighs the problems.

<b>Ethnographic methods</b>	The collection of cultural data on a particular society or group of societies. The primary purpose is the collection of descriptive data.
<b>Ethnographic fieldwork</b>	The collection of cultural data from living individuals. This usually requires that the researcher live with or close to the people being studied.
<b>Ethnohistoric research</b>	The study of the past cultural system of a people through the use of written records.
<b>Comparative methods</b>	The comparative study of the cultural systems of a number of different societies. The objective is to test hypotheses so that we can explain why differences exist.
<b>Cross-cultural comparisons</b>	The testing of hypotheses by using synchronic data drawn from a number of different societies.
<b>Controlled comparisons</b>	The comparative use of historically documented changes in particular groupings of societies over time to define general cultural patterning and to test hypotheses.

## Summary

**1 Discuss the two major objectives of cultural research and the two broad categories of methods used.** Anthropological methods fall into two broad categories. The basic aims of ethnographic methods are descriptive and involve the collection of information on specific cultures, whereas comparative methods are used to test hypotheses or to investigate theoretical ideas by comparing information on numerous cultural systems.

**2 Why does ethnographic research require two different methods of study?** The kinds of ethnographic methods used by anthropologists depend on whether they are investigating a contemporary or an extinct or past way of life.

**3 Describe what types of methods are used to study the culture of a contemporary or live society and the problems these researchers face.** Fieldwork is the primary method of acquiring data about the culture of a living people. Fieldworkers usually live among those they study for at least a year, conducting formal interviews and surveys and engaging in participant observation. The difficulties of conducting fieldwork vary with the personality and gender of the fieldworker and with the people and specific topic being studied. There are four problems that all fieldworkers must face. First, not only must fieldworkers fight against their own ethnocentrism and tendencies to stereotype the people they study, but they must also overcome the stereotypes local people have developed about outsiders. Second, it is often difficult to establish a rapport with local people because they may have had no previous experience with the kinds of questions fieldworkers ask. Third, identifying reliable informants and finding people willing to participate in

intensive surveys may pose a serious problem. Fourth, sometimes people deliberately deceive anthropologists because they mistrust their motives, do not want certain facts to become public, or are culturally forbidden to give away secrets of their religion.

**4 Describe the method used to study the past cultures, and what are the problems involved in ethno historic research?** Research into the past way of life of a people involves the analysis of writing records and other materials that shed light on their culture. This method requires considerable interpretation by the researcher. In almost all cases, the materials used in ethnohistoric research were recorded by individuals who, because they belonged to different societies and came from different cultural backgrounds? and traditions, had at best an imperfect understanding of the cultural traditions they were describing. In addition, the contents of documents are often affected by ethnocentrism as well as by the private interests of their authors.

**5 What is the purpose of comparative research, how do comparative methods differ from ethnographic methods, and what are the problems involved?** The purpose of comparative research is to test hypothesis in order to attempt to explain cultural diversity. Comparative methods involve ways of systematically and reliably comparing massive amounts of ethnographic information. The use of comparative methods presents many difficulties, including stating the research hypothesis in such a way that is testable, reliably defining and measuring the variables of interest for many societies, deciding whether similar cultural

elements from two or more societies are the “same” or “different,” and contending with unintentional researcher bias. The results of comparative studies can be difficult to interpret. Correlation is often confused with causation.

**6 Describe cross-cultural comparisons and their problems.** Cross-cultural comparisons involve the systematic comparisons of synchronic cultural data to determine correlations between particular cultural

variables. The problems of these studies are those noted with comparative studies in general.

**7 Describe controlled comparative studies and their problems.** Controlled comparison involve the systematic comparisons of changes in a limited number of cultural variables and societies over time. In addition to the problems noted with comparative studies in general, the ethnographic literature needed for these studies is extremely limited.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.





# 6

# CULTURE AND NATURE: INTERACTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT



Getting food is perhaps the most important way that people interact with their environments. This Somali woman is hoeing her field. Cultivating the soil is only one way of producing food.

© Mark Pearson/Alamy

### **Understanding Relationships with Nature**

#### **Hunting and Gathering**

*Foraging and Culture*

*What Happened to Hunters and Gatherers?*

#### **Domestication**

*Beginnings of Domestication*

*Advantages and Costs of Cultivation*

#### **Horticulture**

*Varieties of Horticulture*

*Cultural Consequences of Horticulture*

#### **Intensive Agriculture**

*Varieties of Intensive Agriculture*

*Cultural Consequences of Intensive Agriculture*

#### **Pastoralism**

**Nature and Culture in Preindustrial Times**

**Industrialism**

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** how relationships between humans and the environment differ from those of other animals.
- 2 **Describe** hunting and gathering and analyze its major impacts on cultures.
- 3 **Describe** horticulture and analyze its major consequences for cultures.
- 4 **Describe** intensive agriculture and discuss how it led to the emergence of civilization.
- 5 **Discuss** nomadic pastoralism and its benefits in certain environments.
- 6 **Analyze** industrialization and how it affects human lives, globalization, and worldwide environmental problems.

In this chapter, we describe the major ways human groups interact with the natural environment. Anthropologists who follow the materialist orientation (Chapter 4) believe that how people interact with their natural environment is a primary cause of cultural differences and similarities. Materialists also argue that changes in human-environmental relationships are the prime mover of long-term cultural changes. Therefore, in addition to describing interactions between humans and nature, we also cover their main cultural consequences and show how changing interactions between humans and nature affected long-term changes in human cultures. Future chapters deal with other dimensions of cultural diversity: marriage and family life, kinship systems, relationships between the sexes, socialization, political organization, religion and worldview, and artistic expression.



## Understanding Relationships with Nature

In the biological sciences, *adaptation* refers to how organisms survive and reproduce in their environments. Like other animals, humans adapt to their natural surroundings. However, to emphasize that human groups—to greater or lesser degrees—alter their environments in the process of living in them, we prefer the term *interaction* to *adaptation*. Of course, in many ways, other animals alter their environments, as when beavers construct dams, birds build nests, and earthworms aerate and create new soil with their “casings.”

However, humans sometimes extensively modify nature as they interact with it, as when farmers clear land for crops, families cut forests for houses and fires, and civilizations build cities. Both prehistorically and historically, humans altered nature in the process of adjusting to it. *Interaction* emphasizes these alterations.

Like other species, the environment affects humans physiologically and genetically. For example, bacteria, viruses, and parasites kill or sicken susceptible individuals, but those who are genetically resistant survive, reproduce, and pass more of their genes along to the next generation. By means of natural selection, over many generations human populations become more resistant to the life-threatening microorganisms to which they are exposed—even as the microorganisms evolve better means of attacking us. Natural selection acting on our genes helps us to adjust to the environments in which we live, just as for other organisms.

However, one way humanity differs from other species is that we adjust and adapt to changes in our environments *mainly*—not exclusively—by cultural rather than biological/genetic means. If the climate grows colder or if a group migrates to a colder area, humans cope mainly by lighting fires, constructing shelters, and making warm clothing, not mainly by evolving physiological adaptations to cold. Humans hunt animals by making weapons and mastering techniques of cooperative stalking and killing, not by biologically evolving the ability to run faster than game. Group cooperation and technology (including both the tools themselves and the knowledge required to make and use them) allow humans to adapt to a wide range of environments without undergoing major alterations in their genetic makeup.



Production is usually an organized social activity. As among these African net fishers, cooperation usually increases the efficiency of labor.



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The transmission of socially learned knowledge and behavior (culture) enabled humanity to colonize all of Earth's terrestrial habitats, from tropical rain forests to Arctic tundra, from the vast grassy plains of central Asia to tiny Pacific atolls. Our ability to live in diverse habitats by means of technology and group living surely is one of the secrets of the success of the human species—in 2010, nearly 7 billion humans live on earth and our numbers continue to grow.

Of the many dimensions to human-environment relationships, two are most important for our purposes. First, the environment (or *habitat*) provides *resources* that people take advantage of in meeting their material needs and wants. From their natural surroundings, people harness energy to power their bodies (food) and to keep themselves warm and cook their foods (fuel), and for other uses. People mine raw materials like stone and metals to make tools and cut trees to provide shelter. Harnessing energy and harvesting materials takes technology (tools and skills) and requires that people expend their own time and energy (in labor, or work). As they use their technology and expend their labor, people transform resources into products that help meet their needs and wants.

Second, the environment poses certain *problems* that people strive to solve or overcome: resource scarcity, excessively high or low temperatures, parasites and diseases, rainfall variability, deficient soils, and so forth. Solving these and other problems of living in a

particular time and place sometimes leads a group to modify their surroundings. For example, hunters can set fire to woodlands or grasslands to attract more game animals to their territories. Farmers can produce more food by clearing new lands, fertilizing soils, or irrigating their crops. Industrialized nations construct highways, shopping malls, factories, and housing developments.

There are other dimensions to human-nature interactions. Humans are social animals (see Chapter 2), who live in groups of various sizes and compositions. Groups have to organize their members to acquire resources and solve problems efficiently. First, individuals have to know what to do and what they can expect others to do. So groups allocate different tasks to different people, resulting in the *division of labor*. Second, many tasks are more efficient if people work together for common goals. For example, several hunters will have a better chance of spotting, tracking, and killing large game than a single hunter. Net fishing may be more productive if people work together. Because cooperation is often more efficient (and enjoyable) than working alone, human groups develop *patterns of cooperation*. Third, it is helpful if people know when and where to apply their technology and labor so they do not come into conflict with others or get in one another's way. Groups therefore develop patterned *ways of allocating resources* among individuals, families, and other kinds of social units.

Materialists give priority to human-environment interactions in their efforts to explain cultural differences and to account for long-term cultural changes in our species. In this chapter, we explore this idea by describing and comparing some of the major ways various peoples interact with their environments. Humanistic anthropologists tend to disagree that material factors have “priority,” for reasons described in Chapter 4. Even if materialists are correct, always keep in mind that the ways a people interact with nature has greater effects on some aspects of their way of life than on other aspects.

At the broadest level anthropologists categorize human-environment relationships into four major categories, based largely on how people acquire products—especially food—to meet their material needs and wants:

1. **Hunting and gathering** (also called **foraging**), in which people exploit the *wild* plants and animals of their territory for food
2. **Agriculture** (or **cultivation**), in which people intentionally plant, care for, and harvest *crops* (domesticated plants) for food and other uses
3. **Herding** (or **pastoralism**), in which people tend, breed, and harvest products of *livestock* (domesticated animals) for food, trade, and other uses
4. **Industrialism**, in which people discovered ways of harnessing the energy in *fossil fuels* (coal, oil, natural gas), resulting in a dramatic increase in levels of material consumption and profits for private industries.

Anthropologists use these four categories to distinguish major differences—like other categories, they do not faithfully depict the complex realities of human–environment interactions. It is *very* important to recognize that the categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, before contact with Europeans, many Native Americans cultivated crops like corn and squash, but relied on wild game for most of their meat supply because most peoples kept no livestock. Many African people today farm some of their lands, but also raise cattle and other livestock on lands less suitable for agriculture. Since agriculture began several thousand years ago, most peoples have relied on a combination of production strategies, depending on their technologies, local environments, and what their neighbors are doing. Finally, in the complex industrialized nations of today, hunting, fishing, agriculture, and livestock husbandry are carried out by various occupations.

## Hunting and Gathering

Hunter-gatherers—also called foragers—acquire food from collecting (gathering) the wild plants and hunting (and/or fishing for) the animals that live in their regions. On current evidence, *Homo sapiens* has existed as a separate species for less than 100,000 years (see Chapter 1). But no one on Earth farmed crops or herded livestock until about 10,000 years ago, and most people continued to live off wild plants and animals until just a few thousand years ago. Hunting and gathering thus supported humanity for the first 80 to 90 percent of our existence as a unique species. Even after Western exploration and colonialism brought so many indigenous people into larger systems, many hunters and gatherers survived, even into the twentieth century in a few places (see Figure 6.1).

Although foragers do not attempt to grow crops or keep livestock for meat and other products, many do attempt to increase the supply of food in other ways. For example, some Native American peoples periodically burned forests and grasslands to attract game or increase the supply of sun-loving wild berries or other plants. However, compared to farmers and herders, hunters and gatherers do not modify their natural environments very much, but instead take what nature offers. If edible wild plants are available only in particular places during particular seasons, foragers move to those places at those times to harvest them. If major game animals live in large migratory herds, hunters must follow them or else hunt other animals when that game has left their region. A brief statement will help understand both the foraging way of life and how it affects culture: to acquire resources efficiently, foragers must organize themselves to be in the right place at the right time with the right numbers of people.

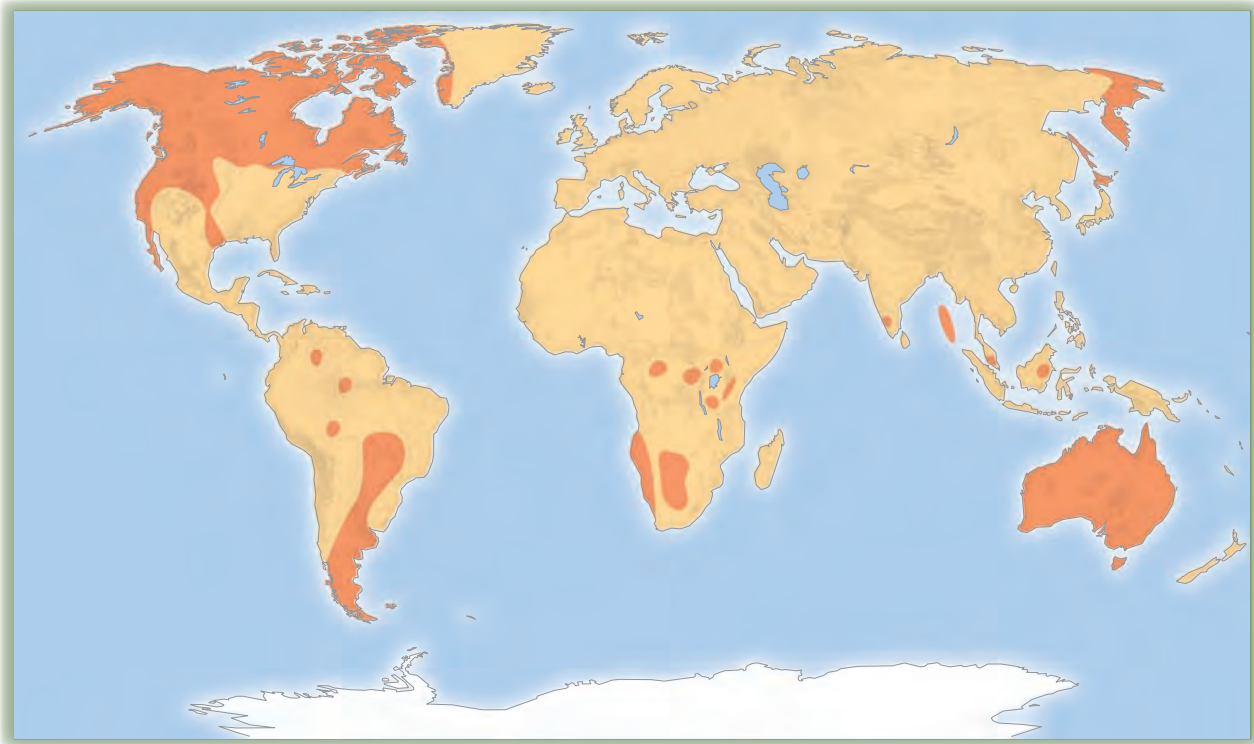
**hunting and gathering** Adaptations based on the harvest of wild (undomesticated) plants and animals.

**agriculture** Intentional planting, cultivation, care, and harvest of domesticated food plants (crops).

**pastoralism** adaptations based on tending, breeding, and harvesting the products of livestock, which are taken to seasonally available pasturelands and water.

**industrialism** Development of technology to harness the energy of fossil fuels to increase productivity, profits, and the availability of consumer commodities.





**Figure 6.1** Principal Regions of Foragers at the Time of First Contact with Europeans.

## Foraging and Culture

Anthropologists classify hunting and gathering as a single “type” of adaptation, and in the minds of many people, all foragers seem pretty much alike. (This is why you may have heard: “When we were all hunters and gatherers on the savannah. . . .”) But foragers living in different habitats differ, partly because environments vary in the kinds and quality of food resources they contain. For example, fishing peoples of the resource-rich environment of the American Northwest Coast lived a fairly sedentary existence in large permanent settlements, whereas the Shoshone of the arid and resource-sparse American Great Basin roamed in small bands or individual families. In spite of such differences, most—but not all—foraging peoples share certain cultural similarities. Our main goal in this section is to describe how the ways hunters and gatherers interact with their environments affect their cultures.

### Division of Labor by Age and Sex

Among foraging peoples, sex and age are the major basis for the division of labor. Of course,

everywhere special knowledge and skill also are a basis for assigning tasks. In the vast majority of foraging peoples, men do almost all hunting and women most of the gathering of plants. However, it is not unusual for either sex to lend a hand with the activities of the other. For example, among the Bambuti of the tropical forest of central Africa, the women and children help the men with hunting by driving game animals into nets. However, in general, hunting is men’s work.

### Seasonal Mobility

Most foragers move across the landscape to cope with seasonal changes. None of Earth’s environments offers the same kinds and quantities of resources year round. In most places, there are seasonal differences in precipitation. Outside the tropics, there usually are marked seasonal variations in temperature as well. Ordinarily, game animals are available in some places and not others at different seasons, and nuts and fruits tend to be available at only certain times of the year.

Foragers migrate to where food or water is most plentiful or easiest to acquire during a given season. For

example, the Hadza people of Tanzania lived in an arid region with distinct wet and dry seasons. In the rainy months, the Hadza dispersed around the many temporary water holes that formed, living on the wild plants and animals in the immediate vicinity. At another time of the year, when these ponds evaporated, they lived in large camps clustered around the few relatively permanent water sources.

### *Seasonal Congregation and Dispersal*

To gather plants and hunt animals efficiently, foragers adjust the sizes of their living groups to match the seasonal availability and abundance of their food supply. At some times of the year, it is most efficient to disperse into small groups, which cooperate in the search for food. During other seasons, these groups come together in larger congregations.

The Western Shoshone live in the arid Great Basin of what is now Nevada and Utah. Until white settlers disrupted their indigenous way of life in the mid-nineteenth century, the Shoshone lived off wild plants and animals. Most of their meat came from deer, antelope, and small mammals such as rabbits and squirrels. Plant foods included roots and seasonally available seeds, berries, pine nuts, and other wild products.

For most of the year, the Shoshone roamed the dry valleys and slopes of the Great Basin in tiny bands consisting of a few families, or even single families. Families occasionally gathered for cooperative hunting of antelopes and rabbits, which they drove into corrals and nets. But a more permanent aggregation of families was difficult because a local area did not have enough resources to support large numbers of people for more than a few days.

Around October, the cones of the piñon trees on the high mountains ripened and produced large, nourishing pine nuts. During their travels in late summer, Shoshone families noticed which specific mountain areas had the most promising pine nut harvest. They arranged their movements to arrive at these productive areas in the early fall. Ten to twenty families arrived in the same region, harvesting and storing pine nuts. During favorable years, the pine nut harvest supported these large camps throughout most of the winter. In spring the families split up again, reliving the pattern of dispersal into tiny groups until the next fall.

### *Bands*

To hunt and gather efficiently, in most environments, foragers live in small, mobile groups of 50 or fewer. To

distinguish these living groups from the settled hamlets, villages, towns, and cities found among other peoples, anthropologists call these mobile living groups *bands*. (Chapter 12 discusses the political aspects of band life.) All or most members of a single band are relatives or are married to relatives. Kinfolk or not, members cooperate in acquiring the wild resources of a given territory. In most foraging communities, the size of bands is flexible, with the numbers adjusted to the availability of the food supply.

The Ju/'hoansi (also known as the !Kung) of southern Africa illustrate band organization. Living in what is now southeast Angola, northeast Namibia, and northwest Botswana, the Ju/'hoansi are the most thoroughly studied of all hunter-gatherers. The northern part of their environment is an arid tropical savanna, which turns into the Kalahari Desert in the south. Until the twentieth century, most Ju/'hoansi exploited this habitat entirely by foraging. They gathered more than 100 species of plants and hunted more than 50 kinds of animals, including mammals, birds, and reptiles. Plant foods consisted of nuts, fruits, berries, melons, roots, and greenery. A particularly important and nourishing food was the mongongo nut, which ripens in April and provided about half the people's caloric intake.

Because their habitat received so little rainfall and then only seasonally, the availability of water greatly affected the annual rhythm of Ju/'hoansi lives. From about April to October (winter in the Southern Hemisphere), there was little precipitation. Practically no rain fell between June and September. During this dry season, water for people and animals was available only at a few permanent water holes, around which many families congregated into relatively large settlements of 50 individuals, and often more. When summer rainstorms created temporary water holes between November and March, the people traveled in smaller camps to exploit the more widely distributed wild resources. But rainfall in this part of southern Africa is not reliable from year to year or place to place. In some years, up to 40 inches of rain falls during the wet months; in other years, as little as 6 inches. Precipitation is also spatially unpredictable: one local area may receive severe thunderstorms, while 20 miles away there is no rain at all.

The aridity, seasonality, and variability in precipitation influenced how the Ju/'hoansi organized their bands. During wet months, people spread out among the temporary water holes in camps numbering about 10 to 30. When they moved to a water hole that had not



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Gathering plant foods is mainly women's work among foraging peoples. This Ju/'hoansi woman is bagging mongongo nuts, a nourishing staple.

been occupied recently, game was relatively plentiful and a wide variety of plant foods were easily available. But the longer a band remained, the more its members exhausted the resources surrounding the water hole. The men had to roam farther away from their camps while hunting, and the women had to travel longer distances while collecting plants. After several weeks, a camp reached the point at which its members judged that the costs of continuing to forage in the area were not bringing adequate returns in food. They then moved to a new wet-season camp. One ethnographer, Richard Lee (1969, 60), succinctly noted that the Ju/'hoansi "typically occupy a camp for a period of weeks or months and eat their way out of it." If the Ju/'hoansi stayed in larger groups during the dry months, they would have had to move more often, consuming more time and energy.

As the months passed and the land dried up, people made their way back to one of the permanent water holes, where several dozen people congregated. By the end of the dry season, the supply of mongongo nuts and

other preferred plant foods was exhausted around the permanent water holes and the people ate the less tasty bitter melons, roots, and gum. The Ju/'hoansi considered this a relatively hard time of the year, and they anticipated the November rains, when they could again disperse into the smaller wet-season group.

### Reciprocal Sharing

It is mutually beneficial for foraging peoples to share food and other possessions, both within and between families. The sharing is more or less on the basis of need: those who have more than they can immediately use share with others. For example, among the Ju/'hoansi, on any given day only some people actually go out gathering and hunting. But plants and especially animals brought back to camp are widely distributed, so even families who did not work that day usually receive a share. The fact that most or all members of a single band are relatives further encourages the sharing of food.

Reciprocal sharing applies especially to meat. Successful hunters returning to camp share the kill with other families, including those who have not participated in the day's hunt. One reason for the special emphasis on the equitable sharing of meat is the uncertain returns of hunting compared to gathering. Among the Ju/'hoansi, on most days women return to camp with their carrying bags full of nuts, roots, fruits, and other wild plants. Men's chances of capturing game, however, are smaller: Richard Lee estimates that only about two out of five hunting trips capture animals large enough to take back to camp. Men who are successful one day may be unsuccessful the next, so they give today in expectation of receiving tomorrow.

Sharing is *normatively expected* behavior: people who regularly fail to share are subjected to ridicule or other kinds of social pressures. Going along with the expectation of sharing is a positive cultural value placed on equality of personal possessions (property) and even of social status. Families who attempt to hoard food or other products may be ostracized. Men who try to place themselves above others socially by boasting about their hunting skills or other accomplishments are soon put in their place. The result is that—compared to many other peoples—there is both economic and social equality between the families of most hunting and gathering bands.

### Resource Allocation

It is beneficial to have familiar, patterned ways of allocating natural resources among individuals, families,



and other kinds of groups—“property rights,” in some form. Many hunters and gatherers have developed similar ways of allocating such rights: who can harvest which resources, where, and when.

One way to organize rights over a territory and its resources is for each group to establish and maintain *exclusive* claims to particular territories. Cultural ideas about the relationship between people and territory might be, for example, that this area is *mine* or *ours*, whereas that area is *yours* or *theirs*. Among foragers, exclusive access would mean that each band has rights to remain in a specific area during a particular season. One benefit of allocating rights in this way is that the members of each band would know they alone can harvest the foods found in particular places at definite times. Another advantage is that bands would not interfere in each other’s hunting and gathering activities.

Despite these (apparent) benefits, most foragers allocate rights to resources differently. Among the Shoshone during the hot months when nuclear or extended families were sparsely distributed, rights to resources were “first come, first served,” meaning that whichever group arrived at an area first was free to harvest its plants and animals. No family had exclusive access to any particular territory in any season.

Among the Ju/’hoansi, rights were a bit better defined. Particular families tended to return to the same territories year after year. Over time, others came to recognize them as the “owners” of the area. Commonly, the reliable water holes together with the wild resources around them were “owned” by a set of siblings whose rights grew stronger as they grew older. But by merely asking permission—seldom refused—anyone with a kinship relationship to one of the “owners” could come and visit and use the area’s food and water. Because most Ju/’hoansi had many relatives and in-laws who were “owners” of various places, each family had many options about where and with whom they would live, work, relax, and socialize.

Thus, who was living and foraging together fluctuated radically because each band received visitors several times a year. Instead of establishing exclusive claims to particular places, Ju/’hoansi families were attached loosely to territories and for the most part came and went according to their preferences and circumstances. If a quarrel or dispute occurred, one of the parties could simply leave to join another group temporarily. Most other known hunter-gatherers had similar ways of allocating rights to resources.

To sum up, most foraging peoples were similar in the following respects:

- Division of labor based mainly on sex and age
- High mobility between areas
- Congregation and dispersal of groups, especially from season to season
- Life in bands of varying size and flexible composition
- Strong values of reciprocal sharing and of equality in personal possessions and social status
- Loose attachment of people to territory and flexible rights to resources

You can see how these similarities helped foragers harness resources and cope with problems. But, although these characteristics describe most hunter-gatherers reasonably well, we must keep in mind that foragers are diverse. Not all have this set of cultural features.

In fact, in some environments, foragers lived quite differently. Along the Northwest Coast of North America (roughly from far northern California into the Alaskan panhandle), food resources—especially fish—were exceptionally abundant, and the Native Americans who lived there were able to smoke and preserve a supply of fish that lasted for many months. Also, salmon and other fish were more reliably abundant on the Northwest Coast than in most other environments where foragers lived—in most years, people could count on fish swimming up the rivers to breed in the fall, and in the bays and estuaries year round. Because of abundance, reliability, and long-term food storage, there was not much need for seasonal mobility or small living groups. Most Northwest Coast people settled in villages, where many families lived in spacious and often elaborately decorated wood-plank houses. Resource abundance and reliability also affected property notions along the coast. If a food resource is so abundant and reliable that you can usually count on its availability, then it makes sense for you to stay close to it and defend it against other groups that might desire it as well. So, people of the Northwest Coast developed more defined property rights: particular groups were more closely associated with particular locations than were people such as the Shoshone or Ju/’hoansi.

Another place where the culture of foragers was different was the North American Great Plains after about 1700, when they acquired horses. Native Americans of the Plains were hunters and gatherers because they did not farm, but the horses introduced by Europeans allowed them to effectively hunt the tens of millions of bison that once grazed North America’s central tall grass prairies. Although they hunted antelope and other mammals, bison was Plains peoples’ main food resource. During the spring and summer, the bison gathered in



huge herds that were most effectively hunted cooperatively by dozens of mounted men. In most areas of the Plains, grasses grew luxuriantly in the spring and early summer, leading the bison to congregate in herds of tens of thousands. As the summer progressed, the land became drier and the grass patchier, so the bison broke up into smaller herds for the fall and succeeding winter months.

The Cheyenne are one Plains people. After acquiring the horse in the late 1700s, until around 1850 the Cheyenne lived mainly on bison meat. On horseback, they followed the seasonal movements of their principal food source. From June until late summer, as the bison gathered in huge herds, the people lived as a single tribe in an enormous camp of several thousand. Men on horseback used bows and arrows and, later, rifles to hunt the animals for their meat and hides. As the bison herds split up in the fall, so did the tribe because it was too difficult for the people to remain together as a single enormous camp when their food supply was so widely scattered. By breaking up into smaller bands during the fall and winter, each with its own name and identity, the Cheyenne gained other advantages. Their numerous horses, which were their main source of wealth and pride, had more grass to graze on. Fuel for fires during the freezing winter was easier to acquire; dried animal dung was the primary fuel in this place of few trees.

The Plains peoples were unusual foragers in many ways. One way was the size of their summer settlements, which usually numbered in the hundreds, as compared to the maximum band size of 50 to 100 among peoples such as the Ju/'hoansi and Shoshone. Another was that they had formal political leaders ("chiefs"), as discussed in Chapter 12. Being able to use horses for both hunting and transportation helped make these variations possible. Like the Northwest Coast cultures, the Plains Indians are a useful reminder of the dangers of overgeneralizing about foragers.

### **What Happened to Hunters and Gatherers?**

For tens of thousands of years, hunting and gathering worked well enough to allow the human population to grow to several million. Further, foraging is a flexible adaptation that can be successful in any environment with a sufficient quantity of wild, edible plants and animals. Foraging has supported people in rain forests, grasslands, savannahs, tundras, and high mountains. The Netsilik Inuits (formerly "Eskimo") even spent the winters in igloos erected on top of the Arctic

ice, living largely on the meat and blubber of seals that they captured by ingenious methods. Human ingenuity and rapid communication by social learning allowed hunter-gatherers to migrate into all the continents except Antarctica by around 13,000 years ago. Even then, humanity was a successful species.

In fact, most research suggests that hunter-gatherers enjoyed a relatively high quality of life. Richard Lee's quantitative studies of the Ju/'hoansi in the 1960s show that they worked only about two and a half days per week to acquire their food supply. Even adding in time spent in other kinds of work, such as toolmaking and housework, they worked only about 42 hours per week. Most adults in modern industrial nations would be happy with such a short workweek! Further, the Ju/'hoansi's relatively modest work efforts were sufficient to keep them well fed most of the time: adults consumed an average of 2,355 calories and 96 grams of protein per day, more than sufficient for their bodily needs. Robert Kelly compared figures on other foragers living in various environments. He found that working hours about like those of the Ju/'hoansi were common in reasonably productive environments, but quantitative studies are few and have uncertain reliability.

Most evidence also indicates that foraging peoples enjoyed a diverse diet and were healthy compared to farmers. Hunters and gatherers live from plants and animals that naturally occur in their habitats and that are well adapted to periodic droughts and other hazards. In most places, their diets were diverse compared to those of farmers and herders, who focused their attention and efforts on only a few crops and livestock. Foraging bands were small and moved often, which reduced the incidence and spread of infectious diseases. There are, of course, exceptions, but generally hunter-gatherers did not have a particularly hard life. Some anthropologists go so far as to call them "affluent," although this does not mean the same as contemporary affluence.

Once plant and animal domestication developed, however, agricultural and herding peoples increased in numbers and expanded their territories. Over several millennia of expansion, cultivators and herders pushed most foraging peoples into regions that were ill-suited to crops and livestock. As a result, when European contact with people of other continents intensified after about 1500, hunters and gatherers already lived primarily in regions too cold or arid to support agriculture (see Figure 6.1). Since 1500, even more foragers have lost their lands as they died from diseases and warfare, yielded their territories to outsiders for plantations and mines, relocated onto reservations, and/or gave up

foraging voluntarily for the attractions of introduced ways of making a living.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, most foragers had died out altogether or had become assimilated into some other society. Contact was especially hard on Native Americans, who lived on lands highly coveted by Spanish, French, Anglo, and Portuguese settlers. Because of their isolation from Old World populations, Native Americans were susceptible to a host of diseases brought by Europeans and the Africans they enslaved. Most scholars who have looked seriously at the impact of diseases on Native Americans estimate that 80–90 percent of Indians died from epidemics. Europeans did indeed conquer and subdue many Native peoples, but not in the way most people imagine: bacteria and viruses were more important than guns and bullets. The indigenous foraging peoples of Australia and Tasmania suffered in similar ways and degrees.

Only a few foragers preserved their way of life into the twentieth century. By the twenty-first century, the hunting and gathering way of life was almost gone. The Ju/'hoansi of southern Africa were surrounded by herders, and many had taken up raising livestock. Governments curtailed their old freedom of movement by fencing off lands. Some left the Kalahari to work for wages in mines or, in the 1960s and 1970s, to serve as trackers for the military in South Africa. Some voluntarily settled down at government-funded stations, where they began eating large quantities of corn porridge, drinking alcohol, and catching new diseases (including HIV). Recently, governments realized they could earn money from tourists by turning much of the Ju/'hoansi territory into game parks. Even the people themselves have become tourist attractions: outsiders come to watch them perform “traditional” dances and curing ceremonies. (Chapter 18 further discusses the modern Ju/'hoansi.)

The Hadza, discussed earlier, are one of the few remaining East African people who still get a lot of their food from foraging. In the early 2000s, the royal family of the United Arab Emirates offered big payments to the government of Tanzania to lease part of Hadza land for safaris. Just as foragers lost numbers and territories in the past, so today forces arising from the global economy endanger their ways of living.

both increase the supply of their crops and/or livestock and control their location and numbers. Controlling part of nature requires new technologies and, in most circumstances, additional labor inputs compared to foraging.

With respect to plants, in this book we are concerned with *food crops*, or those species that people intentionally select, plant, care for, harvest, and propagate for purposes of eating. People also grow plants for other purposes, such as for fibers (cotton, flax, hemp) or for drugs (tobacco, coca leaf, opium poppy). With animals, we are concerned with *livestock*, or those species that people raise, control, and breed to provide food (meat, dairy products) or other useful products (hides, wool), or for performing work (pulling plows, carrying people and possessions). People keep animals for other reasons, such as companionship (pets).

### Beginnings of Domestication

Detailed coverage of the origins of plant and animal domestication is outside the scope of this text. (See the following feature, A Closer Look, for information on the world regions where particular crops and livestock were first domesticated. Notice how much all of humanity owes to peoples who lived thousands of years ago.) In the Old World, crops were grown and livestock kept by around 10,000 years ago in the Middle East and by about 9,000 years ago in eastern Asia. Over the next several thousand years, adaptations based on domesticated plants and animals developed or spread into most African, Asian, and European environments that could support either or both farming and herding. In the New World, a completely different set of plant species was domesticated in Mexico by about 7,000 years ago, and in the Andes region of South America by the same time or even earlier.

In the Old World, people domesticated several animal species at about the same time they began to farm. Livestock were an efficient complement to farming. Their availability meant that most men eventually gave up hunting, putting their labor into farming, crafts, warfare, metallurgy, ruling, and other activities instead. Later, strong animals like oxen, horse, and mules pulled the plows that helped increase yields. In the New World, except for residents of the Andes, most peoples



## Domestication

**Domestication** is the intentional planting and cultivation of selected plants and the taming and breeding of certain species of animals. People who live by domestication

**domestication** The process by which people control the distribution, abundance, and biological features of certain plants and animals in order to increase their usefulness to humans.

The domestication of plants and animals occurred independently in the Old World (Europe, Asia, and Africa) and the New World (North and South America and the Caribbean). Before European colonization, the crops grown in the two hemispheres were completely different.

### Old World Crops

The earliest plant domestication occurred in the region around what is now Jordan, Israel, Syria, eastern Turkey, western Iran, and Iraq. This region is known to prehistorians as the Fertile Crescent. Wheat, barley, lentils, peas, carrots, figs, almonds, pistachios, dates, and grapes were first grown here. Oats, cabbages, lettuce, and olives were first domesticated along the Mediterranean fringe. In West Africa, sorghum, finger millet, watermelons, and African rice were domesticated. Sorghum and finger millet still feed millions of people on the African continent. Eggplants, cucumbers, bananas, taro, and coconuts originated in southern Asia and Southeast Asia. Soybeans, Oriental rice, millet, citrus fruits, and tea were domesticated in ancient China. Taro (a root crop widely grown in Southeast Asia and the Pacific) and bananas were probably first cultivated in New Guinea or the islands around it. Sugarcane may come from the same area. We get our morning caffeine from coffee, first domesticated in the Ethiopian highlands.

### New World Crops

Maize (corn), tomatoes, several varieties of beans, red peppers, avocados, and cacao (now used in the making of chocolate) originated in Central America and Mexico, in either the highlands or the coastal lowlands, or both. Various members of the squash family (squash, pumpkins, and gourds) were first intentionally grown in the same region, although squashes probably also were grown in eastern North America. From Peru came numerous crops that are still important to the region and to the world, including potatoes, sweet potatoes, and lima beans. From lowland South America came manioc (cassava), peanuts, pineapple, and cashews. Chili peppers originated in South America also, but were taken back home by Europeans. During the colonial era, chilis gave heat to food in southern China, India, Thailand, and other parts of the Old World.

In the 1980s, research discovered that the prehistoric Native Americans of the eastern United States domesticated several crops, including sunflower, gourds and squash,

marshelder, and goosefoot. The Native peoples apparently abandoned the last two, grown for their tiny seeds, when maize and beans from Mesoamerica became available, with their larger seeds and better yields. A couple of crops that were important in the diet of the Indians at the time of contact with the Spanish were amaranth and quinoa, but the Spanish outlawed them because of their use in “pagan” ceremonies.

Some plants were domesticated not just once but several times in various parts of the world. Squash may have had independent origins in Mesoamerica, the Andes, and eastern North America. Separate species of rice were domesticated in Africa and Asia, apparently independently. Cotton was domesticated independently in three places: South America, Central America, and either India or Africa. Three yam species were grown in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and tropical South America. Apparently, when conditions were right, peoples of all world regions were quite capable of transforming wild plants into domesticated crops—a good point to keep in mind when next you hear someone claim that some cultures (usually their own) are more inventive or creative than others.

### Old World Livestock

In the Old World, the earliest animals were domesticated at about the same times and in the same places as crops were first grown. Dogs probably were the earliest domesticated animals. Genetic studies comparing dogs with grey wolves (their wild ancestors) suggest that people first domesticated dogs about 12,000 years ago, probably in the Middle East and/or in East Asia (China). In the Middle East, the wild ancestors of the most important livestock lived in large herds, including sheep, goats, and cattle. These animals were and are kept for their hides, wool, meat, and milk. Another large mammal, the horse, was first domesticated on the Asian grasslands around 5,000 years ago. When mounted, horses greatly increased the speed of long-distance travel and, of course, increased the mobility of warriors and soldiers. For thousands of years, from Central Asia to North Africa, camels made it possible for people and products to cross vast stretches of arid land. Along with asses, donkeys, and South Asian yaks, horses and camels enabled people to carry heavy loads long distances, increasing the possibilities and profits of trade. When harnessed to the plow, cattle, horses, and Asian water buffalos supplemented human labor in farming. Their dung added nutrients to agricultural fields and gardens. Finally, pigs—first brought under human control in

who relied on the cultivation of crops for their food got all or most of their meat from deer, antelope, small mammals, fish, and other wild animals. Most New World peoples got the bulk of their meat from wild,

not domesticated, animals, even though many of them were farmers.

Plant and animal domestication probably had more long-lasting and dramatic effects on cultures than any

Southwest Asia and perhaps eastern Asia—are an outstanding source of protein and today remain the major source of meat in China and non-Muslim Southeast Asia.

### **New World Livestock**

Compared to ancient Old World peoples, Native Americans domesticated few livestock. In the Andes, llamas and alpacas (related to camels) were used for meat and transportation. Their thick, long hair was also woven into beautiful clothing by weavers of the ancient Andean civilizations. In South America, people still raise guinea pigs for their meat. Elsewhere in the Americas, turkeys and Muscovy ducks were the only animals domesticated for food, and these only in a few areas. Dogs, present also in the Old World, were used in hunting and often as food.

Why did American Indians domesticate so few animals compared to Middle Easterners and Asians? The answer is uncertain, but one important reason may be that so many of the large herd animal species in the Americas became extinct shortly after the end of the Pleistocene epoch, about 11,000 years ago. Members of the horse and camel family, in particular, all disappeared (except in the Andes). Horses did not return to the Americas until the Spanish brought them in the 1500s. Jared Diamond (1997) argues that the large herd mammals such as bison and caribou that remained after the New World extinctions were not amenable to human control. Certainly, it was not the capabilities or the intelligence of the prehistoric Indians that explains why they domesticated so few animals.

### **What's Cooking?**

Soon after Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, and the Netherlands began exploring and establishing colonies on other continents, crops and livestock spread from continent to continent. Many New World crops were taken to various parts of the Old World, where they became important foods for millions of people. Manioc (or cassava, as it is commonly known) from Amazonia became a staple in tropical Africa and Asia. Mexican corn spread widely, especially in Africa, Mediterranean Europe, and eastern Asia. After initial resistance, the Andean potato became a staple food in Russia, northern Europe, and—especially—Ireland. Imagine modern Italian food without the Mexican tomato! Over the centuries, Native American cultivators had become master farmers, and food crops are one of the greatest gifts they bestowed upon the rest of the world.

Crops and livestock also moved across the Atlantic Ocean in the other direction. European colonists took Old World wheat, oats, barley, grapes, and other crops to temperate zones of the Americas. In parts of the Americas with more tropical climates, rice, bananas, and coconuts became important foods. But livestock were the most important food introduced from the Old World. Pigs, cattle, sheep, and horses were introduced very soon after the European encounter with the New World. Over the next couple of centuries, they multiplied rapidly and spread widely. Old World livestock greatly eased the life of the European colonists—pigs and cattle thrived and multiplied in the Americas and became enormously abundant by the time European settlers began spreading over the landscape. Plentiful and familiar cattle, pigs, and sheep helped attract European colonists to the Americas in the 1700s and 1800s. Plows pulled by horses, mules, and oxen turned over heavy soils and broke up the matted roots of grasses, enabling settlers to farm the rich earth of the American Midwest and Plains for the first time and making this region the breadbasket for the rest of the country.

Too few of us alive today recognize our debt to the prehistoric Middle Easterners, Asians, Africans, Andeans, and Mexicans who domesticated the plants and animals we eat daily. Yet most North American meals include foods brought to the continent from all over the world centuries ago. If you're an all-American, steak-and-potatoes kind of person, only the potatoes are truly American—and they came from well south of the border. Today, there is an ecological movement to "eat local" because a lot of energy can be saved from transportation costs if people in New York eat, say, apples from their own state rather than those grown in Washington.

Eating local is a fine idea. But it's enlightening to know that the foods we now grow locally came from all over the globe. The next time you enjoy that bread or steak, think of the Middle East. As you bite into the corn cob or relish the tomato in the salad, remember the ancient Mexicans. If you're a fan of Hot Stuff or are from Hunan or Sichuan provinces in China or from many places in South Asia, be grateful to the ancient Mesoamerican peoples.

*SOURCES:* Crosby (1972), Diamond (1997), Dillehay et al. (2007), Pickersgill (2007), Pope et al. (2001), vonHoldt (2010)

other single set of changes in peoples' relationship with nature—except, probably, industrialization. For example, once certain plants evolved by human selection into crops, people produced more food in a given area

of land. Increased production allowed them to remain in one place for long periods—over time, groups became more *sedentary*. They could also live in much larger settlements than the bands of most foragers—



groups settled in *villages* and, later in some places, in *towns* and *cities*.

## Advantages and Costs of Cultivation

If it is true that prehistoric hunters and gatherers lived fairly well, then why did so many humans take up farming? In trying to account for why agriculture developed at all, most archaeologists point to two factors that led prehistoric foragers to gradually begin cultivating crops. The first is climate change: in the Eastern Mediterranean, where agriculture developed earliest—around 10,000 years ago—the climate became warmer at about the same time people began domesticating plants and animals.

The second factor is growing human populations. Although prehistoric hunters and gatherers lived well, once their numbers began to increase substantially, wild plants and animals could no longer support the population size in a region. Growing crops gives a group greater control over the numbers of *edible* plants that exist in their environment, raising the ability of the land to support people. If a field is planted in wheat, or rice or corn, then nearly all the plants growing there produce foods that humans can digest. If the field is left in its natural state, only a fraction of the wild plants are digestible and, hence, edible. Thus, agriculture nearly always supports far more people per unit of territory.

How these two factors interacted, and the importance of other factors, is one of the most controversial issues in modern archaeology. However, probably the single greatest and most widespread advantage of agriculture over foraging is that agriculture supports far more people. Only in the most favorable environments does the population density of foragers exceed one or two per square mile. In contrast, agricultural peoples typically live at densities of dozens or hundreds per square mile.

Supporting higher population densities does entail some costs, however. Creating and maintaining the artificial community of plants that make up a garden or farm requires labor, time, and energy. First, the plot must be prepared for planting by removing at least some of the vegetation that occurs naturally in the area. In some kinds of agriculture, people modify the landscape itself by constructing furrows, dikes, ditches, terraces, or other artificial landforms. Second, the crops must be planted, which requires more labor. Third,

natural processes continually encroach on the artificial plant community and landscape that people have created: weeds invade and compete for light and soil nutrients, animal pests are attracted to the densely growing crops, and rainfall and flood may wash away physical improvements. Periodically, cultivators must “beat back nature” by removing weeds, protecting against pests, rebuilding earthworks, and so forth. Fourth, the act of farming itself reduces the suitability of a site for future harvests, by reducing soil fertility if nothing else. In future years, the farmers must somehow restore their plots to a usable condition or their yields will fall. All these necessities require labor and other kinds of energy expenditures.

So, farming is a lot of work, and much evidence suggests that most people who make their living by agriculture work at least as long and hard as most foragers. Cultivation also led to other changes—in settlement size and permanence, in ownership of resources, in political organization, and in many other dimensions of life—that culminated in the evolution of whole new forms of culture, as we shall see.

Preindustrial farming systems are conveniently divided into two overall forms, based partly on the energy source used in farming and on how often a garden or field is cultivated. The forms are usually called *horticulture* and *intensive agriculture*. Both have many, many varieties—far too many for us to even mention most of them.

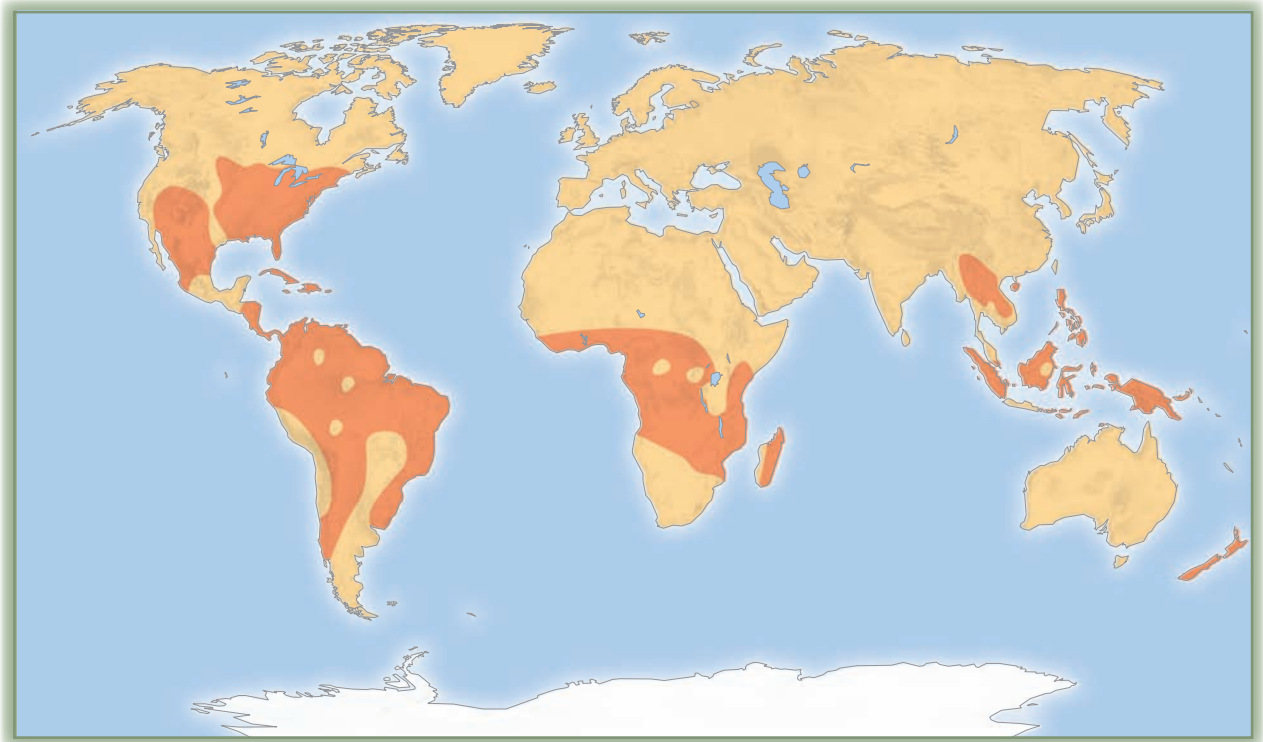
## Horticulture

In **horticulture**, people use mainly or entirely the energy (power) of their own muscles to clear land, turn the soil, plant, weed, and harvest crops. There are no plows pulled by horses, oxen, or other draft animals to help prepare the soil. Instead, hand tools such as digging sticks, shovels, and hoes are used for most tasks. Some people clear new fields by burning the natural vegetation and fertilize their gardens with animal or human wastes or with other kinds of organic matter. If irrigation is necessary, horticulturalists usually hand-carry water from nearby rivers or streams. Figure 6.2 shows the most important regions where the horticultural adaptation existed at the time of contact by the West.

## Varieties of Horticulture

One type of horticulture is *shifting cultivation* (also called *slash and burn*). Once very widespread, in modern times it is found in pockets of remote tropical rain

**horticulture** A method of cultivation in which hand tools powered by human muscles are used and in which land use is extensive.



**Figure 6.2** Principal Regions of Horticulture at the Contact Period.

forests in Central and South America, Southeast Asia, and central Africa. Shifting cultivators farm the forest in a cycle. Using axes, knives, and other hand tools, they first remove a small area of forest. After the wood and leaves dry out, they burn the refuse to recycle valuable plant nutrients in the ash. Generally, a given garden plot is cultivated for only two or three years before its fertility declines and it is gradually abandoned. Then a plot is cleared in another place; a new garden is planted, tended, and harvested until its productivity declines. It too is abandoned, until its natural vegetation regrows and it recovers its ability to produce an adequate harvest, which typically takes 10 or more years.

Shifting cultivation works well so long as population density (the number of people who live in an area of a given size) does not grow too large. For every plot of land under cultivation at any given time, several plots are *fallowed*—they have been left alone for the forest to regrow and the land to recover. If, for every acre of land being cultivated, 10 acres are under fallow, then far fewer people could be supported per acre than if only half the land were fallowed at any one time.

*Dry land gardening* is another form of horticulture. It is defined by the main climatic factor with which

cultivators have to cope: low, erratic, and unpredictable rainfall. Dry land gardening occurs in the American Southwest, in arid parts of Mexico, in some of the Middle East, and in much of sub-Saharan Africa. In the more arid regions of Africa, it is sometimes complemented by livestock such as cattle and goats because rainfall is too low and unpredictable for people to depend entirely on their crops.

Cultivation in arid lands is risky: even if rainfall and harvests are adequate in most years, there is a chance that in any given year not enough rain will fall. Therefore, people who cultivate in dry regions have developed various gardening techniques to cope with the possibility of drought.

In most parts of the American Southwest, annual rainfall averages only about 10 inches, concentrated in the spring and late summer. Further, in this high country, the growing season for corn—the major food—is only about four months long. Western Pueblo peoples such as the Zuni, Hopi, and Acoma are faced with extreme uncertainty: if they plant too early, a spring frost may kill their crops; if they wait too long, they will lose some of the critical moisture from the spring rains.

Over centuries, the Western Pueblo learned to handle risk by planting some of their crops in those areas

most likely to flood, where soil moisture usually lasts until harvest time. Yet, in some years, the unpredictable rains are so torrential that runoff washes away the crops. To cope with such natural hazards, the people diversify both the place and the time of their planting. They plant the seeds of corn, squash, beans, and other crops in several locations so that, no matter what the weather, some fields usually produce a harvest. Gardens in low-lying areas may be lost during an unusually wet year, but upland gardens still yield a crop. Staggering the time of planting likewise lowers the risk of cultivation; by planting crops weeks apart, the risk of losing all of a planting because of an untimely frost is reduced. Thus, by mixing up where and when they plant, the Pueblo peoples reduce the risk of cultivation in an arid, highly seasonal environment.

### Cultural Consequences of Horticulture

The productivity (yield for a given amount of land) of various horticultural methods is much greater than that of foragers. To some people, horticulture looks like “rudimentary” agriculture—because the tools appear so simple—but horticultural people developed sophisticated knowledge of what, when, and where to plant to handle environmental problems. Their tools may be simple, but their knowledge is not at all “rudimentary.” In fact, modern agricultural scientists are studying indigenous horticultural systems to learn how some traditional peoples have farmed their lands sustainably for hundreds of years.

At very basic levels, how do the cultures of horticulturalists differ from those of foragers? Subsequent chapters address this question more thoroughly. For now, we note only two of the most important ways in which the horticultural adaptation shapes the cultures of people who live by it.

First, most horticultural peoples live in larger and more permanent settlements. Rather than bands or camps of 20 to 50, most horticulturalists aggregate into *hamlets* or *villages*, sometimes with hundreds of residents. Also, rather than moving every few weeks, people become more *sedentary*, remaining in the same location for years, decades, or sometimes even longer.

Settlements are more permanent for two main reasons: (1) effective adaptation does not require people to move frequently and (2) families who have cleared and planted plots want to stay around at least long enough to recoup their labor investment.

Second, resource allocation differs from most hunter-gatherers: rights to land are better defined, meaning that particular individuals, families, and other groups are more attached to specific, fairly bounded places where they or their ancestors established a claim. Among most groups, some kind of nuclear or extended family cooperates in food production. When a family invests its labor in clearing, planting, and improving plots or fields, over time that investment establishes the family’s *claim* to the land. Families pass those claims (or rights) on to their children, most of whom transmit the rights to their own children. Over several generations, families—and/or “family lines”—become the recognized owners of particular plots of land.

In sum, two major ways the cultures of horticulturalists differ from those of foragers are: (1) living groups (hamlets, villages) are larger and more permanently settled, and (2) families have more definite rights of ownership over particular pieces of land.

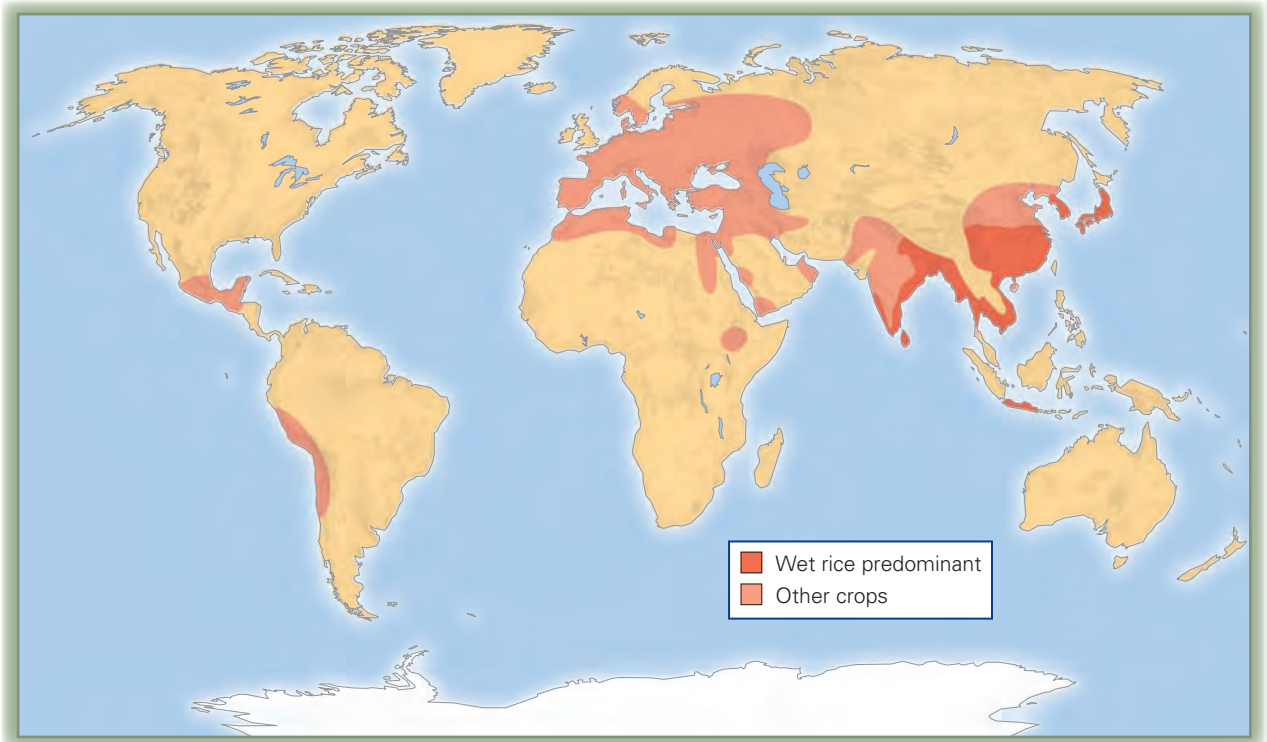
In turn, these two factors have other effects. For example, when people are more sedentary, they can store possessions, raising the potential for wealth accumulation. More definite land rights raise the possibility that some families will inherit or otherwise acquire more productive resources than others. Because the land itself becomes valuable, *within* a settlement rights to parcels may be disputed and people who cultivate the land are not likely to just be willing to abandon their ancestral lands without some kind of argument or conflict. Finally, *between* settlements, potentially some larger, stronger village will want to take over the lands of smaller, militarily weaker groups. Inter-group violent conflict is more likely among horticulturalists than foragers.



### Intensive Agriculture

In the farming system known as **intensive agriculture**, farmers keep their fields under cultivation far longer than horticulturalists. Indeed, some intensive agriculturalists have their lands under almost continuous cultivation—the same fields are farmed year after year, with only brief fallow periods. This is what is meant by using land more *intensively*: to produce higher yields, farmers work the

**intensive agriculture** A system of cultivation in which plots are planted annually or semiannually; usually uses irrigation, natural fertilizers, and (in the Old World) plows powered by animals.



**Figure 6.3** Principal Regions of Intensive Agriculture at the Contact Period.

land (and usually themselves) harder. (Figure 6.3 shows the major regions where intensive agriculturalists lived at the time of contact with Europeans.)

Intensification is possible only if people are able to maintain the yields of their land for long periods. In various regions, to keep up yields people fertilize (generally with the dung of livestock), rotate crops, weed carefully, turn over the soil prior to planting, add compost (organic matter) to the soil, and irrigate their crops. For some of these tasks, a new tool, the plow, and a new source of energy (power), draft animals, are useful. Using plows pulled by horses, mules, oxen, water buffalo, or other draft animals, a farmer can more quickly prepare the soil. In addition to traction for the plow, livestock provide many other useful products: meat, milk and other dairy products, manure, hides, and transportation. After harvest, livestock may be turned loose to graze on the residue of crops, fertilizing fields with their dung. In some regions, animal muscle powers the mechanical pumps that carry irrigation water to the fields.

For all these reasons, intensive agriculture is substantially more productive per area of land than horticulture. An acre of land produces greater yields; hence,

it is capable of supporting far more people—5, 10, and even 20 times the numbers of most horticultural adaptations. Supporting more people is probably the main advantage of intensive agriculture over horticulture.

### *Varieties of Intensive Agriculture*

In the Old World, especially in parts of Asia and Europe, intensive agriculturalists plowed the land. But before the coming of Europeans, New World peoples had no domesticated animals suitable for pulling plows. Except in the Andes of South America, the only animals domesticated by Native Americans were dogs, turkeys, and Muscovy ducks. Andean people also kept llamas, alpacas, and guinea pigs, but these were not harnessed to plows.

Despite this limitation, Native American peoples in places such as the valley of Mexico (land of the Aztecs) and the Andes found ways of increasing yields by intensifying their production efforts. In the valley of Mexico, for example, people transformed swamps and the margins of lakes into productive fields called *chinampas* by constructing raised fields in which they planted crops like tomatoes, squash, and corn. By continually adding new



Wet rice is a very productive form of intensive agriculture that has supported large populations in Asia for many generations. If necessary, humans can construct artificial terraces even on steep slopes, as these Indonesian terraces illustrate.



© David Austen/Stock Boston

organic materials from the lake bottoms, they kept gardens under cultivation for several years. In the Andes, the citizens of the Inca empire constructed stepped terraces to reduce erosion, growing an incredible variety of potatoes and other crops during the summer. Andean peoples also developed a variety of methods for coping with frost in their mountain homelands.

Another method of increasing yields is to augment the water supply by artificial means. Farmers around the world use many ingenious irrigation methods. Some dam streams to conserve runoff and dig ditches to transport water to the fields. In many Asian river valleys, ditches transport water and fertile silt to fields during the annual monsoons, when rivers overrun their banks. In many mountainous regions of Southeast Asia and China, the level of water in hillside rice fields is controlled with an elaborate system of terraces. Rice is produced through a highly coordinated system to supply water in these *wet rice* regions.

In sum, compared with horticulture, intensive agriculture produces more food per unit of land. Its high productivity is due to factors such as using shortened fallow periods, preparing the land more thoroughly prior to planting, removing weeds, adding manure and

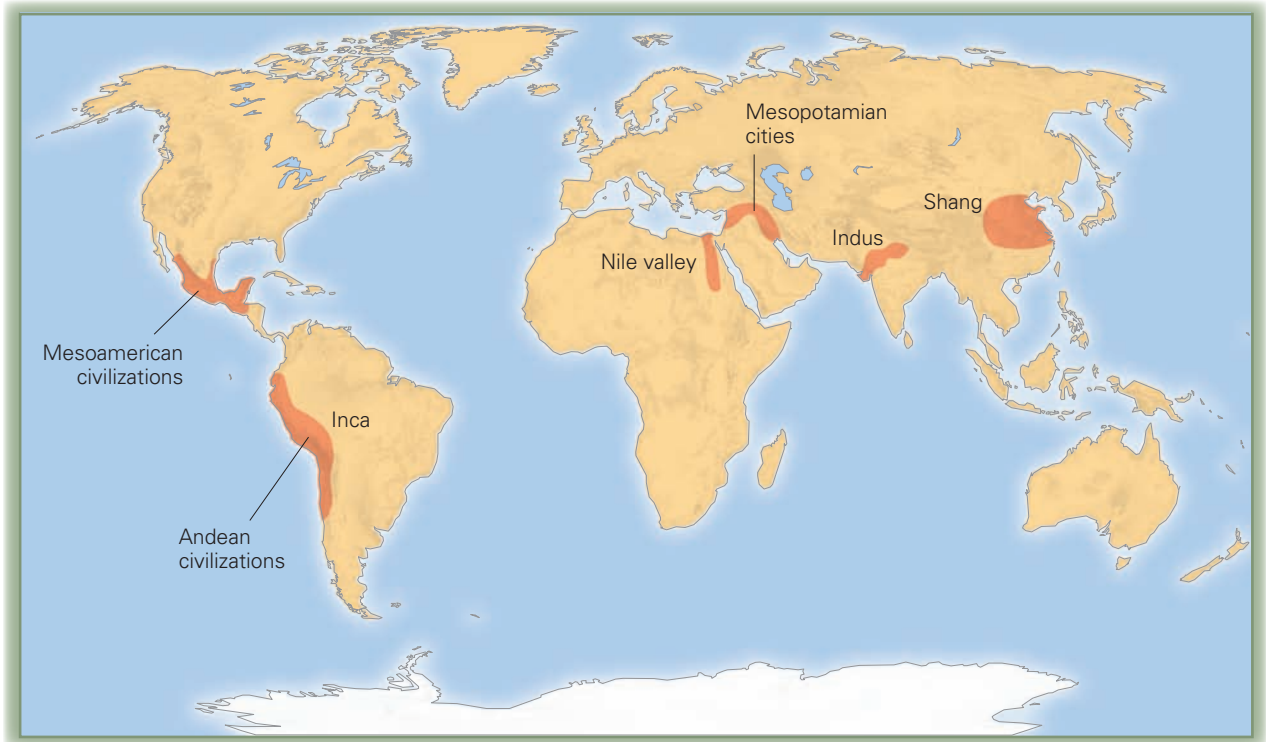
other organic matter to preserve fertility, and manipulating the supply of water. These (and other) inputs give people greater control over conditions in their fields, leading to higher yields per unit of land.

### Cultural Consequences of Intensive Agriculture

The development of intensive farming eventually had dramatic cultural consequences in many regions, most resulting from its relatively high productivity. A single farm family using intensive methods can usually feed many more people than just its own members. Intensive farmers can produce a **surplus** over and above their own subsistence (food) requirements. This surplus can be used to feed other people, families, and groups, who no longer need to produce their own food.

What happens to this surplus? Many things, depending on circumstances. Farmers trade excess food for other useful products like pottery, tools, wood, and clothing. If the community uses money (see Chapter 7), families may produce surplus food to sell and use the money to buy other goods. If the village or other settlement has a strong political leader, such as a chief, he can collect the surplus from his subjects and use the food to pay laborers who work on public projects such as trails, temples, and irrigation works. If the community is part of a larger, more encompassing political system, with a ruler and a governmental bureaucracy, then the government may

**surplus** The amount of food (or other goods) a worker produces in excess of the consumption of herself or himself and her or his dependents.



**Figure 6.4** Ancient Civilizations.

collect part of the surplus as a tax. Political officials then use the tax for public purposes (e.g., support of armies, the judiciary, and the religious hierarchy) and/or to further its own political interests.

All these possibilities illustrate a central fact about most peoples who depend on intensive agriculture: most are not politically independent and economically self-sufficient communities but are instead incorporated into some kind of large organization. Their villages or towns are part of a more inclusive political system that dominates or rules them in some way. Their surplus is traded, sold, or taxed (or all three) and supports people who do not themselves do farm work—people such as rulers, aristocrats, bureaucrats, priests, warriors, merchants, and craft specialists.

Intensive agriculture, then, is strongly associated with large-scale political and economic organization: local-level farmers in villages produce food and other products for people who live elsewhere, and they in turn receive things (products, services) from the larger system. The association of intensive agriculture with large-scale political organization is ancient, going back more than 5,000 years in parts of the Old World and more than 3,000 years in two regions of the New World.

In these regions within a few centuries or a millennium after the development of intensive agriculture, the socially and politically complex society we call **civilization** (including, among other things, the first cities) emerged. Civilizations have a form of government known as the *state* (discussed further in Chapter 12), contrasting markedly with the egalitarian groups of foragers. *States* are large-scale political units that feature a ruler, a governing bureaucracy, class distinctions between the elite and common people, and methods of extracting labor and surplus products from those who are responsible for farming the land.

In ancient times, intensive farmers were incorporated into the four major civilizations of the ancient Old World: the valley formed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of Mesopotamia, the Nile valley of Egypt, the Indus River valley of Pakistan, and the vast empire of China. In the New World, too, agricultural peoples were part of large-scale political units, such as the Mayans, Toltecs, and Aztecs of Mesoamerica, and the Incas of the Andean coast and highlands (see Figure 6.4).

All these early civilizations were supported by intensive agriculture based on large-scale irrigation and water control facilities. Intensive farmers produced the

food supply and paid tribute or taxes to support the rulers, priests, armies, and officials who staffed the government, protected the city, organized the worship of gods, and performed other roles that had now become necessary. So far as we know, intensive agriculture is virtually a prerequisite for civilization because no civilization ever developed out of a foraging or horticultural adaptation.

By about 2,000 years ago, other states developed in Old World places like Korea and Japan (both influenced by China), southern India, much of Southeast Asia, parts of Africa, and most of Europe. In later centuries, the entire world was dramatically affected by states, which tend to expand to incorporate more people and resources to supply necessities for ordinary citizens and luxury goods for elite classes.

Intensive farming methods survive even in the twenty-first century—especially in the developing regions of southern Asia and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Economically, farming communities often fit into their nations as **peasants**, a term that anthropologists use for rural people who live by a combination of subsistence agriculture and market sale. Peasants are integrated into a larger society both politically (i.e., they are subject to laws and governments imposed by their nations) and economically (i.e., they exchange products of their own labor for products produced elsewhere). In many developing countries, peasants are a numerical majority of the population and produce much of the food consumed by town and city dwellers. Peasants produce goods that are sold for money, traded or bartered, paid to a landlord as rent, and rendered to a central government as taxes.

So far as we know, there were no peasant classes until the emergence of the ancient civilizations, so one a by-product of civilization was the development of peasant classes. The farm work of prehistoric and historic peasants fed the craft workers, the merchants, the state-sponsored priests, the political elite, the warriors, and the builders of palaces and temples. Peasants paid tribute or tax (in food, crafts, labor, and/or money), and these resources provided for the maintenance of the society as a whole as well as of the elite classes. The peasantry of medieval Europe, for example, eked out a meager living, paying a substantial portion of their annual harvest to their lords or working many days a year on their lord's estate.

**peasants** Rural people integrated into a larger society politically and economically.

Civilization is usually viewed as a good thing, leading to progress as it spread around the world. True, the high productivity of intensive agriculture allowed the specialized division of labor that led to writing, metallurgy, monumental architecture, cities, and the great religious and artistic traditions we associate with civilization. But what happened to peasants who produced the food that made “progress” possible? For them, writing meant that more accurate accounts could be kept of their taxes or the number of days they worked for overlords. Iron and other metals meant that peasants had better farming tools; yet for the most part they were not allowed to use them to ease their own work but instead only to produce more surplus for others to appropriate. Metal also meant that weapons became more deadly and armies more dangerous, allowing one state to make war against other states more effectively. Most peasant families continued to live in hovels, even while engineers designed great palaces, religious structures, and walled cities and towns that were built using peasant tax-labor. Throughout history, most peasants the world over were denied the benefits offered by technological progress, although the food they produced made much of this progress possible.

In his 2007 book, *The End of Alms*, economic historian Gregory Clark argues that agriculture and civilization did not improve human life for the majority of people at all. Only well after the industrial revolution of the late 1700s did the quality of life for most ordinary people improve, as measured by nutrition, longevity, health status, and consumption levels. The situation is more diverse than Clark implies, but for decades anthropologists have questioned the notion that human life has steadily improved since the “discovery” of agriculture. Agriculture *could* have improved human life, and sometimes it did. But often, the secondary effects of agriculture on societies and polities made the majority of people worse off: surplus benefited elite classes, not those who actually produced the food.

## Pastoralism

Most farmers also keep domesticated animals. Southeast Asian and Pacific horticulturalists raise many pigs and chickens. Intensive agriculturalists raise livestock like horses, mules, oxen, water buffalo, and cattle. Livestock pull their plows, fertilize their fields, yield leather and wool, and provide meat and dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, and other nutritious foods). Livestock do not



merely “supplement” farming: because of the meat, eggs, milk, hides, wool, transportation, fertilizer, and horsepower they provide, they are usually critical to the nutritional and economic welfare of cultivators. The income earned by selling livestock or their products is often the main source of cash for many peasants and other farmers in developing countries.

However, cultivators do not depend on their livestock to the same extent or in the same way as *pastoralists*, or herders. Herders acquire much of their food by raising, caring for, and subsisting on the products of domesticated animals. With few exceptions, the livestock are gregarious (herd) animals. Cattle, camels, sheep, goats, reindeer, horses, llamas, alpacas, and yaks are the common animals kept by herders in various parts of the world.

Agriculture and pastoralism are not mutually exclusive ways of living on the land because many pastoral peoples also farm. In saying a people are “pastoralists,” we do not mean simply that they keep livestock. More important, the needs of their animals for naturally occurring food and water greatly influence the seasonal rhythms of their lives.

When farmers raise livestock, they generally grow crops especially for their animals or maintain fallowed fields on which their animals graze. In contrast, among true pastoral peoples, livestock rely on grassy pasturelands that grow naturally in their territories. The key phrase here is “grow naturally.” Most often, the best natural grasslands are seasonally available, either because of altitudes (generally more grasslands exist in the mountains during summers) or because the herds themselves deplete the grasses by feeding on them. So most pastoralists migrate two or more times a year. This seasonal mobility, called **nomadism**, is one of the defining features of the pastoral way of life. Contrary to what some people think, pastoralists do not wander aimlessly, but migrate in organized seasonal and spatial patterns. Most herders take their livestock to highland areas or mountain pastures to graze during the hottest season of the year. Seasonal movements up- and down-slope according to the productivity of pasturelands is called **transhumance**.

For the most part, herders live in only certain kinds of environments (see Figure 6.5 for the main areas where pastoralists lived prior to European expansion). Pastoralists live mainly in deserts, grasslands, savannas, mountains, and arctic tundras. Although diverse, these environments do share a common feature: cultivation is impossible, extremely difficult, or highly risky because of inadequate or great yearly fluctuations in rainfall (as in deserts or savannas) or very short growing seasons

(as in mountains and tundras). As always, there are exceptions to our generalizations, but most pastoralists live in regions not well suited to cultivation.

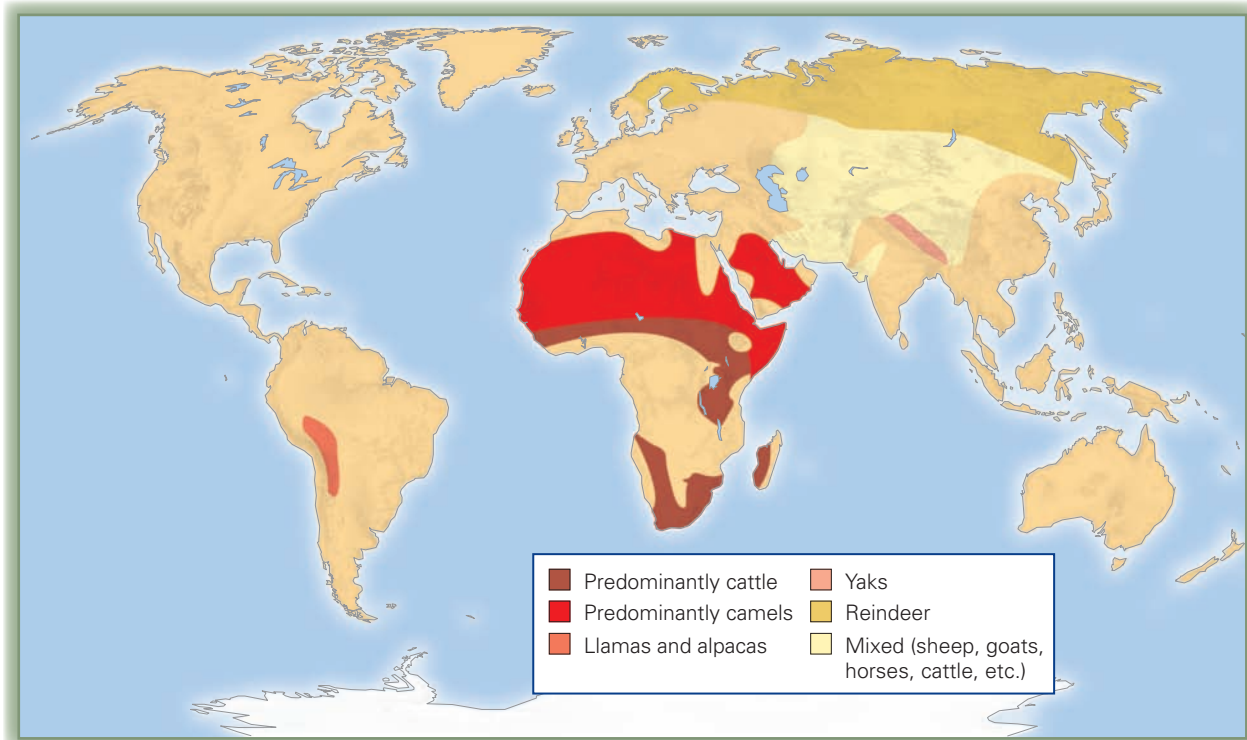
In such arid or cold environments, keeping livestock offers several advantages. First, most vegetation of grasslands and arid savannas (grasses and shrubs) and tundras (lichens, willows, and sedges) is indigestible by humans. Livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats and reindeer can digest this vegetation and transform it into milk, blood, fat, and muscle, all of which are drunk or eaten by various pastoral peoples. The Sami people (formerly called the Lapps) of northern Europe keep reindeer which eat the sparse tundra vegetation and incorporate into flesh and milk that is eaten by their owners. The Turkana of Kenya and many other East African peoples who live in arid lands maintain enormous herds of cattle, drinking their milk and blood almost daily and eating their flesh only on special occasions. A cow, after all, is worth more alive than dead. As these examples illustrate, in some regions livestock allow people to exploit indirectly certain wild plant resources not directly available to them. In brief, livestock convert inedible plants into edible products.

A related advantage of herding is subsistence risk reduction. In areas of low and unreliable rainfall, in some years crop yields are inadequate because of drought. In high altitude or high latitude regions, crops may fail because of low temperatures or short growing seasons. Livestock provide an insurance against fluctuations in the food supply from an unpredictable droughts and cold periods. The Karimojong of Uganda traditionally lived by a combination of horticulture and cattle herding. In the central, wetter part of their lands, Karimojong women tended gardens of sorghum (an African grain) and a few other crops. Crop yields fluctuated unpredictably with rainfall. Boys and young men took the family’s cattle to pasturelands away from where the women lived and worked. While living in these small mobile “cattle camps” the men lived largely by drinking the milk and blood of their herds, supplemented by the sorghum beer that the women sometimes brought when they visited. Not only did cattle add

**nomadism** Seasonal mobility, often involving migration to high-altitude areas during the hottest and driest parts of the year.

**transhumance** The pastoral pattern involving migration to different elevations to respond to seasonal differences in the availability of pasturelands.





**Figure 6.5** Principal Regions of Pastoralism at the Contact Period.

animal products to the Karimojong diet, but they provided insurance against low sorghum yields. In brief, livestock help people cope with risky environments.

Another advantage of keeping livestock is their mobility. Not only do animals store meat on the hoof, but they also can be traded or sold to neighboring peoples. Herds can be moved to areas where the pasture is most lush or where the water supply is abundant. People can move their herds and themselves away from neighbors who have grown too aggressive. In some regions, like Africa's Sahara or central Asia's ancient Silk Road, caravans of camels moved products produced in one place across thousands of miles of relatively barren land, where they were traded or sold. Two thousand years ago, the elite of the Roman empire enjoyed the translucent, flimsy garments made from Chinese silk and transported across Asia. The Romans had no idea that the fine fibers came from larval stage of an insect we call the silk moth. All along the cold, arid route were trading stations and towns where traders were serviced and where products were sold to be transported and sold again at the next station or town.

Aridity, temperature, short growing seasons, and other ecological and climatic factors go a long way toward explaining why pastoralists live where and how

they do. However, the natural environment does not totally explain the geographical distribution of pastoral peoples. Some herders live in areas where the environment can support crops, and they certainly know how to cultivate the soil, but they choose not to grow crops. Many decades ago, British anthropologists defined a culture area known as the "East African cattle complex." In this complex, found throughout the East African savannas, cattle are more than an ordinary source of food. The East African man loves his cattle like some North Americans loved their sports utility vehicles before the financial collapse of 2008–2010. Cattle represent wealth and manliness. They are the source of prestige, influence in tribal affairs, and bride-wealth for wives. When sacrificed ritually, cattle are religious symbols and are the source of blessings from the ancestors and gods.

The cattle-herding Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania are a famous example of the East African cattle complex. In some parts of the Maasai territory, cultivation is possible; in fact, most Maasai neighbors combine cattle herding with cultivation of sorghum and other crops. However, the proud Maasai look down on cultivation because their herds represent wealth and are the main symbol of their cultural identity relative to their

Most pastoralists live in regions that are too cold or too arid for agriculture. The Nenet, reindeer herders in the western Siberian tundra, live partly from eating reindeer meat and trading the products of their herds. They also use the animals as beasts of burden for long-distance travel.



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neighbors. Maasai, therefore, live largely off the products of their cattle—blood, milk, meat, curds—and trade with their neighbors for cultivated foods. The reasons so many Maasai continue their pastoral way of life are, therefore, “cultural” as well as “ecological.” Their pastoral way of life helps define their cultural identity relative to neighboring peoples.

Despite peoples like the Maasai, most anthropologists who study herders think the main benefit of pastoralism is that it allows large numbers of people to live well in regions unsuitable or marginal for farming. It therefore is informative to compare how most herders raise and feed livestock with how livestock are raised and fattened in nations with an industrialized food system. Pastoral peoples might teach the world that livestock are most efficiently used as converters of inedible plants into edible meat and other animal products. If you feed foods that people can eat to livestock, you lose most of the energy, vitamins, and protein to the bodily functions of the animal.

Yet consider livestock use in North America and other nations where agricultural production is mechanized. In such nations, government policies provide subsidies to certain farmers, marketing strategies produce an excess of low priced agricultural commodities, and most citizens have no idea about livestock (what animal produces the meat called “mutton”?) or about how their food is produced. In North America, most soybeans and corn are grown as fodder for cattle,

pigs, and fowl. When you eat a pound of flesh, indirectly you consume several pounds of corn and soy. You also consume (and pay for) the energy used to grow and process the corn and soy into animal fodder. You are supporting the industries that produce the fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides used to produce the crops that make grocery-bought meats so tender and juicy—that is, so fatty.

## Nature and Culture in Preindustrial Times

In this chapter, we have synthesized an enormous amount of information, although we have not covered many complications and exceptions because of space limitations. Recognizing these, we emphasize one major point: *the ways a people harness the resources and cope with the problems of living in a particular environment are important influences on many dimensions of the group's culture.* (See the Concept Review for a summary of some of these influences.)

Just how important these “influences” are, of course, is debatable, as the theoretical approaches known as scientific and humanistic illustrate (see Chapter 4). Nonetheless, few anthropologists question the following generalizations about the relationship between forms of adaptation and cultural systems:

## MAJOR FORMS OF PREINDUSTRIAL ADAPTATIONS AND THEIR CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

Form of Adaptation	Food Acquired by Means of	Basic Organization of Communities	Rights to Resources	Internal Differentiation
Hunting/Gathering	Collection/gathering of wild plants; hunting of animals; sometimes fishing	Small, mobile bands of 10–50, usually varying seasonally	Flexible access to resources over large territories	Division of labor based on sex and age; equality based on sharing
Horticulture	Cultivation of crops using hand tools and mainly human muscle power	Scattered hamlets or villages of 100 or more, largely but variably sedentary	Ownership of land and productive resources by kin groups and/or residential groups	Variable differentiation, but little specialization and inequality
Intensive Agriculture	Cultivation of crops with animal-powered plows or other means of using land intensively	Central administrative places, with cities and towns surrounded by rural “peasant” communities	Rights vested in or controlled by multilevel administrative officials responsible to the “state”	Craft and service specialization with social distinctions and major inequalities
Pastoralism	Tending of livestock that provide products (meat, milk, hides, wool) to eat, trade, and sell	Seasonally nomadic living units of varying size and composition	Grazing rights based on membership in families, kin groups, or the tribe itself	Variably complex differentiation based on age, sex, and often hereditary distinctions

- In most environments, foraging is most efficient when people live in small, seasonally mobile groups that maintain flexible rights to the natural resources of large territories.
- Horticultural people settle in hamlets or villages in which land and other productive resources are owned by families or other kinship or residential groups.
- Intensive agriculture resulted in the development of towns and cities occupied by elites and specialists and surrounded by rural peasant communities that contribute labor, tribute, and/or tax to support the government and public projects.
- Most pastoral peoples are seasonally nomadic, with grazing rights to pasture lands vested in families or other kin groups or in the tribe as a whole.

In future chapters, as we cover various aspects of culture, we sometimes discuss the ways in which human–environment interactions affect family life, gender relationships, political organization, and other dimensions of cultural systems.

### Industrialism

Thus far, as you realize, we have focused on preindustrial peoples who did not have significant access to the

energy locked up in fossil fuels. Industrialism is the most recent—not necessarily the final—major way in which humans interact with nature. Industrialism shelters the world’s more affluent persons from the environment and provides them with their means of survival without them having to engage nature directly—except under tightly controlled conditions like sea cruises and fishing vacations. Heating and air conditioning keep us warm or cool, and we no longer need to butcher our own meat or gather firewood for cooking. Machines and the energy needed to power them substitute for human labor, allowing people who in the preindustrial world would be producing food, wood, and metals to find other jobs in factories and services. In fact, one of the hallmarks of industrialization is that few people work in activities that extract natural resources like farming, fishing, lumbering and mining. This is a new condition in human history.

We have no space to discuss the history of the industrial revolution or the process of industrialization itself. Here, we simply note that industrialization began in Great Britain in the late 1700s and in the next several decades spread to the rest of Europe and North America. At first, British textile mills (and later those in New England) were powered by falling water. Around 1800, efficient ways were found to burn coal to make steam, which powered looms to turn out textiles in massive quantities. Later, the energy stored in

oil and natural gas was harnessed for human uses, leading to the present reliance on fossil fuels as the main energy source in all industrial economies.

When combusted, fossil fuels release tremendous amounts of energy that humans harness for profit and consumption. Physicists say that energy is the capacity to do work. With vast quantities of energy, vast quantities of “work” can be done—thanks to machinery and fossil fuels more than to human work. Therefore, vast quantities of products can be manufactured. Electricity generated from coal-fired power plants, falling water, and most recently nuclear sources vastly increased available power for private industries. They also made new mass consumer products available, from light bulbs to iPads.

The technology for producing energy from fossil fuels is the essence of industrialization. Except during periodic energy crises, citizens of industrialized nations take the benefits of fossil fuels for granted, seldom thinking about what happens when they turn on light switches, car engines, air conditioners, and elevators. When the global price of oil rises to over \$100 per barrel, we become aware of energy costs. Most of us blame oil-producing countries and oil companies, but we continue to pay at the pump even though we are sure we are being gouged. Energy to move around as we wish and to heat and cool our living space is so important that we usually give up something else if its price increases. But most people do not realize how cheap energy from fossil fuels actually is, even during oil crises. If you live in North America, you paid more per gallon for the bottled water you probably drank today than for gasoline when its price “skyrockets” to \$3.00 per gallon. So, giving up a quart of bottled water will help you weather the next energy crisis—and save the oil used to manufacture the container.

Think about just a few of the implications of industrial technology for your life. Most of our readers would go hungry or even starve without supermarkets or some other kind of retail outlets that used to be called *grocery stores*. Even if you know how to hunt, fish, and garden, you probably don’t have access to enough land to support yourself. Most likely, your individual workday is (or someday will be) tightly scheduled. The same applies to your week—but at least there’s the weekend. Perhaps you think you are “burning up” when you go outside into 95 degree heat, and “freezing” if your living space goes down to 55 degrees. You are, or someday hope to be, a “homeowner.” You will feel lucky to have your own place and probably do not know that most people in history have had access to a place to live without having to

buy it at all. You are far more likely to have two or three children than six or seven. Your family size won’t matter much because you don’t need children to help around the farm and you trust that Social Security will still be there when you “retire.” Odds are you will live long after your retirement, at least if you watch what you eat and exercise more often.



## Globalization of Production

Industrialism not only changed the lives of ordinary humans more than any other technological change, but it also opened up all kinds of possibilities for humanity. It improved the material living standards of several billion people in the last two or so centuries. However, like other ways of extracting nature’s resources, industrialism has social and cultural consequences and like the others it is not free of costs.

As just one example of these “possibilities” and “costs,” consider transportation. By the mid-nineteenth century, steam engines powered the locomotives that made train transportation both rapid and cheap, to the detriment of horse breeders and wagon makers. Trains greatly facilitated the settlement of the American West. Box cars moved Western products East and vice versa, integrating the American economy. Later, when a way was found to power internal combustion engines by gasoline, automobiles were invented. After Henry Ford introduced the assembly line production of automobiles in the early decades of the twentieth century, the costs of autos fell so much that ordinary families could afford one. The American government responded by constructing tens of thousands of miles of new roads, using tax revenues to do so and thus subsidizing auto industries and car owners. By the last half of the century, middle-class families could afford two, three, or more motor vehicles, which now included a lot more models than just sedans. But moving passengers by train travel declined as a consequence, even though railroads were once a major American employer and despite the fact that trains are far more efficient in energy terms than cars.

In the last half of the twentieth century, two new methods of freight transportation grew rapidly: trucks and container ships. Both modes of transportation changed lives by more tightly integrating parts of nations or the whole world.

The long-haul trucking industry moves products from factories and fields to retail stores or supermarkets very rapidly. In January, New Englanders and eastern



Canadians can enjoy produce grown on mega-farms in Southern California's Imperial Valley, which produces 40 percent of the nation's winter vegetables. When the price of energy again increases, rising transportation costs will result in higher prices for winter vegetables, and for most other foods. The same will occur should the federal government eliminate the huge subsidies it now pays for the irrigation water necessary to transform the Imperial Valley from semi-desert to agricultural paradise.

By lowering costs of transporting freight to overseas destinations giant container ships helped create the global economy. As just one example, it is cost effective for American companies to ship computer components to China where Chinese workers assemble them into a computer, then send them back to the United States. Many of the computer parts cross the Pacific Ocean *twice*, so companies pay two-way shipping costs. But computer-makers still make more profits and consumers enjoy lower costs than if computers were assembled by American or Canadian workers.

The process in which companies move their production facilities to cut costs and be more competitive is the **globalization of production**. Where manufactured commodities are actually produced or assembled is often a different country from where the company is registered. The reason so many manufacturing jobs have moved “offshore” is profits, which depend in part on lowering the costs of production. If production and shipping costs are low enough, then market forces encourage companies to move at least some manufacturing operations to low-cost regions. Should global energy prices rise enough, then higher shipping costs will curtail or slow the globalization of production. But the consequences would be global.

Most people explain the relocation of assembly and other production facilities to newly industrialized countries in Asia and other continents by low labor costs. Labor is inexpensive in countries like China and India for several reasons. They have millions of people migrating to cities looking for factory jobs, so the labor supply is plentiful. Most unskilled labor is not organized by unions for many reasons, one of which is that governments and local managers want to keep wages low so their work force is competitive in the

global market for labor. Peoples' skill levels are so low that they accept work that others refuse because of its low wages. Finally, India and China are often said to be overpopulated, meaning they allegedly have too many people for their resource base. In a sense, the globalization of production provides their people with more resources—mainly with jobs, which have become the “resource” most people in industrialized nations need for survival and well-being. Conversely, the globalization of production has taken away “resources” from many factory workers in North America, Japan, South Korea, and Europe. At the same time, globalization indirectly has increased the “resources” for consumers in the wealthier nations whose corporations have exported jobs overseas. If you pay much lower prices for electronics, clothing, shoes, and a host of other goods because they are produced in countries with low wages, you now have more “resources.”



## Globalization and the Environment

Low labor costs are not the whole explanation for the globalization of production, however. Other costs of offshore production for corporations also are low, because plant safety and environmental regulations are more relaxed than in the corporations' home countries. When Western governments passed serious environmental regulations in the 1970s, they increased the production costs of their industries. But to the extent that governments applied the regulations evenly and fairly, no particular company in an industry received a comparative advantage. They adjusted by lowering costs in other areas and raising costs to consumers. They “adapted” to the new “regulatory environment.”

Since the environmental movement took off in Europe and North America in the early 1970s, most scientists and ordinary citizens recognize the environmental impacts of industrialization. Natural resources are harvested from all over the world to supply raw materials for factories. Extracting resources leads to depletions, landscape destruction, soil erosion, and other deteriorations of environmental quality. As a by-product of burning fossil fuels like coal and oil, factories pollute the air, making government regulation mandatory for environmental and health reasons. Coal mines dig out earth and rock to uncover seams of coal. If there were not laws to curtail them, factories would release toxins that pollute waterways. Even

**globalization of production** The process of corporations headquartered in one country relocating their production facilities to other countries to reduce production costs and remain globally competitive.

As these cement factories illustrate, China's rapid growth in the last 30 years has led to serious pollution of air and water.



© Tim Graham/Getty Images

modern agriculture usually is more factory-like than farm-like, relying on machinery for most operations and consequently consuming more total energy than the food energy of the products. Runoff from agricultural chemicals and modern livestock feedlots pollutes waterways.

Despite regulations, environmental disasters still occur from human activity. In April 2010, an offshore oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico leased by British Petroleum exploded. At first, officials anticipated the environmental damage would be minimal. As massive quantities of crude escaped from the well 5000 feet below the sea surface and BP was unable to stop it until mid-July, the spill reached gulf coasts and marshes. Immediate damage to ecosystems, beaches, the tourist industry, the fish and shellfish population were severe, but odds are the long-term costs will be even worse. Despite the environmental damage and the economic costs to fishermen and others, the spill will not detract much from the American GDP, because the companies hired by BP to clean up the mess will make profit and hire workers. Their income will *add* to the nation's GDP, at least partly making up for income lost by occupations like fishers and tourism workers.

Despite continuing events like the 2010 disaster, government regulation of mines, industries, farms, auto emissions, and the like have significantly reduced many environmental impacts in Japan, Australia, North America, and Europe. If it were not for these regulations, environmental degradation would certainly

be worse than it is. Why don't farms and businesses just act in environmentally responsible ways? Some do, of course. However, in a market economy, if an environmentally responsible company voluntarily decides to clean up its wastes and reduce its harmful emissions, then that company will suffer in the competitive marketplace because its costs will rise. That would be economically foolish, and competitive markets do not reward this kind of foolishness.

When countries like Brazil, India, and China industrialized rapidly due to globalization, they also experienced the negative environmental effects of industrialization. Consider the People's Republic of China. With several hundred million rural peasants and low urban wage rates, China is still not a rich country. China has a huge population of 1.4 billion (four times that of the United States), a government that seems committed to development, a cultural tradition infused with a work ethic, and a large pool of workers. In August of 2010, China surpassed Japan as the world's second largest economy, now trailing only the United States.

China's industries have grown so rapidly since the 1980s that it now has serious air and water pollution problems. According to the World Bank in 2007, China had 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities. China uses about half of the world's cement for its new roads and buildings. It imports about half of the world's iron ore, which it manufactures into steel for use in construction and in products like motor vehicles and ships.

Only in the past 20 years has global warming, also called climate change, been widely recognized as a worldwide environmental problem. Combustion of fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which traps solar radiation and warms the climate. There remains disagreement about how serious the problem is and whether human activities are its main causes. But climate change is real and is a *global* problem, meaning that the carbon dioxide one country puts into the atmosphere harms or will harm all other countries. Global warming therefore requires international agreements and cooperation.

However, agreements at the global level are difficult to come by. Until its replacement by the G-20 in late 2009, the Group of 8 (G-8) was an organization of the world's eight most developed countries: United States, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, Canada, Russia, France, and Italy. G-8 members met periodically to discuss and formulate agreements on issues of common concern. In July of 2009, the G-8 met in Italy. One hope was to reach an agreement to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Nations like India, China, Mexico, Brazil, and five other nations were not G-8 members (all are now part of the G-20), but were invited to the July 2009 meeting because they are now large contributors to global warming. Between them, these 17 nations produce about 80 percent of the planet's greenhouse gases. China and the United States together account for over 40 percent of global emissions. In a draft agreement, G-8 members had agreed to reduce their emissions by 80 percent by 2050. But the other nine nations refused to agree to even the indefinite goal of reducing their emissions "significantly" to achieve a worldwide greenhouse gas reduction of 50 percent by 2050.

In December 2009, 193 of the world's nations met in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the goal of reaching a binding agreement on greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Environmentalists had hoped that nations would agree to cut their emissions by a certain percentage (varying according to the level of development) by a definite date, like 2030 or 2050. However, there were many disagreements between the 193

countries. How much financial assistance should the developed countries provide to the lesser developed ones to help them lower emissions? What should be the maximal amount the global temperature should be allowed to rise? Arguing for a maximum rise of 1.5 degrees, the G-77 (Group of 77 of the developing countries) claimed that a 2 degree rise is unacceptable because it would drastically affect many low-lying regions and islands that would be heavily damaged by rising temperatures and sea level rises.

Why are international agreements like this so hard to make? Greenhouse gas emissions are "public bads"—unless most industrializing nations actually reduce their emissions, the efforts of nations who pay for costly emission reductions will be for naught. If, say, the more developed nations pay the economic costs of reducing their emissions, global warming will still occur because other nations will continue to contribute greenhouse gases.

Consider China. By 2008, China emitted more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases than the United States, and thus became the world's largest single contributor to global warming. Without cooperation from the Chinese and other emerging industrial economies, any agreement by richer nations will have little impact on global warming. An agreement between all major emitters is necessary. Why don't the leaders of emerging nations sign agreements that are in the global interest?

Political leaders in some countries claim—understandably and truthfully—that it was the actions of Westerners that historically brought the planet most depletions and pollutions. Some feel that China, India, and other rapidly developing countries should not have to pay the full economic costs of pollution controls and greenhouse gas emissions. It was the West's industrialization and development that brought the planet so dangerously close to irreversible climate change, they argue. Why should their citizens suffer by paying the costs of damage already done by countries that did not curtail the environmental impacts as they became wealthy? Why should their people have to sacrifice their recently rising

Tap water is unsafe to drink in most large Chinese cities. Three-fourths of China's energy comes from coal, burnt to heat Chinese homes and combusted to produce electricity in power plants.

China and India together have about 2.5 billion people, or 40 percent of the world's total population. When countries this large pollute, other countries notice because some kinds of pollution easily cross national borders. Air pollution from Chinese factories wafts over to the Koreas and Japan. Sometimes, upper

atmospheric winds carry the sulphur dioxide from China's coal-burning clear over to North America's west coast. Countries like India and China are experiencing car booms, raising global oil prices and hastening the time when the price of oil will rise high enough to really threaten the standard of living of the middle class in many countries. The newly industrializing regions also contribute significantly to global warming, raising world issues such as who should pay most to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the

standards of living to protect the global environment? Their citizens still consume far less than those of the richest nations.

In a speech delivered in China in July 2009, U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu admitted that China's people produce about one-fourth of greenhouse gases than America's people, on a per capita basis. China *has* agreed to reduce substantially its "emissions intensity": the amount of greenhouse gas emitted per unit of Gross Domestic Product. So, China's emissions per capita will grow, but even with the growth, an average Chinese would still be less responsible for climate change than an average North American. On what fairness or moral basis should the rich nations demand that China's 1.4 billion people do more?

Leaders of many newly industrialized countries also point out that European and North American companies locate some of their most hazardous and polluting industries in poorer regions in order to avoid those costly government regulations in their home countries. Western companies therefore are responsible for part of the pollution generated by factories that produce commodities for export to the already-developed countries. The richer countries export some of their dirtiest industries to the newly industrialized countries, then expect those countries to clean up their pollution and reduce their harmful emissions. Over one-third of China's products are exported to North America and Europe. In the last 20 or so years, consumers who buy the products produced offshore also have benefited from significantly lower retail prices of clothing, shoes, consumer electronics, and other offshore products. So it is they who should pay more to ease global warming.

These are arguments of those who think it is unreasonable for newly industrialized nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions as much as wealthy countries think they should. The richer countries point out that there is nothing they can do about their past environmental records and that cooperation from all nations is needed. The issue is one of equity: which countries should reduce their emissions, and by how much?

Perhaps it will help if people realize there are nations whose people contribute almost nothing to global warming and rising sea levels but who will be most affected by it. North Americans hear that low-lying areas like southern Louisiana and part of Florida will be seriously affected if sea levels rise a couple of feet. This would be a tragedy that should be avoided. But the United States now emits about one-fourth of the world's greenhouse gases and most Floridians and Louisiana people can be relocated (theoretically). In Bangladesh, whose people contribute about 0.1 percent of all greenhouse gases, a sea level rise of 20 inches would inundate the living space of about 20 million mostly impoverished people. Unlike the United States, Bangladesh is such a densely populated country that there are few other places for people to move. How will they cope with a global problem not of their own making?

Other places will be even more affected by global warming. We seldom hear about Pacific island nations composed entirely of low coral atolls such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The *highest* elevation of most atoll nations is around 20 feet. Significant sea level rise would flood much of their living spaces. Equally seriously, their staple crops like taro (an edible root) and breadfruit (a tree crop) are intolerant of salt water and already are being killed as ocean water that lies just below the land surface reaches their roots through the permeable limestone.

Rising sea levels gets a lot of media attention, but climate change also will alter worldwide precipitation patterns. Climate scientists cannot predict the severity or location of the most serious impacts, but undoubtedly food production will be disrupted in some regions. A 2009 article in the prestigious journal *Science* reported that most climate models suggest that the tropics and subtropics will experience the most severe impacts. Three billion people still get most of their food from subsistence farming. For many of them, global warming will reduce their ability to support themselves. Again, these are people who have done the least to cause climate change.

*SOURCES:* See the Notes for Chapter 6 "Industrialism"

interest of future generations (see the Globalization feature).

The comparative advantage of the recently industrializing nations is based on their ability to deliver products to the global market at extremely low costs. If they do not do so, there are other countries that will. Viewed in this context, serious and enforced environmental and safety regulations like those adopted by the present rich countries would threaten the constant creation of new jobs and the rise in consumption. Should

China impose costly regulations on its factories, prices for their products would rise and the continual growth of Chinese employment and living standards would be threatened. The Chinese government is legitimately worried about the impacts on social stability and what Chinese leaders call a "harmonious society." China has an active environmental movement and its national government is making efforts to clean up its manufacturing, but officials at the local level too often profit by not enforcing regulations.



This discussion does not “excuse” Brazil, India, China, and other rapidly industrializing nations for their inability or unwillingness to pass and enforce environmental regulations. Rather, our point is to propose that environmentalists and self-righteous citizens in the more affluent parts of the world make more of an effort to “grasp the native’s point of view,” to quote Clifford Geertz (Chapter 4). How much harm would be done to the ordinary citizens of the newly industrializing nations if their production costs rose substantially? China already is offshoring some of its own production to still poorer nations, who in their turn are likely to contribute to global environmental problems. If the Chinese central government should lose control because the country cannot provide jobs for two or three hundred million people, what would be the global consequences? If the richer nations enjoy cleaner air and water partly because they shipped some of their most polluting industries overseas, what are their obligations in regard to environmental protection in the overseas nations?

The globalization of consequences is one consequence of globalization. We began this chapter by saying that two of the most important dimensions of human-nature interactions are extracting resources and handling environmental problems. Industrialism has extracted resources from all over the world, and these resources are bought and sold on the global market. The scale of this buying and selling is new. Industrialism has created environmental problems that are global in scale. That also is new. In the last few decades, new international institutions have been created, such as the Organization of American States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the European Union. Nations have signed agreements that promote free trade, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. Members of the European Union buy and sell to one another using a new currency, the Euro. Countries seem to find ways of negotiating and enforcing agreements when it is in their economic interest. Perhaps it’s time to do the same for the global environment.

## Summary

**1 Discuss how relationships between humans and the environment differ from those of other animals.** Humans adjust to their environments by cultural changes in technology and organization more than by changes in their genes. One important way people interact with nature is by productive activities, which require labor, technology, natural resources, and group organization. People also find ways to cope with the problems of living in a particular habitat, which occurs mainly by means of group-level accumulated experiences.

**2 Describe hunting and gathering and its major impacts on cultures.** Hunters and gatherers, or foragers, live exclusively from the wild plants and animals available in their habitats. Only a few foraging cultures survived into the twentieth century. Foragers organized their activities so that at the proper season, they could be at the places where wild foods were naturally available. Most exhibited the following characteristics: (1) a division of labor based mainly on sex and age; (2) high mobility; (3) congregation and dispersal of groups, usually based on seasonal changes; (4) small living groups or bands; (5) reciprocal sharing; and (6) loose and flexible rights to the resources of a given territory. These features are well illustrated by cultures

such as the Hadza, Shoshone, and Ju/'hoansi. However, there are many exceptions to these generalizations such as fishers of the Northwest Coast and bison hunters of the Great Plains of North America.

**3 Describe horticulture and its major consequences for cultures.** Domestication is the attempt to increase the productivity of an environment by planting and cultivating selected plants (crops) and taming and breeding certain animals (livestock). Horticulture is one form of plant domestication. Horticulturalists use only hand tools in planting, cultivating, and harvesting their plots or gardens, as illustrated by shifting cultivation and dry land gardening. Horticulture produces more food per acre than foraging, and it requires that people make a labor investment in particular pieces of land (their plots). Broadly, this led to two cultural consequences: (1) people remained in one place for a long time (sedentism) and the size of their settlements increased (villages), and (2) particular families established their own claims to certain pieces of land, producing cultural beliefs that land is the property of specific groups.

**4 Describe intensive agriculture and how it led to the emergence of civilization.** Intensive

agriculturalists use various methods to keep yields high, including fertilization and irrigation. Intensive farming eventually raised productivity enough that a single farm family was able to produce a surplus over and above its own food needs. Out of this surplus potential a new form of culture, called *civilization*, arose in several regions of both the Old World and the New World. Supported by intensive agriculture, civilization changed human life profoundly, leading to new developments such as writing, specialization, huge architectural structures, roads, and familiar artistic traditions. But whether the class of peasants enjoyed very many of these benefits is doubtful.

**5 Discuss nomadic pastoralism and its benefits in certain environments.** Nomadic pastoralism is most beneficial in regions unsuitable for agriculture due to aridity, extreme temperature, or inadequate growing seasons for crops. In these kinds of habitats, herding offers several advantages. It allows people to convert indigestible grasses and other vegetation into edible flesh and dairy products. It reduces the risk of living

in an unreliable environment, both because livestock provide a way of storing food on the hoof and because the food supply (herds) can be moved to more favorable places when times are hard.

**6 Analyze industrialization and how it affects human lives, globalization, and worldwide environmental problems.** Industrialism exploits the energy locked up in fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas. By vastly increasing the amount of energy available to humanity, industrialism transformed most aspects of human life, from the number of people working in extractive industries to family sizes. To reduce the costs of production, corporations in the richer nations have relocated many factories overseas, providing jobs for citizens there and greatly impacting the work force and consumers in their own nations. Because of the globalization of production, environmental problems like water and air pollution and climate change have accelerated, generating international issues about which nations should bear the costs of environmental clean up.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 7 EXCHANGE IN ECONOMIC SYSTEMS



In the twenty-first century, global markets are integrating nations and regions into a single system. This is the Ginza shopping district of Tokyo, where you can buy nearly anything from anywhere, especially if it's expensive.

© Michel Setboun/Corbis

## **Economic Systems**

### **Reciprocity**

*Generalized Reciprocity*

*Balanced Reciprocity*

*Negative Reciprocity*

*Reciprocity and Social Distance*

## **Redistribution**

### **Market Exchange**

*Money*

*On Market Economies*

## **Globalization and Markets**



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Describe** the three main forms of exchange in economic systems.
- 2 Analyze** how the form of reciprocity between people varies with social distance.
- 3 Discuss** the relationship between redistribution and political organization.
- 4 Elaborate** on the differences between markets and other kinds of economies and their relative costs and benefits.
- 5 Describe** money and some of its uses and varieties.
- 6 Discuss** the globalization of markets and its impacts on workers, consumers, corporations, and cultural preservation.

In the mid-1970s, when one of your authors (J. P.) conducted fieldwork on a Micronesian island called Kosrae, a man in his 60s told me he had heard that many people in “Merike” (America) had no land. “Is this true?” he wanted to know. I assured him it was. “But if they have no land, where does their food come from?” “We buy it in stores,” I answered. Being familiar with stores, jobs, wages, and money, he nodded. “But where do people live?” He also understood my explanation of rent and the buying and selling of land. “How much does a house cost?” I estimated that he could buy a small house in California (where I then lived) for around \$40,000 but that few people had that amount of money on hand and would have to borrow most of it. “Does everyone have to do this in Merike?” “Almost everyone,” I replied. He was astonished. “On Kosrae,” he said, “everyone gets land from his father [and sometimes from his or her mother] and we build our own houses.”

The Micronesian was surprised not only because \$40,000 was far more money than he would make in his life, but also because almost all Americans have to buy or rent land to live on. The people of Kosrae did sometimes sell land to one another, but those who sold the land they inherited were regarded as unfortunate or shortsighted. Land was not simply a “commodity” to be bought and sold routinely, like clothing or detergent. A family’s land helped define their identity; sometimes people referred to a family by the name of the shared estate it had inherited from its ancestors. Although unmarked, the boundaries that separated one family’s land from another’s were widely known or, in cases of dispute, debated. How could so many Americans not have any land at all, and how could they pay so much for it?

Of course, by the year 2000, a family in California would have had a very difficult time finding any house for a mere \$40,000. By mid-2007, the median price of an American house was \$220,000. In the San Francisco Bay Area, in 2006 the median price of a small lot with a house built on it was \$550,000, 14 times more than in the mid-1970s, when I talked to the man from Kosrae. In Merike, “homes” are the main “asset” of most families and “homeownership” is part of the “American Dream.” If you rent when you can afford to buy, you are just “giving money to your landlord,” rather than building up “equity” and reaping the benefits of the “tax break” from the “interest” you pay over the “amortized life of the loan.”

The American Dream is to own the land that the Kosraean man took as his normal birthright. For generations, many North American families have never owned the places they live in, either because they choose to rent or because real estate prices are beyond their means. In the early twenty-first century, the escalation of real estate prices led many middle class families to conclude (reasonably) that if they didn’t enter the “housing market” soon, they would never be able to achieve their dreams. In 2007 and 2008, so many people bought houses they could not afford (for many of them, a house they could not afford was any house at all) that the resulting “financial crisis” caused the most severe “recession” since the 1930s.

Who would make a loan to a family who borrowed more money than they could likely pay back, given the high risks of making such loans? A multitude of real estate lending institutions, who did not worry about whether new homeowners could pay them back because most of them bundled a bunch of loans as one package and sold the package to another financial institution. And why



would those institutions purchase these loans? The short answer is that over the decades, members of the financial industry developed mechanisms to increase their profits while reducing their risks by creating financial markets known by terms such “hedge funds” and “derivatives.”

In 2008, in California and elsewhere, the housing market collapsed. The median price of a California house fell 38 percent in 2008 and another 22 percent in 2009. By 2010, lowered real estate prices meant that now renters of the middle class potentially could enter the California housing market. Median prices were below \$300,000. There was one problem: you would have a very hard time finding an institution to lend you the money. In 2010, hundreds of thousands of Americans who could not make their house payments did things that were practically unthinkable three years earlier: instead of sacrificing to make their mortgage payments, they simply abandoned their houses. Why? Because the market value of the property had fallen so far that they now owed more on the property than it was worth. Banks foreclosed, owners lost their houses, yet most former homeowners were making rational choices under the new conditions.

How did all this happen? Unlike Kosrae in the 1970s, Americans live in an economy in which land *is* a commodity, whose price is theoretically determined by supply and demand. Some of the same Californians (and Texans and Albertans and Londoners and Japanese) who used to complain about the ridiculously high price of land and housing now complain about their falling property values. It seems no one can do too much about it. Supply and demand are “impersonal,” and real estate prices are set by the market for real estate. In a market economy, human wants and productive and consumptive activities create prices, yet prices are controlled by the Invisible Hand—the phrase used in the late 1700s by Adam Smith, who explained how prices regulate economic activities in market economies.

Who was to blame for the collapse of the housing market and the financial crisis? Greedy bankers? Arguably, no one. It was The Market.



## Economic Systems

We use the word *economics* in its everyday meaning: economics is how people make their living. At the

**reciprocity** The transfer of goods for goods between two or more individuals or groups.

societal level, three processes are involved in making a living. First, people work and use technology to transform nature’s resources into useful *products*. In modern *postindustrial* economies, most people do not produce any tangible (material) product, but work in *services*. They produce or process information, sell something to someone else, nurse or doctor their patients, manage the activities of others, and so forth.

Second, someone *consumes* the products. We consume material products by eating, living in, driving, wearing, and so forth. Material products are valued for their practical use: food nourishes, houses shelter, motor vehicles transport, and clothes cover. A great many material products also are valued *symbolically*. For example, food choices express identity, houses demonstrate wealth, motor vehicles show status, clothes flatter and—like most other consumables—send social messages about who we are. Many objects are bought and sold entirely for their symbolic significance, such as jewelry, cosmetics, haircuts, and sometimes athletic club and fitness center memberships.

Third, between the time they are produced and consumed, many material products are *exchanged*. In economies like those of foragers or horticulturalists, often the producers and the consumers are the same people (usually, family members), but nonetheless exchange exists in these and all economies. In modern market economies, the producers and the consumers are nearly always different people or groups, so practically every product is exchanged. Most people make their living by working for firms or public agencies in exchange for money in wages, salaries, tips, commissions, and the like.

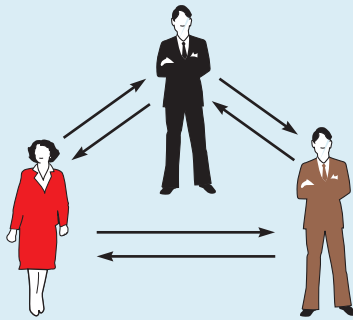
In market economies, most products are produced entirely for exchange (sale on the market). Once the value (money) acquired from the market exchange has been gained, the producer and seller have little further economic interest in the product, except insofar as its quality affects future sales or reputation. However, markets are only one way of organizing exchange. In subsistence-based economies, families or other kinds of kinship groups produce mainly for their own needs, not for sale on the market. And rather than exchanges based on supply, demand, and prices, exchanges are organized around other principles.

Anthropologists usually classify various forms of exchange into three major modes or types:

1. **Reciprocity**, in which individuals or groups pass products back and forth, with the aim of helping someone in need by sharing with him or her;

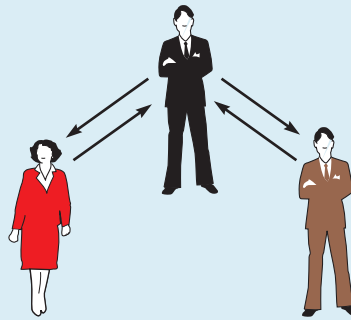
**Reciprocity**

Back-and-forth exchange of products, gifts, and objects; symbolizes relationships as well as satisfies material needs and wants



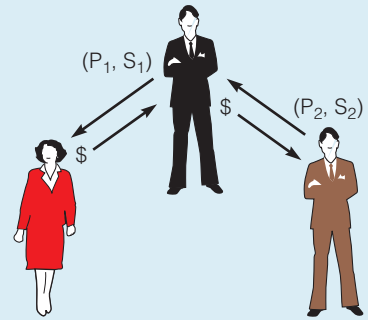
**Redistribution**

Collection of products and valuables by a central authority, followed by distribution according to some normative or legal principle



**Market**

Free exchange of products ( $P_1, P_2$ ) and services ( $S_1, S_2$ ) for money (\$) at prices determined by impersonal forces of supply and demand



creating, maintaining, or strengthening social relationships; or obtaining products made by others for oneself

2. **Redistribution**, in which the members of an organized group contribute products or money to a common pool or fund that is divided (reallocated) among the group as a whole by a central authority
3. **Market**, in which products are sold for money, which in turn is used to purchase other products, with the ultimate goal of acquiring more money or accumulating more products or both

The Concept Review illustrates the three forms of exchanges.

Most products (including land and labor) are exchanged through the market mode in modern industrial economies, but reciprocity and redistribution also exist. Examples of reciprocity are various gifts we give and receive on holidays, birthdays, weddings, baby showers, and other culturally special occasions. If you are employed, every pay period you participate in redistribution because federal, state, and local governments collect a portion of your wage or salary as taxes, which they spend on public purposes, like wars or roads, or transfer to other members of society, like the elderly, the poor, and various subsidies for corporations.

All these exchange forms thus exist in modern societies, but not all preindustrial peoples have all three. Reciprocity in one form or another occurs in all human populations. But redistribution implies a central

leader(s) whose role(s) carries authority to organize the collection of resources from the group and to make decisions about how they will be reallocated. Redistribution, therefore, is an insignificant exchange mode in societies that lack strong leaders who make decisions on behalf of the group. The market mode of exchange requires money, private property, and certain other features that are absent in nonmarket economies.

**Reciprocity**

In subsistence economies such as those based on foraging, horticulture, and pastoralism, most families and households are capable of producing most of the food and other products they consume. That is, most families are *potentially* self-sufficient in the sense that they own or have access to the land, labor, tools, and other resources necessary for survival.

However, in no known society are families, households, or other kinds of social groups self-sufficient *in fact*. Everywhere, such groups exchange products with

**redistribution** The collection of goods or money from a group, followed by a reallocation to the group by a central authority.

**market** Exchange by means of buying and selling, using money.

other groups. Most anthropologists say this is because families and other groups need or want to maintain relationships with other families and groups, and exchange is necessary to create and sustain these relationships. Examples of why groups need such relationships include ensuring long-term economic security, acquiring spouses, maintaining political ties, and strengthening military alliances.

The form of exchange used for such purposes is *reciprocity*, defined as the transaction of objects without the use of money or other media of exchange. Reciprocity takes several forms, including sharing with those in need, providing hospitality, giving gifts, engaging in mutual feasting, and bartering. Various forms are motivated by different considerations and values, so anthropologists distinguish three forms of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative.

### Generalized Reciprocity

The defining feature of **generalized reciprocity** is that those who give objects do not expect the recipient to make a return at any definite time in the future. Generalized reciprocity occurs between individuals who are (or at least are normatively expected to be) emotionally attached to one another and therefore have an obligation to help one another on the basis of relative need. Parents who provide their children with shelter, food, vehicles, and college educations are practicing generalized reciprocity which sustains younger generations. Giving without expectation of definite return also should occur between parties to certain other kinds of social relationships, such as wives and husbands, siblings, and sometimes close friends.

Because it includes various forms of sharing with relatives and other people whom cultural norms define as close, generalized reciprocity is found in all societies. However, among some peoples it is the dominant form of exchange, meaning that more resources are distributed using this form than any other form.

For example, most hunter-gatherers expect their band mates to share food and be generous with their

possessions, partly because most members of a band are relatives of some kind (see Chapter 6). Among the Ju/'hoansi, the band is a social group within which food sharing is culturally expected or even mandatory. Those who are stingy with possessions or who fail to share food with others are ridiculed or socially punished in some other way. Generalized reciprocity ensures an equitable—if not entirely equal—distribution of food among the band's families. It also maintains social and economic equality between the families that make up the band. In fact, the Ju/'hoansi have a custom they call “insulting the meat” that almost seems designed to keep the best hunters from becoming too proud and boastful (see A Closer Look).

### Balanced Reciprocity

In **balanced reciprocity**, products are transferred to the recipient and the donor expects a return in products of roughly equal value. Over the long run, the value of the products exchanged should be close to equivalent. The return may be expected soon, or whenever the donor demands it, or by some specified time in the future. With generalized reciprocity, the giver continues to provide assistance even when the receiver is unable to return anything for a long time. With balanced reciprocity, the giver tries to apply some kind of sanction against the receiver if the latter does not reciprocate within the appropriate time period. Donors may become angry if there is no reciprocation, may complain or gossip to others, may try to force a return, or may suspend all relations until things of appropriate value are returned.

Although the value of the objects exchanged is supposed to be about equal, balanced reciprocity is characterized by the absence of bargaining between the parties. In some preindustrial economies, the exchange of objects without having to negotiate for each transaction frequently is organized by a special relationship between two individuals known as a *trade partnership*. Individuals of one tribe or village pair off with specific individuals (their “partners”) from other regions with whom they establish long-lasting trade relationships.

For instance, in the Trobriand Islands off the eastern tip of the island of New Guinea, there was a form of balanced reciprocity called *wasi*. Residents of coastal villages traded fish for yams and other garden crops produced in the mountainous interior. The exchange was formalized: a coastal village paired off with an interior village, and within each village individuals formed trade

**generalized reciprocity** The giving of goods without expectation of a return of equal value at any definite future time.

**balanced reciprocity** The exchange of goods considered to have roughly equal value; social purposes usually motivate the exchange.

Each member of this Inuit (“Eskimo”) whaling crew will receive a share of the whale meat and blubber. Sharing the fruits of cooperative efforts is one form of generalized reciprocity.



© William Bacony/Photo Researchers, Inc.

partnerships. The rates at which garden produce was exchanged for fish were established by custom, so there was no haggling at any particular transaction.

In *wasi*, each trade partner received foods not readily available locally, so parties to the transaction gained a material benefit. In other cases, trade partnerships have social as well as material benefits. For example, the Ju/'hoansi have a gift exchange custom called *hxaro*. In *hxaro* the gift exchange is delayed—those who receive a product are not expected to return anything for an indefinite and often long period of time. *Hxaro* partners rely on one another for mutual support in other contexts, such as when one partner asks to forage in the territory of another. The social relationship created and reinforced by *hxaro* matters more to people than the objects given and received.

In *hxaro*, gifts make friends and vice versa, so gifts have *symbolic value*. More generally, when two people exchange gifts, ideally both gain something more than the sum total of the economic worth of the objects. On your friend's birthday, instead of giving her a DVD in exchange for a gift of about equal value on your own birthday, you both could save the cost of wrapping paper and cards by buying the objects yourselves. If you did that, neither of you would gain the symbolic value added when the exchange of “objects” becomes an exchange of “gifts” on culturally appropriate occasions. As material symbols of good relations, gifts both create and sustain feelings of solidarity and relations of mutual aid between individuals and groups.

Gifts show that the giver has expended some resources and taken some trouble because she or he cares about the recipient. Perhaps this is one reason why so many people do not like giving or receiving cash or gift cards: cash and cards take too little effort, are too generic to be personal, and the nature of the gift does not express the character of the relationship. To many people, gifts of cash or cards dilute the social symbolism of the gift.

So, the transaction of material symbols (gifts) is one of the ways people express positive social relationships. But gifts are also used to create social bonds that are useful to the giver, and to obligate people from whom the giver wants something. Gift giving makes someone indebted to you and therefore can be used to create an obligation to return a favor. Lobbyists and sales representatives know that balanced reciprocity can serve one's self-interest.

Among some peoples, balanced reciprocity takes the form of mutual exchanges of gifts or invitations for political purposes. For an example of how balanced reciprocity creates and sustains political alliances, we turn to the Maring, a horticultural people of the mountainous interior of Papua New Guinea. In the 1960s, when Roy Rappaport worked among them, the Maring lived in settlements composed of clusters of kin groups. Each settlement engaged in periodic warfare with some of its neighbors. Unless a settlement was unusually large, its members formed a political alliance with one or more nearby settlements. When warfare occurred,



Many gathering and hunting peoples have cultural mechanisms that cut proud and boastful people down to size, reminding them that they are no better than anyone else. A fascinating example of such a mechanism is found among the Ju/hoansi, the foragers of southern Africa described in Chapter 6. The Ju/hoansi call their custom “insulting the meat,” referring to the practice of ridiculing successful hunters’ contributions. Their goal is to keep skilled hunters modest because modesty is an important value in their culture. In the following extract, Richard Lee describes this custom in his ethnography, *The Dobe Ju/hoansi*.

When a hunter returns from a successful hunt, or when meat is brought into a camp, one would think that this would be met with open glee and the hunter praised for his skill. Quite the contrary: The people often display indifference or negativity at the news of a successful kill, and I was surprised to see the low key way in which the hunters would break the news of their success. /Xashe, an excellent hunter for /Xai/xai, put it this way:

When you come home empty-handed, you sleep and you say to yourself, “Oh, what have I done? What’s the matter that I haven’t killed?” Then the next morning you get up and without a word you go out and hunt again. This time you do kill something, and you come home. My tsu (“older kinsman”) sees me and asks: “Well, what did you see today?” “Tsutsu,” I reply, “I didn’t see anything.”

I am sitting there with my head in my hands but my tsu comes back to me because he is a Ju/hoan. “What do you mean you haven’t killed anything? Can’t you see that I’m dying of hunger?” “Well, there might be something out there. I just might have scratched its elbow.”

Then you say, as he smiles, “Why don’t we go out in the morning and have a look.” And so we two and others will bring home the meat together the next day.

Men are encouraged to hunt as well as they can, and the people are happy when meat is brought in, but the correct demeanor for the successful hunter is modesty and understatement. A /Xai/xai man named /Gaugo said:

Say that a man has been hunting. He must not come home and announce like a braggart, “I have killed a big one in the bush!” He must first sit down in silence until I or someone else comes up to his fire and asks, “What did you see today?” He replies quietly, “Ah, I’m no good for hunting. I saw nothing at all ... maybe just a tiny one.” Then I smile to myself because I know he has killed something big.

The theme of modesty is continued when the butchering and carrying party goes to fetch the kill the following day. Arriving at the site, the members of the carrying party loudly express their disappointment to the hunter:

“You mean you have dragged us all the way out here to make us cart home your pile of bones? Oh, if I had known it was this thin I wouldn’t have come.”

“People, to think I gave up a nice day in the shade for this. At home we may be hungry, but at least we have nice cool water to drink.”

To these insults, the hunter must not act offended; he should respond with self-demeaning words:

“You’re right, this one is not worth the effort; let’s just cook the liver for strength and leave the rest for the hyenas. It’s not too late to hunt today, and even a duiker or a steenbok would be better than this mess.”

The party, of course, has no intentions of abandoning the kill. The heavy joking and derision are directed toward one goal: leveling potentially arrogant behavior in a successful hunter. The [Ju/hoansi] recognize the tendency toward arrogance (/twi) in young men and take definite steps to combat it. As /Tomazho, the famous healer from /Xai/xai, put it:

When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can’t accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. In this way we cool his heart and make him gentle.

Insulting the meat is one of the central practices of the Ju/hoansi that serve to maintain egalitarianism. Even though some men are much better hunters than others, their behavior is molded by the group to minimize the tendency toward self-praise and to channel their energies into socially beneficial activities. As a result, the existence of differences in hunting prowess does not lead to a system of Big Men in which a few talented individuals tower over the others in terms of prestige.

SOURCE: Excerpt from *The Dobe Ju/hoansi*, 2nd ed., by Richard B. Lee, pp. 54–55, copyright © 1993 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., reprinted by permission of the publisher

the warriors of each settlement relied on their allies for military support and, in the case of defeat, for refuge.

An important expression of continued goodwill between allied groups was periodic invitations to feasts, accompanied by exchanges of pigs and wealth objects. Every few years, whenever they accumulated enough pigs, the members of a settlement invited their allies

to an enormous feast, appropriately called a *pig feast*. At the pig feast, which was attended by hundreds of people, allies brought large quantities of wealth objects to exchange and pay off debts; they consumed enormous quantities of pork provided by their hosts; they were on the lookout for potential spouses and sexual partners; and they aided the host settlement in the

ceremonial dancing that the Maring believed ritually necessary for success in the fighting that soon occurred. The host group used the occasion of their pig feast to gauge the amount of military support they could expect from their allies: The more people who attended the feast, the more warriors the host settlement could put on the battleground. Later, the guests accumulated enough pigs to reciprocate by hosting a pig feast of their own.

A Maring community sponsored a pig feast to compensate its allies for their previous military aid as well as to reciprocate previous pig feasts. The failure to organize a pig feast large enough or soon enough to compensate allies could result in an alliance weakening and even ending. Thus, mutual invitations to feasts were essential to the military success and continued survival of a Maring settlement. Here, and among many other peoples, the reciprocal flow of products, invitations and return invitations, and other forms of give-and-take, are essential for well-being and even military survival.

### Negative Reciprocity

In **negative reciprocity**, the third kind of reciprocity, both parties attempt to gain all they can from the exchange while giving up as little as possible. Negative reciprocity is usually motivated largely by the desire to obtain material goods at minimal cost. Insofar as it is motivated by the desire for material goods, negative reciprocity is like market exchange; it is different mainly because no money changes hands between participants.

In economies with no money, negative reciprocity is an important way for individuals and groups to acquire products that they do not produce themselves. Few communities are entirely self-sufficient: some foods they like to eat are not found where they live; some materials they need to make tools are not found locally; or they lack the skill to produce some of the objects they use. To acquire these things, people produce other goods to exchange for “imports.”

Barter is the most common form of negative reciprocity. In the interior highlands of Papua New Guinea, many indigenous peoples manufactured money or wealth objects by stringing shells together into long chains or belts. Because these shells did not occur naturally in the interior, they were traded from people to people until they reached their final destination. Salt was also a trade object because it was found in only a few areas. Similarly, in western North America, the

obsidian (volcanic glass) used to make stone tools was found in only a few areas; other peoples acquired it through trade. In some cases, these trade routes stretched for hundreds of miles, with the obsidian passing through the hands of numerous middlemen before finally being made into a tool.

### Reciprocity and Social Distance

Each type of reciprocity tends to be associated with certain kinds of social relationships. As Marshall Sahlins, who first distinguished the three varieties, noted, the kind of reciprocity that occurs between individuals or groups depends on the **social distance** between them. Social distance is the degree to which cultural norms specify persons should be intimate with or emotionally attached to one another. A given mode of reciprocal exchange is normatively appropriate only with certain kinds of social relationships.

This is illustrated in North American norms. You should practice generalized reciprocity with your children and perhaps with siblings and elderly parents. Others may judge you as uncaring or selfish if you refuse to offer help that is genuinely needed. Well-off grandparents may help with their grandkids' education or cars or down payments on a house. But it is rare enough to earn comment if a middle-income person repeatedly helps more distant relatives by repeatedly lending money to a cousin or putting a niece through college.

A normative association between exchange and social distance applies to market transactions, the equivalent of negative reciprocity in modern monetary economies. In buying and selling, people are supposed to be “trying to get the most for their money.” This is smart shopping with transactions in a car lot, when everyone is supposed to bargain. But when the seller and buyer are friends or relatives, it is difficult for them to disentangle their economic transaction from their personal feelings for each other. Bonds between relatives and friends cannot easily be combined with market exchange: kinship and friendship are supposed to have an element of

**negative reciprocity** Exchange motivated by the desire to obtain goods, in which the parties try to gain all the material goods they can.

**social distance** The degree to which cultural norms specify that two individuals or groups should be helpful to, intimate with, or emotionally attached to one another.





© Jon Burbank/The Image Works

Gift exchange is a familiar form of reciprocity. Here in Narita, Japan, two men formally exchange gifts before an important festival.

selflessness, whereas buying and selling are assumed to have selfish motives. You might buy a used car from your friend, but chances are both of you feel anxious about the transaction: will our relationship be damaged if the car is a lemon?

As our social relationships with other people change, so does the kind of reciprocity we practice with them. For example, as we grow up, our increasing independence from our parents is manifested by a change in the way we exchange goods with them. We go from being the recipients of generalized reciprocity to more of a balanced reciprocity as we become more independent, and finally—at least until the advent of Social Security—to being the provider of generalized reciprocity.

Finally, changing one form of reciprocity into another can be a way of changing the nature of a social relationship. Because the form of reciprocity two people practice is related to the degree of social distance between them, one party can increase or decrease the

social distance by initiating a new form of exchange. Or someone can signal his or her wish to draw another person closer by tentatively initiating a relationship of balanced reciprocity.

I can let you know that I want to become your friend by giving you an unexpected gift or inviting you to dinner. In turn, you let me know whether you share my feelings by whether you return my gift on an appropriate occasion, repeatedly find reasons to refuse my dinner invitation, or come to dinner several times at my place without reciprocating. If we both use this “strategy of reciprocity,” neither of us needs to be put in a potentially embarrassing position of verbalizing our feelings. I signal my wish by my initial gift or invitation, and you decline or accept my offer of friendship by your response. Reciprocity thus is often a symbolic act, conveying messages about ideal social relationships, hoped for relationships, and even rejected relationships. Because we routinely use reciprocity as a way of conveying feelings and sending social

messages, some anthropologists view the reciprocal exchange of material goods as a form of communication.



## Redistribution

The major difference between reciprocity and redistribution—the second major form of exchange—is how the transfer of products and other resources is organized. With reciprocity, resources pass back and forth between two participants, with no third party to act as intermediary. With redistribution, resources collected from many individuals or groups are taken to a central place or put into a common pool or fund. Some overarching authority (empowered to make decisions on behalf of those who contributed) later draws from this pool or fund and returns public goods and services to allegedly benefit the group as a whole.

In modern nations, the main resource (money, in this case) that is redistributed takes the form of taxes on wages, profits, retail sales, property, interest, and other income and assets. Consider how national tax systems are supposed to operate in most modern nations. The national government redistributes tax revenues in two main ways. First, revenues are distributed in such a way as to benefit the whole country. Citizens receive police protection, law enforcement, national defense, infrastructure (e.g., dams, roads, airports), regulation of polluting industries, and so forth. Here, resources collected from the citizenry are expended on public goods and services. Second, taxes provide assistance for individuals in need. In the United States, these are “transfer payments” in the form of Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, disaster relief, children’s services, and so forth. Such public expenditures are based on moral norms and cultural values about social justice, equal opportunity, and helping those in need. Redistribution systems around the world are used for similar purposes: to provide public goods and services and to provide assistance to individuals and groups in need.

But there is another side to redistribution, a side with which we are also familiar. First, there is often conflict over who should provide the public resources, how the resources should be expended, and how much of a share should be given to those who collect and distribute them. One common social and political problem with redistribution is political disagreement: when many individuals have contributed to the public pool or fund, not everyone is likely to agree on how the “public resources” should be spent for the “public good.” Much of the conflict between political parties

in modern industrial democracies is rooted in disagreements over who should be taxed and how much and over how government revenues should be spent. Parties and various interest groups are, in many cases, quarreling over redistribution: Who pays? Who gets what? And how much?

Second, elected officials and other officeholders who make important decisions about redistribution sometimes use public resources to further their own interests and ambitions, rather than to benefit the entire country or to help those in greatest need. In the United States, for instance, elected officials make “pork barrel” deals to allocate federal tax dollars to finance highway construction in their districts. Congestion might be reduced for a while, but the real purpose is to provide jobs for their constituencies or to serve special-interest groups who contribute to their reelection. Balanced reciprocity between members of Congress often integrates well with redistribution: “You vote for my bridge reconstruction; I’ll vote for your wetlands reclamation.” Speaking more generally, political interests—in addition to concern for the public welfare—enter into decision making about redistribution.

A common form of redistribution in the preindustrial world is **tribute**. The subjects of a chief or other title holder contribute products (usually including food) into a common pool under the control of the central authority. Often the tribute is culturally viewed as a material symbol that the subjects continue to acknowledge the chief’s sacred authority. Some of the accumulated products are consumed by the chiefs and their relatives, some are distributed to support the work of crafts specialists (e.g., weavers and potters), and some are redistributed to the whole population at public feasts, celebrations, and ceremonies.

Examples of redistribution systems using tribute payments exist on many of the islands of Polynesia and Micronesia in the Pacific. On many islands, the entire population was divided traditionally into two ranks or classes, noble and commoner (Chapter 13 has more about rank and class). Members of the nobility did little agricultural or other manual work, but instead managed the political system and organized religious ceremonies. Commoners produced the food for themselves and their families and performed most physical labor.

**tribute** The rendering of goods (typically including food) to an authority such as a chief.



On some islands, the king or principal chief was viewed as the ultimate owner of the land and its resources. Nobles generally had ritual functions, including prayers and sacrifices to deities and ancestors. On most islands, commoners paid periodic tribute to families of noble rank, whether in return for their use of the land or as a sacred obligation, or both. Tribute fed the nobility and their families and supported specialists. The tribute rendered by commoners was used partly for public purposes, such as feeding people who worked on trails and public buildings, providing relief from temporary food shortages, and publicly celebrating special events. On a few of the larger, resource-rich islands such as Hawaii and Tahiti, the nobles were sufficiently powerful to become materially wealthy from tribute: they lived in the best houses, slept on the softest woven mats, wore special clothing, had numerous servants, and ate only the finest foods.



## Market Exchange

To say that objects or services are exchanged “on the market” means they are bought and sold at a price measured in money. Person A possesses goods that person B wants to acquire; B acquires the goods by giving A whatever amount of money both A and B agree on; A then uses the money to acquire more goods from other people.

Because of our familiarity with markets, market exchange sounds obvious. But notice that it requires four things:

1. Some object that serves as a medium of exchange—that is, *money*
2. A rate at which particular goods and services exchange for money—that is, *prices*
3. The prices are determined by *supply and demand*
4. Most property is *privately owned*

On the third point, markets imply the absence of coercion: if prices are set by supply and demand, then neither party to a transaction can be forced to buy or sell from the other party. Everyone has alternative ways of spending their money and selling their labor in return for

a wage. This is a *free market*—no third party (a government, for example) sets prices or forces anyone to buy or sell from anyone else, and no single supplier of a good (a monopolist) controls enough of the market to force people to buy from him, her, or it (in the case of firms). On the fourth point, private property does not mean there are no restrictions on how owners can use it because even private property is subject to public laws and regulations. One important feature of market economies is that *productive property* is in private hands, including the hands of shareholders for companies whose shares are traded on stock exchanges. This kind of property (or *capital*) is used to produce goods or services and then sold for a price with the goal of making profit.

In market economies, governments are supposed to protect and enhance the market. Governments print money and control the money supply; protect private property by means of laws, police, and courts; break up some monopolies; pay for public goods and infrastructure such as highways, ports, and airports; regulate polluting industries; prohibit insider trading in stock markets; and in many other ways allow markets to work smoothly. Governments are more directly involved in the economy also: if recession threatens, the government may act by providing public-sector jobs to stimulate demand. If too many large banks—those that are too big to fail—are in trouble, the government may give them public money to avoid a financial collapse. If wages do not keep up with inflation, the government may raise the minimum wage. In brief, the market is “free” only in part.

Because markets require money, we discuss some of the diversity in money objects and money uses.

## Money

Money is another of those things we take for granted, so much so that it seems like a simple idea. Actually, the idea of money presupposes a lot of other ideas and institutions, so money is actually rather complicated.

**Money** is objects that serve as *media of exchange* in a wide range of transactions of goods, services (including labor), or both. If an economy uses money, person A can acquire something from person B without having to return an object desired by B—that is, without having to barter. B can then use the money to buy a chosen object or service. Because you sell your time and skills for money, the value of your labor is expressed in terms of money (“wages” and “salaries”). This facilitation of exchange is the main function of money. Money greases the wheels of commerce.

**money** Objects that serve as media of exchange in a wide range of transactions of goods, services (including labor), or both.



© Spencer Platt/Getty Images

The market form of exchange requires money, prices determined by supply and demand, and private ownership of most resources and technology. Ownership shares of companies are bought and sold by licensed brokers on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

Other characteristics of money are derived from its function as a medium of exchange. For example, money serves as a *standard of value*: we can compare the values of the goods and services because money serves as a common measure of how much things are worth. This makes it a lot easier for you to decide whether to buy new outfits or a new HDTV; you can compare their values (i.e., their prices) and thus determine how many outfits you would be giving up for the new HDTV.

Money is also a *store of value*: because you can use it any time to purchase a wide range of goods, it stores your wealth, often in a portable form that can be carried in pouches or pockets. If you are rich and don't want anyone to know it, don't buy anything that displays your wealth; just keep the money, because you can transform it into goods that you can display later if you wish. If you are worried about your relatives or friends resenting you (or begging from you) when they realize how much wealth you have, the ability of money to store wealth while potentially hiding it is quite handy. If you

want to defer immediate consumption so that you can get something really expensive later, just save your money, since it stores your resources indefinitely. If inflation is high, though, and you store your wealth in a low-yielding bank account, then your money becomes worth less without you doing anything at all.

Money has *symbolic significance*. Money is one way to evaluate people, especially if we don't already know them. Clothing, jewelry, cars, houses, and so forth are not indicators of moral worthiness, but they are still signals about how much individuals or families are "worth." How you spend your money tells others a lot about you. Money can even symbolize national identity or independence: some citizens of England still resist adopting the pan-European currency (the Euro) because they see it as a threat to their sovereignty.

These and other characteristics mean that not just any object is suitable to be used as money. Obviously, money objects must be *durable*. This is why hard objects such as modified stones, shells, and metals often serve as currency.



One of the more unusual forms of money is the stone money of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia.



© Paul Chesley/National Geographic Image Collection

Money is more useful as an exchange medium if it is *divisible*, so sometimes different kinds of objects serve as denominations of money—equivalent to nickels, quarters, dollar bills, and thousand-dollar bills. Among the Kapauku, a people of the rugged interior of Papua province, Indonesia, small cowrie shells imported from the coast serve as money. As the shells circulate, their natural polish wears off. Because the older ones are more scarce, they are worth more than the newer ones—thus, the “age” of the money serves as a kind of denomination.

The supply of the money object must be *controllable* because if people can get all they want of it, its value inflates and it becomes worthless as an exchange medium: who would give you anything in exchange for it? The monetary supply can be controlled by a government, which manufactures the only “legal tender” in the society. Or the supply can be controlled by using only imported or rare objects as money. Shells imported from far away frequently serve as money because of their scarcity and durability. The money supply can also be controlled by using a currency that requires a lot of labor to make. Minerals or shells can be ground into shapes, drilled with holes, and strung into necklaces. In such cases, money remains scarce because it takes a lot of time to make it.

For convenience, most money is *portable*. In different cultures, you can stick it in your pocket, carry it around your neck or waist, wrap it in a bundle, roll it up, or wear it around your arm. Chinese and Korean

coins had holes in the center so the owner could store them on a cord. On the island of Yap in Micronesia, however, huge stone disks weighing hundreds of pounds serve as a kind of money. Yapese stone money is seldom moved; rather, the ownership of it is transacted so that the money stays in one place even when its owner changes.

As the stone money of Yap illustrates, an enormous variety of objects serve as money in one or another region of the world. In preindustrial economies, the kinds of monetary objects are surprisingly diverse. In Africa, for example, the following objects served as money in some part of the continent: iron, salt, beads, cowrie shells, cloth, gin, gold dust, metal rods, brass bracelets, and livestock. Among the ancient Aztecs, cacao beans served as currency.

The range of goods that can be acquired with money varies greatly. In some economies, the range is broad. Many kinds of resources and goods can be bought and sold, including labor, land, tools, and sometimes even people (slaves). In these systems, money serves as a *generalized medium of exchange*, that is, it can be used to acquire many kinds of goods and services. Of course, there are always some things that money just can't buy. Love is the classic example, but if you have enough money, it is not hard for you to *think* everyone loves you.

In many preindustrial economies, the range of money uses is relatively narrow. Only a few categories of products may be purchased. For example, it may be

possible to buy food, clothing, and a few other goods, but land is not available for sale at any price and labor is almost never sold. Economic anthropologists sometimes call this **limited-purpose money**.

Paul Bohannon’s classic study of the Tiv of Nigeria, illustrates limited purpose money. Tiv money took the form of metal rods. A Tiv could exchange metal rods for some categories of valuables, including slaves, cattle, and a special kind of white cloth. These things were highly valuable and brought high prestige in Tiv culture. However, metal rods were only rarely exchanged for subsistence products like chickens, goats, crops and some kinds of household goods. These products were so plentiful that they were not used to acquire prestige. Obviously, in normal times, prestige goods had much greater cultural value than subsistence products, so Tiv viewed exchanging a metal rod for subsistence goods as trading “down.” As a result, Tiv metal rods were largely limited-purpose money.

The Tiv example reminds us that just because we call some object like metal rods “money” does not mean that the object has all the characteristics of our own currency. In fact, some anthropologists believe money objects are lacking in preindustrial economies and that money is a concept that we should apply to other cultures only with qualifications. Yet if we define money simply as a medium of exchange, then it is found in many other economies. To avoid confusion and false impressions, we always need to specify its uses and its cultural meaning to local people.

## On Market Economies

The phrase *market economy* means that practically the whole economy is organized on *market principles*. Briefly, here are the most important of these principles:

- Practically all privately owned goods and services have a monetary price: they can be bought and sold on the free market.
- Most people make their living by selling something on the market. Some people make their living by selling goods or services to consumers. But most people are workers: they make their living by selling their labor to a group (such as a firm or public agency). Workers have to do this because most of them do not own the natural resources and capital with which to make their own living.
- The market allocates the factors of production. Because privately owned resources, capital

(including technology and equipment), and labor are bought and sold, the supply of and demand for these factors of production determine the uses to which they are put. In theory, the market allocates them so that they are used in ways that bring the highest return (profit).

- The economy is self-regulating. The impersonal forces of supply and demand set prices and therefore regulate the kinds of economic activity that occur.

Economies organized by market principles have a lot of advantages for individuals—you can shop around until you find the best deal, and you are not tied to any particular place or employer. Further, an economy organized on free-market principles is tremendously productive, as Karl Marx—the nineteenth-century arch-enemy of capitalism—recognized and as the Peoples Republic of China has experienced since around 1980.

The overwhelming majority of people alive in the twenty-first century buy commodities in markets. However, many rural people have access to the land and tools they need to produce much or most of their daily subsistence in the form of vegetables, fish, and animal products. They purchase products like household utensils, building materials, clothing, and fuel from local marketplaces or stores, but do not rely totally on the market for what they need to survive or thrive. To earn money for such purchases, they sell products themselves and/or work for wages part of the time. Thus, they are not totally dependent on markets for survival and well-being.

Peasant marketplaces provide an example. Peasant marketplaces are ancient and especially important in West Africa, southern and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Peasant vendors sell food, cloth and clothing, pottery, leather products, livestock, and other goods produced by their families. Traveling merchants (middlemen) bring commodities imported from the developed world or from elsewhere in the region to sell to local people at the local marketplace. In addition to all the economic transactions, peasant marketplaces provide a context in which new social relationships are created and old ones renewed.

**limited-purpose money** Money that may be used to purchase only a few kinds of goods.



The economies of all but two or three of the world's nations are market economies. For the most part, such capitalist markets have benefited most people in these nations. Still, it is worth considering some of the more subtle ways in which a market economy affects people and society. For example, compare a market economy in which most people sell their labor to a firm or an agency to an economy in which people themselves own or have access to everything they need to survive and do well (by their standards, of course). Because we have described the hunting and gathering Ju/'hoansi of southern Africa extensively, we'll use them for comparison and we'll assume (falsely) that they still live a traditional lifestyle by using the present tense.

### Work

You probably do not have what you need to survive on your own. You must get a job. On the job, for the most part, your working days and hours are set by your employer. You have some flexibility, but exercising it too often endangers your job. How much income you earn and how much job security you have vary, but both are highly dependent on your employer. In turn, the employer reacts to impersonal market forces: you may lose wages, benefits, or the job itself if your company decides to “outsource” your job to “remain competitive in global markets.”

If you were a Ju/'hoansi, by virtue of being born into a given family, you have access to a territory that supplies you with almost everything you need. You have to work for your food and other things, of course, but when you have acquired all you and your group need or want, you can stop working. If you take a day off, someone else will give you and your family enough food for that day. You have no concept of wage or job security, but you do think about subsistence security: Will there be a drought or other kind of natural calamity? Droughts are as “impersonal” as market forces—and just as unpredictable. But everyone knows this from generations of living in the same place, so you have alternatives: you can go live with your husband's brother's band for a while until natural conditions improve.

### Family

When you go to work, chances are you leave your family. If you have children, your job will compete with your family for your time and probably for your mental energy. It will be hard for you to balance these demands and preferences. Your boss is sympathetic, and even your boss's boss understands when you have to

take personal days because she knows you personally. But people higher up on the corporate ladder don't know you at all, and all your bosses are ultimately answerable to them. Really, you are interchangeable; someone else can do what you do about as well. So you have to balance your personal life and what your job requires.

If you were a Ju/'hoansi, you have no boss, although other people in your band exert some influence over what you do. Everyone knows you, and you know everyone, so within reason everyone can take everyone else's personal situations into account. You don't care too much about getting ahead. Of whom? For what?

### Values

You find a lot of things and qualities important and desirable: material goods, but also family life and meaningful relationships with friends. So, many different kinds of things and qualities are important and desirable that you cannot possibly satisfy them all. When you get one thing, some other desire springs to the forefront to take its place on your wish list. And just in case you should ever come close to satisfying one category of desire—that for material goods—advertising will try to convince you that you want things you never even knew existed. What would happen if too many people decided they have enough, and found a way to cut back on their work hours, and stopped spending? Growth in the economy would cease, unemployment would increase, profits would fall, stock markets would crash, and something worse than a short-term recession would follow.

If you are a Ju/'hoansi, you want to be well-fed and have meaningful social relationships. You value equality, meaning not that everyone is “equal” (which is a social impossibility) but that it is distasteful when some people have full bellies while others go hungry. You really don't like it when someone you know brags about himself, so you join others in cutting such people down to size. Since you know that the other people with whom you have spent most of your life feel the same way, you remain outwardly modest. No one in your camp has very many material possessions—they are too hard to carry around, and if someone has something she doesn't really need, someone else will probably ask her for it. When you get enough things, and everyone else around you has about the same things, and no media bombard you with images that make you think you are not sexy enough—well, then enough really is enough.

None of the preceding comparisons is meant to disparage market economies, which have done much to

improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world. Rather, our main point is this: Some scholars, talk-show hosts, elected officials, and others have completely bought into (pardon the pun) market principles and market economies. They talk and act and support policies as though the costs of markets are so low as to be negligible. But they're not:

- Unlike the Ju/'hoansi, you probably won't move your family in with your husband's brother if times get tough because it would be humiliating. Relatives care about and care for one another, but mostly not in that way. Most of us leave our families when we go to our jobs, and the demands of jobs too often compete with the obligations and pleasures of family life. Markets encourage individual achievement, but with some social costs.
- Because modern technology has made everyone's labor so productive, theoretically we could all be working less. That's probably what a Ju/'hoansi would do. But the same force (market competition) that fosters technological improvements also means that production has to increase to stay competitive. So, productivity gains are used mainly to increase output, not to reduce working hours. Markets encourage people and companies to be competitive, not to take it easy.
- Most people try to live what their culture considers the good life. The cultural definition of the good life is affected by the market economy itself, which requires ever-increasing consumption fueled partly by advertising and the media. Because most people tend to admire others who live out their culture's values, to get their admiration most of us buy a lot of stuff. Unlike the Ju/'hoansi, we've got a place to put it. Unlike the Ju/'hoansi, no one is likely to ask us for it, although we protect it from thieves. Markets encourage continual growth in consumption, which is hard to resist.

If you were raised in a market economy, you may think that such things are not “costs” at all, or that they are costs that are worth bearing. But consider the possibility that the main reason you think that is because you were enculturated inside a market economy with its norms, values, and worldview.

parts of the United States. Once again, Americans realized they were “too dependent” on foreign oil. Fortunately, technological developments in the 1970s allow us to make fuel from corn—and American farmers produce a lot of corn, especially when American taxpayers subsidize both farmers and giant agricultural corporations to produce it. After it has been processed into ethanol, mixed with real petroleum, and pumped into fuel (no longer “gas”) tanks, corn can both reduce gasoline prices at the pump and free us from having to deal with people who don't like us, and vice versa. Everyone benefits.

Not quite everyone. Demand for corn by ethanol-processing plants rose so much that the market price of corn nearly tripled between the end of 2005 and 2007. Corn syrup (fructose) is used to sweeten so many products that there was a general increase in the prices of food—including beef, chicken, and pork, which (while they were alive) feed partly on processed corn. So, if we save some money on fuel for our cars, we lose some of it in the prices we pay for our snack foods, soft drinks, and other fructose-laden products. Further, at most, ethanol yields only about 30 percent more energy than the energy needed to produce it, and some researchers claim its energy balance is negative. (The Brazilians produce ethanol from sugarcane, which yields 800 percent more energy than is required to produce it.) Most researchers doubt ethanol will reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Finally, the market for corn is a global market. American increases in the demand for ethanol led to an increase in the price of corn in Mexico—and the price of corn tortillas, a staple of the Mexican diet, rose.

The impact of increased ethanol demand on Mexican corn prices is an example of **market globalization**: the economies of most of the world's nations are increasingly integrated into a single exchange system organized by market principles. Labor, capital, technology, consumer products, and services move with few restraints across national boundaries. Theoretically, if the entire world would become a single integrated megamarket, then subsistence maize farmers in Uganda would compete with American corn farmers to sell their products in both Kampala and Chicago. Obviously, the implications of such a global market would be



## Globalization and Markets

In late 2007, the world price of oil soared to \$95 per barrel. The price of gasoline rose to \$4.00 per gallon in

**market globalization** Process through which the world's national economies become integrated into a single global exchange system organized by market principles

**I**ndigenous peoples are groups whose ancestors lived in a particular region until they came into contact with outsiders who were more powerful and wealthy than themselves. Most often, the indigenous peoples lost land, population, and resources as a result of the contact. Nearly always, their traditional ways of living were affected due to exposure to new beliefs and customs as well as loss of resources, land, and participation in a wider economic system. In the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and most of the Pacific, the indigenous peoples suffered from Old World diseases that resulted in population declines, usually estimated at 80 to 90 percent.

Technically, peoples like the French and Germans are also indigenous, to Europe. However, the common use of *indigenous* implies peoples whose ancestors were conquered and who therefore became part of a larger nation state and/or global empire. As we use the phrase, *indigenous* refers to peoples like Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, native Africans, and Asians who are ethnic minorities (Chapter 17).

Today's worldwide economic system affects indigenous peoples in many ways. One way is that the global market connects consumers in the more affluent nations and regions with producers of indigenous arts and crafts. In most large world cities, there are small stores that sell "tribal" products made by the world's diverse indigenous peoples. Here, you can buy things marketed on the basis that they are "indigenous." They are hand-made (rather than mass-produced), traditional (just like their ancestors used to make it), authentic (made by an indigenous person who is "Other"), and different (few people you know have anything like it). The object's appeal is further enhanced if buyers can become the expert among their family and friends, because the object traditionally was used in a cultural context that the educated buyer has taken the time to master.

profound for Americans, Ugandans, and the rest of the world. The world's remaining indigenous peoples increasingly participate in the global market, in part by selling their products and in part because some outsiders find their contrasting way of life appealing (see the Globalization feature).

Market globalization is related to the globalization of production (Chapter 6). Both involve the *internationalization of capital and labor*. Corporations in the developed world move their production facilities to other, poorer nations, where they employ people who will work for a fraction of North American, European, and Japanese wages. There are many advantages for companies that relocate factories in regions where the

In the North American southwest, stores in cities like Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Gallup, and Phoenix sell Native American products. Pottery made by Pueblo peoples sell for hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and other Native peoples make bracelets, necklaces, belt buckles, conchos, and other jewelry from silver and turquoise. Thousands of members of the Navajo nation in the four corners region maintain herds of sheep, whose wool they dye and hand-weave into rugs sold to Anglo and European tourists. Visitors who travel on to one of the more than two dozen southwest reservations have the opportunity to buy pots, jewelry, rugs, and other crafts directly from the Indians, enhancing their sense of an authentic experience.

Most pastoral peoples have marketed their products for centuries, relying on such exchanges for a considerable portion of their livelihood (Chapter 6). They sell or trade wool, hides and leather, milk, and meat to neighboring farmers or at local marketplaces. Many use the hair of their animals to make carpets, garments, carrying bags, and other kinds of tapestries. Herders in Persia (Iran) and many Arab countries shear the wool of sheep, dye it in beautiful colors, and use the fibers to weave carpets, bags, and clothing on hand looms. Ethnic groups in northwestern China and Tibet, of the Caucasus in Europe, of parts of South Asia, and in northern Africa do the same.

Outsiders have long recognized the craftsmanship and beauty of such woven products. The expansion of global markets in recent decades has increased the demand for pastoral products, which have become global commodities that fetch high prices among more affluent people of the herders' own country and others. To cover their floors or hang on their walls, people in the richer countries with enough money can buy carpets—both new and antique—that are hand-woven by herding peoples.

labor force is relatively poor. Wages are far lower. Factory safety regulations are less constraining. Environmental laws are relatively lax or unevenly enforced. Unions are nonexistent or poorly organized. All in all, these and other advantages lower production costs and, therefore, raise the profits of corporations that locate factories in less developed regions.

Market globalization also involves the international movement of *consumer products* along with *marketing efforts*. Products produced in one country are sold in other countries with few or no restrictions. In Europe, the European Union agreement finalized in the 1990s ended all tariffs and quotas on consumer goods among its member nations, and the free flow of products was further



Carpets, hats, coats, tapestries, and other woven products sell for high prices on global markets because they are certified to be “authentic,” meaning they were hand-woven by an indigenous ethnic group using fibers sheared from local livestock. The price may be even higher if the dyes are made from local plants and minerals rather than chemically manufactured in factories. If you can’t make it to Amsterdam, London, Vancouver, or New York, you can maybe get a good deal for one on eBay. If you live in Asia you can buy almost anything in Seoul, Shanghai, Tokyo, Mumbai, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, or Manila. In all the world’s cities, beware of knockoffs and counterfeits. You don’t want to buy a rug or serape that looks indigenous but isn’t really.

Buying material products is not the only way to make a connection to indigenous peoples. For a fee, small companies organize groups of tourists to visit places like New Guinea and Vanuatu where native peoples allegedly still follow the ways of their ancestors. Like its companion known as *ecological tourism*, cultural tourism has become popular as an alternative way to visit and learn about other places without so many modern amenities.

Sometimes, people who feel their nations are sacrificing their values and traditions as they grow richer seek connections with a more unadulterated, authentic cultural past. The government of the People’s Republic of China has built roads and provided public services that have opened up many of the nation’s southernmost remote regions, making it easier for China’s emerging middle class to spend a few days in the “backward” areas where minority peoples live.

In Western as in other countries, many people have houses full of things but feel their lives are empty of meaning. They long for spiritual experiences, feelings of belonging and identity, senses of meaning, and other intangibles. Most

find these within their own cultural traditions. However, some prefer to “connect” more directly with “native cultures.” Familiar examples include Eastern practices like Zen, yoga, meditation, tai chi, and prophylactic acupuncture.

In their quest for meaning and identity in our supposedly secular times, some Anglo Americans turn to Native American cultures. They know just enough about shamanistic world views (Chapter 14), vision quests, and sweat baths to believe such Native beliefs and customs can help them in their search for meaning and for their spiritual path. Santa Fe, New Mexico and Sedona, Arizona are among their favored destinations. Entrepreneurs have established businesses to provide metaphysical services in return for fees in the thousands of dollars. Among other issues, such practices raise questions about whether it is disrespectful to borrow just a little bit of someone else’s religious traditions during a week-long sojourn to acquire meaning or spiritual power.

Occasionally, tragedies result. In October 2009, two men died and three people were hospitalized during a “sweat lodge ceremony” held near West Sedona, a place where multitudes of vortexes release spiritual energies with healing powers. According to the *New York Times*, the overcrowded sweat lodge was wrapped in blankets and plastic tarps, then water was poured over hot rocks to release the heat and steam needed for the experience. A member of the Klamath-Modoc Native American tribe—who organizes such events—commented that “We would never use plastic to cover our lodges. The lodge has to breathe, that steam has to go someplace.” A man who is part Mescalero Apache noted that this event was a good example of “why it is extremely dangerous to conduct sweat lodge ceremonies without proper training.”

*SOURCES:* M. Brown (2004); “Death at Sweat Lodge Brings Soul Searching,” by John Dougherty, *New York Times*, October 11, 2009

streamlined with the adoption of the Euro as the common currency. In the Americas, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will eventually make Canada, the United States, and Mexico into a single market. North Americans and Europeans can easily see the impact of consumer globalization. Go to your closet and try to find a garment or pair of shoes manufactured in your own country. Check out your DVD player, gaming console, TV, digital music player, mobile phone, and other electronic equipment. Where were they manufactured? What do you suppose you would have paid for them if they had been made in Toronto, London, Tokyo, or Chicago?

International markets are not new, but their size and reach expanded dramatically in the late twentieth century. Beginning in the 1960s, an agreement between the

United States and Mexico allowed U.S. corporations to set up factories (called *maquiladores*) in Mexico along the border region with Texas. The plants produced massive quantities of clothing and consumer electronics for American consumers. Garment companies sent cloth to the *maquiladores* to be cut and sewn into clothing sold to American consumers. Electronics firms sent components south to be soldered and assembled. Products were then brought back to the United States for final finishing and sale. There were no tariffs (import taxes) on the finished products, and Mexico allowed North American companies to retain ownership of assembly plants on its soil in return for the jobs and training received by its citizens. The Americans and Europeans made similar arrangements with Asian countries like

Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea. In all regions, unmarried women were especially desirable employees and were hired in larger numbers than men for the unskilled or low-skilled jobs.

The two most important countries to expand opportunities for foreign investment in the past 20 years are India and the People's Republic of China. China's 2010 population of 1.4 billion is more than four times that of the United States (319 million). China's huge and growing cities soak up the labor of tens of millions of former peasants. The new, privately owned factories turn out clothing, toys, machinery, home electronics, housewares, and other products at rock-bottom production costs. Costs of production were so low that would-be competitors spoke of the "China price"—the price they had to equal or beat. In the 1990s and 2000s, tens of thousands of Chinese grew wealthy, and tens of millions became middle class.

But problems loom. More tens of millions of rural Chinese are left out, and many have had their land confiscated for all those new developments. Will their patience wear out and be expressed as demonstrations or even rebellions, leading to political instability that will curtail China's industries and exports? China's contribution to global warming already exceeds that of the United States. Can the Chinese environment—and the rest of our planet—absorb the impacts? In the summer

of 2007, Mattel announced the recall of 19 million toys made in China because samples revealed that they contained unsafe amounts of lead. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2009 led to a shortage of American-made drywall. Much drywall imported from China turned out to be hazardous to human health and toxic chemicals deteriorated plumbing fixtures. What hazards do consumers in the richer countries face when they pay so little for products produced in the global factories?

Globalization is likely here to stay, barring a worldwide economic collapse. Its consequences are debated by news media, government officials, labor unions, companies, and consumers. The most important questions focus on its costs and benefits, especially the question of who loses and who gains. Nearly everyone agrees that corporations win from globalization, mainly because of reduced labor costs and less restrictive environmental and workplace regulations. Consumers in the rich countries also benefit because prices for many products—from shoes to computers—are lower. But we don't know how many hazardous products like the lead in toys and chemicals in drywall will show up in the future.

What about the workers who used to work in the factories in the developed countries, whose formerly high-paying jobs were replaced by people who live

As it integrates the world's economies, market globalization facilitates the buying and selling of goods from the international marketplace. Despite the Western products, this women's store is located in Beijing, China.



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half a world away? Many became victims of “restructuring” and “increasing efficiency” because their employers had to “lower costs” to “compete in the global market” in order to “be responsible to their stockholders.” Those who favor globalization point out that laid-off and fired North American workers have found other jobs and, at any rate, have benefited as consumers from the lower prices made possible by cheap overseas labor. Critics of globalization claim that most of these new jobs are lower-paid jobs in service industries and that the alleged decline of the American middle class is due largely to globalization.

And what about the workers in the global production system, whose labor provides low-priced products for sale to consumers in the global marketplace? Views diverge on their welfare, too. Critics of globalization claim that such workers are exploited. Rich companies take advantage of their poverty and lack of alternative economic opportunities by offering low wages and deplorable working conditions in terms of working hours, health, and safety. Those who favor the expansion of global markets respond that these workers are paid more than they would otherwise be paid, that they receive job experience and training, that their countries receive the taxes paid on their wages, and so forth.

Critics fire back that if things are getting so much better in places like Mexico and Central America, then why are so many Mexicans and Central Americans still illegally entering the United States in search of well-paying jobs?

Many people worry about the effects of globalization on the maintenance of cultural heritages. Will there be a global megaculture if the diverse peoples of the world buy and sell on the global megamarket? People who fear the effects of globalization point out that advertising has infiltrated even remote places such as the interior mountains of New Guinea. Is a culture devoted to megaconsumption the kind of world we want to live in? they ask. Those who favor globalization believe that countries will take what they want and leave the rest. They also hold that companies that sell in particular countries will have to adapt their products and advertising to local cultural preferences. Thus, McDonald’s franchises in India accommodate Hindu traditions with burgers made from something besides beef, and you can buy falafel-burgers at McDonald’s in parts of the Middle East. France has fought what it considers cultural imperialism by passing laws against the use of certain English words in the interest of preserving the French language.

## Summary

**1 Describe the three main forms of exchange in economic systems.** Anthropologists classify exchanges in human economies into three major modes or types: reciprocity, redistribution, and market. Reciprocity is the giving and receiving of objects or services without the transfer of money. There are three subtypes, distinguished by the motivations and social effects: generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity, and negative reciprocity. In redistribution, the members of a group contribute products, objects, or money into a pool or fund, which a central authority reallocates or uses for public purposes, as in taxes and tribute. Market exchange involves buying and selling commodities. It therefore requires money, prices determined by supply and demand, and privately owned property.

**2 Analyze how the form of reciprocity between people varies with social distance.** The kind of reciprocity that exists between individuals and groups depends on the normatively appropriate social distance between them. Exchange relationships alter as social relationships change. Conversely, one party can attempt

to alter a relationship by offering an object (or invitation), and the other party can signal acceptance or rejection by a particular response. A reciprocal exchange of goods can serve as an exchange of messages about feelings and relationships. Reciprocal exchanges thus often have symbolic as well as material content.

**3 Discuss the relationship between redistribution and political organization.** Redistribution is a major form of exchange in societies that have formal political leaders, most commonly called chiefs. As part of their status, chiefs have the right to receive tribute from their subjects, in the form of labor or products. Chiefs organize labor for public projects and reallocate the products among the community. Chiefdoms vary in the proportion of tribute kept by the chief’s family and redistributed back to the community.

**4 Elaborate on the differences between markets and other kinds of economies and their relative costs and benefits.** Market economies give people freedom to choose where to shop and work, and they are also



enormously productive and expansive. Some people believe this advantage is so overwhelming that the costs of living in a market economy are negligible. However, there are costs in family relationships, pressures to perform on the job, and ever-expanding material desires.

**5 Describe money and some of its uses and varieties.** Money makes the exchange of goods and services more convenient and facilitates the making of profit and accumulation of wealth. Money functions as a medium of exchange, a standard of value, and a store of value. These functions mean that money objects generally (but not always) have the characteristics of durability, divisibility, limited supply, and portability.

**6 Discuss the globalization of markets and its impacts on workers, consumers, corporations, and cultural preservation.** Because of market globalization, almost the entire world is integrated into a single exchange system: what happens in one national economy affects all other regions. Global markets have many impacts on all categories of people. There is wide agreement that corporations who export production facilities benefit from lowered production costs and generally make more profit. Consumers also benefit from prices that are lower than they otherwise would be. The impacts on working class people in all countries are more complicated, and globalization has many social and environmental costs. Whether a single, international megaculture centered on consumption will develop also is debatable.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to **[www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)** to access this valuable resource.



# 8

# MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES



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## **Some Definitions**

### **Incest Taboos**

### **Marriage**

*Defining Marriage*

*Functions of Marriage*

*Two Unusual Forms*

### **Variations in Marriage Beliefs and Practices**

*Marriage Rules*

*How Many Spouses?*

*Marriage Alliances*

*Marital Exchanges*

### **Kinship Diagrams**

### **Postmarital Residence Patterns**

*Influences on Residence Patterns*

*Residence and Households*

### **Family and Household Forms**

*Matrifocal Households*

*Extended Households*



The family is a fundamental social unit in all societies, although its forms and functions vary from people to people.

This Indian nuclear family is on the move in the city of Indore in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** the main theories of the culturally universal incest taboo.
- 2 **Analyze** why marriage is so difficult to define cross-culturally.
- 3 **Describe** the major forms of marriage and the leading ideas about their causes.
- 4 **Describe** patterns of marriage exchanges and the rationale behind them.
- 5 **Discuss** the types of postmarital residence and how anthropologists try to explain them.
- 6 **Describe** the main household forms and analyze the main influences on them.

When American politicians proclaim that “the family is the backbone of our nation” and that their own policies promote “family values,” they can hardly go wrong. After all, how many voters see themselves as antifamily? Certainly, the bonds of marriage and family are among the central social relationships of most societies. For one thing, a married couple, aided by some kind of extended family, is usually the social group that nourishes and socializes new generations. For another, family ties are the basis of residential groups that not only live together but often own property together, play together, work together, and worship together.

Families, we all recognize, do a lot of things that are helpful to their members and to society at large. So, when studies show that American divorce rates hover around 50 percent and that about 30 percent of American children live in households with only one parent present, we believe that something is amiss. We fear that broken homes and single-parent families will cause harm to children, communities, and the whole nation. Worrying that marriage between people of the same sex will erode the “sacred institution” of marriage, in 2004 the American president and some members of Congress attempted (unsuccessfully) to include the one man–one woman marital norm in the

Constitution. Many states passed defense of marriage acts to “protect” the American family from marriage between lesbians and gays.

Ethnographic studies and anthropological ideas have a lot to contribute to such contemporary issues. We look at some of the main ways cultures differ in their marriage practices and in the organization of their families and households. Before doing so, though, we need to define some terms used in this and later chapters.



## Some Definitions

Anthropologists distinguish between two kinds of relatives. **Consanguines** are “blood” relatives—people related by birth. **Affines** are “in-laws”—people related by marriage. Among your *consanguineous relatives* are your parents, siblings, grandparents, parents’ siblings, and cousins. Your affines include your sister’s husband, wife’s mother, and father’s sister’s husband.

Both consanguineous and affinal relationships can, in theory, serve as the basis for all kinds of social groups. When people form an organized, cooperative group based on their kinship relationships, anthropologists call it a **kin group**. The **nuclear family**, which consists of a married couple together with their unmarried children, is one kind of kin group. Typically its members live together, share the use of family wealth and property, rely on one another for emotional support, pool their labor and resources to support the family, and so on.

Among their many functions, nuclear families usually have primary responsibility for nurturing and enculturating children. North Americans usually think of each nuclear family as living in its own dwelling such as an apartment, condo, townhouse, or their own

**consanguines** “Blood” relatives, or people related by birth.

**affines** In-laws, or people related by marriage.

**kin group** A group of people who culturally conceive themselves to be relatives, cooperate in certain activities, and share a sense of identity as kinfolk.

**nuclear family** Family group consisting of a married couple and their offspring.



Term	Meaning
Kin group	A social group formed on the basis of recognized (including fictive) kin relationships between its members
Nuclear family	A married couple and their unmarried children
Extended family	Culturally recognized relatives of varying degrees of distance
Household	A domestic group, or people who live in the same place and share assets and certain responsibilities

house. In fact, immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and southeast Asia are often vilified by their Euro-American neighbors for housing too many nuclear families in one “single-family” dwelling.

Larger groups can be formed out of kinship relationships. People everywhere keep track of distant relatives who are part of their **extended family**. North Americans recognize extended family ties, if only when cousins, aunts, and uncles, and other distant relatives gather for holidays, family reunions, weddings, and funerals. Theoretically, the number of people who make up your extended family could go on “forever” to include third cousins and beyond. Extended families do not have clear social boundaries; rather, peoples’ recognition of relationships wither and disappear as relatives become more and more distant. You may know and occasionally interact with your first and second cousins, but beyond that range, whether you even know their names depends mostly on circumstances such as whether they live in your town or state.

In contrast, in more traditional societies, most of the important relationships in the lives of individuals are defined by extended kinship ties. Commonly, most of a person’s relationships with other people depend on whether, and precisely how, they are related. Extended families are far more important in the lives of individuals: they live in the same household, they rely on one another for economic support and access to resources, they share religious duties, and so forth. In such societies, nuclear families are embedded in larger, more inclusive kin groups. Some of these groups are enormously large, consisting of hundreds of members, as we see in the next chapter. In this chapter, we focus mainly on households, especially on nuclear and extended families and the ties that create and bind them.

A **household** (or *domestic group*) refers to people who reside in the same physical space. In the United States, most people continue to believe that normal households consist of a married couple and their children. In 2008, however, only 49.5 percent of households were lived in by the “traditional” nuclear family. A third of American households were nonfamily households.

In some other societies, the nuclear families live in separate dwellings on land they own jointly with related families. So long as the families use common property like land and tools, cooperate in work, share income or wealth, and recognize themselves as having distinctive identities, they belong to a single *household* even though they live in separate *houses*. We consider types of households later.

The preceding terms referring to groupings based on family and kinship seem simple enough. But it is easy to use one term when technically you mean another, which can lead to confusion. The Concept Review may provide some help.

Households are not always formed exclusively by family or marital ties, as gay and lesbian couples, heterosexual unmarried couples living together, and various other roommates and housemates illustrate. In fact, in a great many societies, people incorporate unrelated people into their family and household, acting and feeling toward them in the same way as they do consanguineous relatives. This practice is widespread enough that there is a phrase for it: **fictive kinship**, in which individuals who are not actually biological relatives act toward one another as if they were kin. Adoption is the most familiar example. In many islands of the Pacific, it is very common for a couple to adopt (or foster) one or more children, whether or not they have parented children themselves. Unlike in most Western nations, usually the adopted children keep up ties with their

**extended family** A group of related nuclear families.

**household** A dwelling or compound usually inhabited by consanguineous and affinal relatives or fictive kin who cooperate and share resources; in some contexts, a kin group of one or more nuclear families living in the same physical space.

**fictive kinship** Condition in which people who are not biologically related behave as if they are relatives of a certain type.



biological parents, who are often relatives of their adopted parents. For many purposes, such children in effect have two sets of parents to support them emotionally and economically.

This chapter mainly concerns the diversity in marriage and family among humanity. We begin with the point that every people have rules that govern who may and may not marry. The most universal of these rules is the *incest taboo*, which is so basic that we discuss it first.

## Incest Taboos

Rules against sexual intercourse between relatives are called **incest taboo**. Incest taboos are cultural universals (see Chapter 2), but there are some complexities. For one thing, the specific relatives to whom the taboos apply vary from people to people. Some societies prohibit sex and marriage between all first cousins, whereas others not only allow but prefer marriage among certain cousins. We cover such cases later.

For another thing, nearly every society prohibits sex between nuclear family members, but there are three documented cases in which sexual intercourse between siblings was permitted: the ancient Hawaiians, the prehistoric Incas, and the civilization of Egypt. Among the Hawaiians and Incas, incest was allowed only to members of the royal family and existed to preserve the spiritual purity of the royal ancestral bloodline. In ancient Egypt, even common people sometimes married (and presumably had sex with) their own siblings. Everywhere else in the known world, mating between siblings and between parents and children is culturally forbidden (which is not the same as saying it does not occur). In most cultures, the incest taboo is extended beyond the nuclear family to prohibit sex between uncles and nieces, aunts and nephews, and some kinds of cousins. Other than the widespread extension to these relatives, cultures vary in the categories of kinfolk with whom sex is taboo.

Anthropologists have wondered a lot about why nuclear family incest is almost universally taboo. This wonder sometimes surprises people who are not anthropologists, who usually think that intercourse within the family is universally prohibited because inbreeding is genetically harmful to the children. Indeed, in Euro-

American societies, incest is illegal because science has demonstrated that the offspring of incestuous matings have a significantly higher chance of exhibiting harmful recessive alleles. But humans had laws or enforced norms against incest long before genetic science even existed, so clearly biomedical knowledge is not the primary explanation for the universality of the incest taboo.

What, then, are some other reasons for the nuclear family incest taboo? There are four major explanations.

The first two explanations begin with the assumption that many or most people have sexual desire for their close relatives. Because acting on these desires would somehow harm others in their family or other group, the incest taboo exists to help groups control such behavior. In many cultures, adults teach children that incest is one of the most reprehensible crimes, and this culturally imposed prohibition forces people to repress their own desire. Several specific hypotheses make these assumptions, but we discuss only two of the most credible.

“Marry Out or Die Out” is the idea first proposed by E. B. Tylor, one of the nineteenth-century evolutionists mentioned in Chapter 4. Tylor noticed that a rule prohibiting marriage between close relatives forces people to seek their mates outside their domestic groups. These marriages force families to establish relationships with one another—relationships that widen the scale of economic and political cooperation. Over time, groups that marry out had an advantage over those that did not, so eventually all groups developed incest taboos.

As we note later, Tylor’s idea contains an important insight: outmarriage does indeed offer advantages to those domestic groups that practice it. Unfortunately, this insight does not pertain to the incest taboo. There is no necessary reason a successful family could not allow sexual relations between its members but forbid them to marry one another. This hypothesis thus confuses the incest taboo (“Thou shalt not have sexual intercourse within thine own domestic group”) with outmarriage rules (“Thou shalt not marry within thine own domestic group”).

The “Peace in the Family” hypothesis, also called the *family disruption hypothesis*, argues that nuclear family incest would lead to sexual rivalry and competition within the family unit. It would interfere with the normal and essential functions of the family, such as economic cooperation and enculturation. It also might undermine the authority of the parental generation of the family, who would be constantly challenged by their children. Brothers might be brought to blows over their sisters, and vice versa. Imagine the status

**incest taboo** Prohibition against sexual intercourse between certain kinds of relatives.

and role confusions: for example, if a man had children by his daughter, the daughter's children would also be her half-siblings, and the father's children would simultaneously be his grandchildren.

This hypothesis is plausible but difficult to evaluate. We do not know whether sexual relations in the family would threaten the family's peace because the nuclear family incest taboo is well-nigh universal. Would brothers and sisters peacefully wait their turns? Probably they would not, but we have no way of testing the hypothesis. At any rate, the incest taboo is sometimes extended to very distant relatives who hardly know one another, and family disruption cannot explain these extensions.

The other two explanations both assume that the majority of people have little sexual desire for their close relatives. The two hypotheses are closely related and, indeed, complementary. Also, the same objection applies to both: if there is so little sexual desire between close relatives, then why do people need a taboo at all?

"Inbreeding Avoidance" is the cultural rationale for the taboo familiar to most of our readers. Both genetic theory and animal experimentation have established that offspring of sexual unions between close relatives have a significantly higher probability of inheriting homozygously recessive harmful alleles that show up phenotypically; that is, incest is bad for the children and the "gene pool." The inbreeding avoidance explanation simply states that the incest taboo exists to reduce the incidence of mating between close relatives.

Why, then, do anthropologists not embrace the explanation that avoiding intercourse with one's close relatives has the biological function of preventing the harmful genetic effects of inbreeding? One reason has already been mentioned. Many preindustrial peoples are unaware of these harmful genetic effects, so these effects cannot consciously be the reason for the taboo. This objection, however, is not fatal to the inbreeding-avoidance idea because the hypothesis does not require conscious awareness that inbreeding is potentially harmful to the children and future generations. Nonhuman primates do not "know" that inbreeding increases the expression of harmful alleles, but they act "as if" they know: they generally do not mate with close genetic relatives. We need only postulate that throughout humanity's evolutionary history, those individuals who mated with their close relatives left fewer surviving and reproducing offspring than those who did not. The genes of those who did not interbreed with their close relatives would have spread within the population. Evolution then "built in" a lack of sexual desire for close relatives over a long time span. If so, our

knowledge is instinctive, not conscious. This idea about the incest taboo, of course, is consistent with evolutionary psychology (see Chapter 4), the general theory that humanity's behavior has been shaped by genetic evolution. (Notice that evolution would also have had to build in knowledge of who one's close relatives are, or who they are most likely to be.)

Another objection is more serious: many peoples do not apply the taboo to the kinds of relatives that inbreeding avoidance predicts they should. For example, some peoples allow or encourage marriage between one set of cousins but prohibit both marriage and sexual intercourse with another set of cousins who are equally closely related genetically. Among certain populations, it is quite common for a man to marry his mother's brother's daughter, but for his father's brother's daughter to be prohibited as both a sexual and marriage partner. Yet among other peoples, a man is encouraged to marry his father's brother's daughter. Now why should some populations prohibit sex with one kind of cousin and others encourage it? In other words, the inbreeding-avoidance theory does not explain the cross-cultural variability in the kinds of relatives to whom the taboo applies. It predicts (or seems to predict) that all peoples ought to prohibit the same relatives.

The "Familiarity Breeds Disinterest" explanation holds that males and females who are closely associated during childhood have little sexual desire for one another when they grow up. Also called the *childhood familiarity hypothesis*, this hypothesis was first proposed by a nineteenth-century scholar named Edward Westermarck. It was rejected for decades but became popular again in the 1970s because of some ethnographic studies that seem to support it.

One study is from the *kibbutzim*, the agricultural collectives first established in Israel in the 1950s. Nearly all *kibbutzim* are now disbanded, but in the past children were not raised by their parents but in communal peer groups by specialists in child care. Several infants of similar age were placed in a common nursery soon after birth. They were nourished and enculturated as a group, with more children joining them later around our kindergarten age. A peer group of 10 to 20 children was raised together until adolescence, more or less as if they were siblings. Boys and girls raised in the same peer group were not forbidden to marry and in fact were often encouraged to get together. But people raised together almost never married, although they had plenty of opportunities to get to know one another. Their behavior thus supports the "familiarity breeds disinterest" idea.

On the kibbutzim of Israel, children raised in communal nurseries tended not to be interested in one another sexually, supporting the “familiarity breeds disinterest” theory of the incest taboo. Here four kibbutz children are getting ready for bed after their baths.



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Arthur Wolf’s study of marriage in Taiwan also supports the childhood-familiarity theory. Some Taiwanese couples with male children took girls to be reared and trained in their households as future wives for their sons. In each family, a boy and girl grew up together in the same household—in most respects just like brother and sister—and were expected to marry. If it is true that children raised together have little sexual interest in one another, then there should be less sexual activity and greater marital difficulties for these couples than for other Taiwanese. Wolf found that these couples had fewer children, higher rates of divorce, and more extramarital sexual activity than other couples.

Finally, evidence from an Arab village in Lebanon studied by Justin McCabe supports Westermarck’s hypothesis. For a variety of reasons, it is fairly common in the Middle East for a man to marry one of his father’s brother’s daughters. In the village studied, about 20 percent of all marriages were between men and women whose fathers were brothers. These cousins were in constant childhood association with one another because of the close personal relationship between their fathers. If childhood familiarity does indeed produce adult sexual disinterest, then it should be revealed in these marriages. In fact, it is: these cousin marriages had three times the divorce rate and produced fewer children than other kinds of marriage.

So, some ethnographic research suggests sexual disinterest between individuals who have intimate

childhood associations. This lack of desire cannot be universal, or there would never be any nuclear family incest, but such incest certainly exists and it is likely more common than publicly recognized. However, the childhood-familiarity hypothesis does explain why most people do not commit incest within the nuclear family—they have little desire for one another.

Further, if childhood familiarity does lead to erotic disinterest as adults, then the inbreeding-avoidance explanation is also supported. To avoid inbreeding, people must have some way of recognizing their close relatives. In general, my close relatives are likely to be those with whom I was raised, so if I avoid mating with my childhood associates, I generally will not be inbreeding. Both these hypotheses taken together are capable of explaining why nuclear family incest is uncommon.

Notice, though, that neither the inbreeding-avoidance nor the childhood-familiarity hypothesis explains why nuclear family incest is usually *punished* whenever it does occur. It is easy to see why, for example, a sister would rather reproduce with a nonrelative than with her brother (at least it is easy to see if we think she lacks desire for her brother!). But how does the lack of desire by individuals become a punishable offense or, in many cultures, a capital crime? Why should anyone else care?

Some scholars have used the very existence of a taboo on incest to argue against both the inbreeding-avoidance



and childhood-familiarity explanations. Their argument is that if people generally do not have erotic feelings toward close relatives, then cultures do not need a taboo. The fact that there is a taboo at all proves there is sexual desire for close kin, for why prohibit an action that people have no desire to commit? But this objection is unfair because neither explanation denies that some people desire close relatives sexually. There is merely evidence suggesting that *most* people do not. We can see why this objection is unfair with an analogous legal prohibition: few people argue that laws against murder or assault proves that most people would commit these acts without the laws.

To return to our overall discussion, notice that three of the four hypotheses account mainly for the incest prohibitions within the nuclear family. They therefore cannot explain everything about incest taboos because in most human populations incest prohibitions are extended to more-distant relations. For example, in a great many societies members of the same clan (discussed in Chapter 9) are subject to the taboo, and clanmates are often very distantly related. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the incest taboo has a biological basis, but that some peoples extend it beyond close relatives to achieve other social and cultural objectives.

## Marriage

Biologically speaking, procreation creates the family relationships of an individual: who your parents are determines your grandparents, your aunts and uncles, your cousins, and so forth. Assuming the woman and man are married, marriage and its resulting family relationships seem pretty basic. How many ways can people marry and have families? Quite a few, it turns out. We begin with marriage.

### Defining Marriage

What is marriage? Persons with little knowledge of cultural diversity might say that marriage is a relationship between a woman and a man involving romantic love, sexual activity, cohabitation, child rearing, and shared joys and burdens of life. People trained in law might also note that marriage has legal aspects, such as joint property rights and obligations to share support of children. Religious people may want to include their beliefs that marriage is a relationship sanctioned by God, a relationship that should last until the parties

are separated by death. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people will want to add their own provisions.

These provisions are broadly applicable in many modern nations. However, they obscure the diversity in marriages that anthropologists have uncovered. For example, choosing one's spouse is not always a private matter decided by the couple. In many cultures, marriage is likely to be a *public* matter that involves a broad range of relatives who must consent to or even arrange the marriage.

Further, as often as not, romantic love is not considered necessary for marriage, and sometimes it is not even relevant to the relationship. Couples do not marry because they "fall in love." For example, in traditional China, Korea, and Japan, a man and a woman seldom had a chance to fall in love before they married because they usually hardly knew each other and often had not even met. Sometimes boys and girls were betrothed at birth or as children. Even when couples married as adults, the marriage was arranged by their parents with the aid of a matchmaker, usually a female relative of the groom's family or a woman hired by them. She tried to find a woman of suitable age, wealth, status, and disposition to become a wife for the young man. The matchmaker would "match" not only the couple to each other, but also the woman to the husband's parents. This was important because the new wife would be incorporated into her husband's family; her labor would be under the control of her husband's parents, especially her mother-in-law; she would revere and make offerings to the ancestors of her husband's family, not those of her own parents; her behavior would be closely watched lest she disgrace her in-laws; and her children would become members of her husband's kin group, not her own.

Even cohabitation in the same house does not universally accompany marriage. In many villages in Melanesia, Southeast Asia, and Africa, the men sleep and spend much of their time in a communal house (called, appropriately, the *men's house*), while their wives and young children live and sleep in a separate dwelling.

Other Western cultural notions of and customs about marriage do not apply elsewhere. Sex is not always confined to the marriage bed (or mat). There may or may not be a formal ceremony (wedding) recognizing or validating a new marriage. The marital tie may be fragile or temporary, with individuals expecting to have several spouses during the course of their lives. Or the tie may be so strong that even death does not end it. For example, in parts of old India, there were strict rules against the remarriage of a higher-caste widow, and

such a widow often followed her husband to the grave by throwing herself onto his cremation fire (a practice now illegal in India).

Finally, there are culturally legitimate marital relationships that are not between a man and a woman. Among the Nuer of the southern Sudan, sometimes an older, well-off woman pays the bridewealth needed to marry a girl. The girl then takes male lovers and bears children, who are incorporated into the kin group of the older woman. The pastoral and horticultural Nandi of Kenya allow marriage between women. Some men have more than one wife, and at her husband's death surviving wives normally receive a share of his cattle, which they, in turn, pass along to their own sons. When a married woman grows too old to bear children and happens to have no sons to inherit the cattle given her by her husband, she may take a younger woman as her wife, thus becoming a "female husband." She picks a sexual partner for her young wife, whose male children then become the heirs of the "female husband." The two women, however, are not supposed to be sexually active after the birth, with other men as well as with each other. Regina Smith Oboler, who worked among the Nandi, reported that the relationship was almost identical to that between a married woman and a man. (We have more to say on same-sex relationships in Chapter 11.)

Because of such diversity, defining marriage to encompass all the cross-cultural variations in the relationship is hard because there will always be some people who do not fit the definition. As you can imagine, numerous definitions have been offered, but there is still no agreement on the "best" one. Most anthropologists agree, however, that marriage in *most* human societies involves the following:

- A culturally defined (variable) relationship between a man and a woman from different families, which regulates sexual intercourse and legitimizes children
- A set of rights the couple and their families obtain over each other, including rights over children born to the woman
- An assignment of responsibility for nurturing and enculturating children to the spouses and/or to one or both sets of their relatives
- A creation of variably important bonds and relationships between the families of the couple that have social, economic, political, and sometimes ritual dimensions

If we define marriage in this way, do all societies have some form of marriage?

This question is tricky, and not just because the definition above is problematic. However, the answer appears to be no. Consider the Musuo (also called Na and Naxi) an ethnic group of Yunnan Province in the south of China. The Musuo are ethnically distinct from the Han, China's majority population. Among Musuo, a typical adult woman remains at the home of her mother and siblings. Men visit her at night for sexual intercourse, but such visits carry no commitment or obligation. Both people have multiple sexual partners. The man does not spend the night and seems to have no obligation to his children, or even to recognize them as his. Children are raised by their mother and her own family, which means that Musuo have no nuclear families. Either the woman or her male visitor may initiate the communication that leads to their sexual relationship, but it is always the man who visits at night. The Musuo lack all four aspects of the definition of marriage given above. Therefore, they have no marriage as we define the term, nor do they have marriage as most people understand it. Cai Hua, the Han Chinese ethnographer, says that the Musuo show that marriage and nuclear families are not universal human institutions. (Where, we might ask, is the "backbone" of Musuo society?)

The Han, who are the majority ethnic group in China, find Musuo so different that many of them visit Yunnan province to see them. Han people often view Musuo women as promiscuous and the Musuo people as matriarchical. (If this were true, in these two respects, Musuo would contrast strongly with traditional Han practices, which perhaps is why so many Han are interested.) The Chinese central government has a policy of helping the development of the country's more remote, poorer regions, including the rural areas of Yunnan province. So the government encourages Han visits and has even helped establish "parks" where Musuo perform their allegedly traditional songs and dances.

However, the Musuo are very unusual. Nearly all other peoples have some institution that is recognizably "marriage."

### *Functions of Marriage*

The near-universality of marriage suggests that marriage does important and useful things for individuals, families, and/or society at large. Four functions are among the most important.

1. Marriage creates the social relationships that provide for the material needs, social support, and

enculturation of children. Most cultures recognize that forming a (variably) stable bond between a woman and her husband is an important reason to marry. In the human species, one reason the tie between mothers and fathers is more important than in most other animals is the lengthy dependence of children on adults. Until age 10 or older, children are largely dependent on adults for food, shelter, protection, and other bodily needs. Equally important, children need adults for the social learning that is crucial to complete their psychological and social development. It is theoretically possible that children *need* only one adult, the mother. But generally children benefit from multiple caretakers and supporters, and marriage helps to create and expand relationships that help children.

2. The marriage bond reduces (but does not eliminate) potential conflicts over sexual access by defining culturally approved sexual activity and limiting adult sexual access to certain individuals (normatively or legally, at any rate). Extramarital sex is not, of course, prohibited to the same degree in all cultures, but limitations are placed on it. In the vast majority of societies, the nurturing and care of young infants are entrusted mainly to mothers, so it is beneficial for mothers to receive material and social support for some period after childbirth by their relatives, usually including their husbands.
3. All known societies divide up work like food-getting and household tasks according to age and gender (see Chapter 11 for more on the division of labor). Men do some kinds of tasks, women other kinds. Although the work usually overlaps, there is enough differentiation in most communities that the products and services produced by women must be shared with men, and vice versa. Marriage helps define these rights and duties and establishes the household within which family members do things for one another. The division of labor also means that, most often, mothers need the assistance of *some* male to help provide food and other necessities to their children. Most commonly, this male is her husband.
4. Marriage creates new relationships between families and other kinds of kin groups. In a few societies, nuclear families are physically able to produce what they need to survive with their own labor and resources. But the incest taboo forces individuals to marry someone other than their immediate relatives. Every such marriage creates a potential new set of affinal relationships between the relatives of the

couple. The importance attached to these relationships varies from people to people. At the very least, the families of the wife and husband have a common interest in the children. In addition, a great many societies use the relationships created by intermarriage to establish important trade relationships or political alliances, as we see later.

Because marriage—and the new nuclear family each marriage creates—is useful to individuals and to societies in these and other ways, a relationship like marriage and a group like the family are almost universal among the world’s cultures. However, no particular *form* of marriage or *type* of family is universal. Cultures evolved various marriage and family systems to perform these functions. To show the diversity of these systems, we now consider two unusual systems.

## Two Unusual Forms

### *“Marriage” among the Nayar of Southern India*

Before Great Britain assumed colonial control over their part of India in 1792, the Nayar were a warrior caste (see Chapter 13). Because so many Nayar men served as soldiers for surrounding Indian kingdoms, they were away from their homes and villages much of the time. Frequent male absence affected marriage and family life. The Nayar lacked nuclear families, in the sense of a couple and their offspring living together and sharing responsibilities. Depending on how we define marriage, they may have had no marriage either. Yet Nayar people managed all the “functions” of marriage listed above. How did sexuality and provision for children work in such circumstances?

Each Nayar village contained several kin groups. At birth, most children became members of the kin group of their mother. Each group was linked for certain ceremonial purposes to several other groups, either from its own or from neighboring villages. Both Nayar women and men who engaged in sexual relations with anyone in their own kin group were put to death because such behavior was considered incest. Restrictions on Nayar women were even more severe: under penalty of death or ostracism, they had to confine their sexual activity to men of their own or a higher subcaste.

Every few years, all the girls of a kin group who were nearing puberty gathered for a large ceremony, the purpose of which was to ceremonially “marry” these girls to selected men from the linked kin groups. At the ceremony, each “groom” tied a gold ornament around the neck of his “bride.” Each couple then went



to a secluded place for three days, where they sometimes had sexual relations. Afterward, the “grooms” left the village, and none had any further responsibilities to his “bride.” He might never even see her again. For her part, the “bride” and the children she would later bear had only to perform a certain ritual for her ceremonial “husband” when he died. The ritual tying of the ornament by a man of a linked kin group served to establish a girl as an adult, able to have sexual liaisons with other men when she matured.

After her “marriage,” each girl continued to live with her own consanguineous relatives. When she reached menarche, she began to receive nighttime male visitors from other kin groups. She established long-lasting relationships with some of her partners, who gave her small luxury gifts periodically but did not live with her. None of her partners supported her or her children in any way other than these occasional gifts. In fact, they also visited other women and fathered other children. The food, clothing, and other needs of a woman and her children were supplied by her brothers and other members of her own family.

A Nayar woman’s early “marriage,” then, did not establish a nuclear family, nor did her later sexual partners live with her or support her children. There was only one other thing a woman required from her partners: when she got pregnant, one of them had to admit that he could have been the father of her child by paying the fees for the midwife who helped deliver the baby. If none of her partners did so, it was assumed that she had had sexual intercourse with someone of a lower caste. She, and sometimes her child, would be expelled from her kin group or killed.

### *Cross-generational Marriage among the Tiwi of Northern Australia*

In most societies, people who marry are comparable in age. Often the husband is older, sometimes significantly older. The Tiwi, who traditionally lived on the Bathurst Islands just off the coast of northern Australia, were unusual because both sexes frequently married people of markedly different ages—in fact, most spouses belonged to different generations. Ethnographer C. W. M. Hart worked among the Tiwi in the late 1920s, and Arnold Pilling worked there in the early 1950s. Jane Goodale’s later work focused on Tiwi women.

Like other aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Tiwi were hunters and gatherers. Male elders made most of the important decisions in a band, including decisions about foraging activities and the distribution of food.

Many elderly men were polygynous—that is, they had more than one wife. Polygynous men had access to lots of food from their wives’ gathering and fishing, and they could acquire prestige and allies by distributing the food widely to other families. Tiwi prized meat, but as men reached their 50s and 60s, they were unable to hunt effectively. To hunt meat for food and distributions, they needed sons, which they generally had, and sons-in-law, which they could get by marrying off their daughters.

Tiwi marriage was unusual because of two rare customs. First, when a girl was born, she was almost immediately promised as a wife to some other man. This is “infant betrothal,” with the girl’s husband selected by her father. Second, Tiwi norms required that all females be married virtually all their lives. So after she was betrothed an infant girl was considered already married. And when a woman’s husband died, she remarried almost immediately, called “widow remarriage.”

An astute Tiwi father did not marry his infant daughter to just anyone. He used her marriage to win friends and gain allies. The allies who were most valuable were men of about his own age, so naturally he tended to marry his daughters to these men. But the relationship created by one such marriage was often reciprocated—if you married your daughter to a friend, you would likely receive his daughter, sooner or later. So a man might gain a wife in return for a daughter.

If a man’s wives had daughters when he was in his 40s and 50s (which was common because wives were so young), then he married some of them to men his own age. Not all of them, though, because a man also wanted young sons-in-law to come live in his band and help supply meat. An elder would look around for a man in his 20s who seemed like a diligent and skillful hunter and a promising ally. He married some of his daughters to these younger men. When his daughters grew up, his sons-in-law would supply him and his household with meat.

A girl growing into womanhood would already have a husband, most likely one who was perhaps 20 or 30 years older than herself. Of course, this meant that most wives outlived their husbands but did have children by them. By Tiwi custom, widows had to remarry. But to whom? Some young men in their 20s had failed to attract the notice of the elders and therefore had no wives of their own. But they still could be friends and useful allies of the sons of these widowed women. So at the death of her husband, her sons (usually with her consent and approval) married their mother to a man 20



Human children are dependent on adult care for many years, as this photo of a Laotian woman and her children reminds us. Providing for the physical and emotional needs of children is everywhere a major function of families.

or 30 years her junior. That way, she would have the support of a strong hunter as she aged, and her sons would strengthen a friendship and gain an ally. (Incidentally, Tiwi wives might seem like “pawns,” but in fact they were active participants in marital machinations, as Jane Goodale documented in her book, *Tiwi Wives*.)

If you had visited the Tiwi during their traditional life, here’s what you would have observed: many elderly men had several wives, most of whom were 20 to 30 years younger than themselves. Young men had either no wife at all or only one wife, and that one wife was probably at least 20 years older than her husband. Elderly men were married to women in the prime of their lives, whereas many younger men in their “prime” had wives who were old enough to be their mother. Looked at from the point of view of a typical female’s life cycle, she was first married to a much older man. Then after he died, she married a man who was young enough to be her son.

We emphasize again that both the Nayar and the Tiwi had unusual marriage systems. (Both systems are no longer operating.) Of course, neither people viewed their own marriage practices as “unusual.” It was just what they did. Perhaps they even thought it was only natural. Maybe they even considered it the backbone of their societies.

## Variations in Marriage Beliefs and Practices

The marriage relationship varies enormously among cultures. For one thing, most cultures allow multiple spouses. For another, the nature of the marital relationship—living arrangements, what wives and husbands expect from each other, who decides who marries whom, authority patterns, how the relatives of the couple relate to one another, and so forth—differs from people to people.

### Marriage Rules

Everywhere, norms identify members of some social groups or categories as potential spouses and specify members of other groups or categories as not eligible for marriage. One set of rules is **exogamous rules**. Exogamy (“outmarriage”) means that an individual is prohibited from marrying within her or his own family or other kin group or, less commonly, village or settlement. (Recall that the incest taboo prohibits *sex*, whereas rules of exogamy forbid *intermarriage*.) Because the incest taboo applies to those people whom the local culture defines as close relatives, members of one’s own nuclear family and other close kin are almost everywhere prohibited as spouses.

Other kinds of marriage rules are **endogamous rules**. Endogamy (“inmarriage”) means that an individual must marry someone in his or her own social group. The classic example of an endogamous group is the caste in traditional Hindu India (see Chapter 13). Other kinds of endogamous categories are found in orthodox Jews, races in the American South during slavery, and noble classes in many ancient civilizations and states.

**exogamous rules** Marriage rules prohibiting individuals from marrying a member of their own social group or category.

**endogamous rules** Marriage rules requiring individuals to marry some member of their own social group or category.

Endogamous rules have the effect of maintaining social barriers between groups of people defined as having different social ranks. Rules of endogamy maintain the exclusiveness of the endogamous group in two ways. First, they reduce social contacts and interactions between individuals of different ranks. Inter-marriage creates new relationships between the families of the wife and husband and potentially is a means of raising the rank of oneself or one's offspring. Endogamy keeps affinal relationships within the caste, class, ethnic group, race, or whatever. Over generations, this reinforces ties *within* the endogamous groups and decreases interactions *between* the groups.

Second, endogamy symbolically expresses and strengthens the exclusiveness of the endogamous group by preventing its “contamination” by outsiders. This is most apparent with Indian castes because the cultural rationale for caste endogamy is to avoid ritual pollution: the Hindu religion holds that physical contact with members of lower castes places high-caste individuals in a state of spiritual danger, precluding the possibility of marriage between them.

Technically, the term *endogamy* applies only to cultural rules (or even laws) about confining marriage to those within one's own group. But it is important to note the existence of *de facto endogamy*, meaning that although no formal rules or laws require in-marriage, most people marry people like themselves. De facto racial and social class endogamy exists in most modern nations, including North America, partly because opportunities for members of different classes to get to know one another are often limited. For instance, members of different classes often go to different kinds of schools and hang out with different sets of friends. Such practices decrease social interactions between classes and thus reduce the possibility that people of different classes will meet and fall in love.

De facto endogamy also exists because of beliefs about the dangers of marrying outside one's own “kind.” Members of elite classes (and parents and other

relatives of young people) may worry that would-be spouses of lower-class standing would not fit in with their social circle (to phrase their objection politely). Likewise, interracial couples are warned about the social stigma attached to their relationship and about the “problems” they and their children will encounter. Of course, these problems exist largely because some people continue to think that interracial marriages are problematic.

Racial, ethnic, and even religious barriers to inter-marriage are breaking down in many regions due to improved education and increased interactions between peoples due to globalization. By expanding the range of nationalities people get to know, international and intercultural marriages are becoming commonplace. Globalization is changing popular attitudes and affecting marriage and family in this obvious way, but also in more subtle ways (see the following Globalization box).

### How Many Spouses?

One way cultures vary in marriage practices is in the number of spouses an individual is allowed to have at a time. There are four logical possibilities:

1. **Monogamy**, in which every individual is allowed only one spouse
2. **Polygyny**, in which one man is allowed multiple wives
3. **Polyandry**, in which one woman is allowed multiple husbands
4. **Group marriage**, in which several women and men are allowed to be married simultaneously to one another

The last three possibilities are all varieties of **polygamy**—“plural spouses.” It is important to recognize that the three types of polygamy refer to the number of spouses *allowed* to a person, not necessarily to how many spouses most people have. For example, in polygynous cultures, men are permitted more than one wife, but only a minority of men actually have more than one.

It may surprise members of monogamous societies to learn that most of the world's cultures historically allowed polygamy. The most common form of plural marriage is polygyny. In the past, before colonialism affected most of the world's peoples, around 70 percent of all societies allowed a man to have two or more wives. Today, polygyny is allowed in many nations in the Middle East, and it remains common among

**monogamy** Each individual is allowed to have only one spouse at a time.

**polygyny** One man is allowed to have multiple wives.

**polyandry** One woman is allowed to have multiple husbands.

**group marriage** Several women and several men are married to one another simultaneously.

**polygamy** Multiple spouses.



indigenous peoples of Africa, Southeast Asia, and Amazonia. American news stories give the impression that many Mormons still practice polygyny, but in fact the church outlawed it in the nineteenth century, and the vast majority of Mormon faithful disavow the practice.

Polyandry is rare. It is documented in fewer than a dozen societies—less than 1 percent of the world’s cultures. Group marriage, so far as we know, has never been a characteristic form of marriage in a whole human society. Indeed, most anthropologists believe that group marriage, where it has occurred, has been a short-lived phenomenon brought about by highly unusual circumstances.

Many Westerners misunderstand the nature of polygamous marriages. We fail to recognize the social and economic conditions that make these forms of marriage advantageous. We now look at these conditions for polygynous and polyandrous societies.

### Polygyny

Many people who view themselves and their nations as modernized believe that polygyny is an outmoded form of marriage. Commonly polygyny is interpreted as a manifestation of patriarchy (men force women into the relationship); as reducing female marital happiness (what woman wants to be part of a “harem”?); as harmful to children (wouldn’t the kids of each wife be better off if each has their *own* father?); and as a way to provide men with additional sexual partners (at the expense of each wife). There is some truth to each of these opinions, but they do not tell the whole story of polygyny.

Because around 70 percent of all societies known to anthropology formerly allowed polygyny, many explanations have been offered. Many polygynous peoples practice sexual abstinence for several years after marriage, a custom called the *postpartum sex taboo*. The taboo commonly lasts two to four years. If it is followed, this reduces the birth rate, which might be beneficial, and also allows each newborn to nurse longer, leading to better child nutrition and health. Because of the taboo, polygyny allows husbands a legitimate sexual outlet, protecting new mothers and their children from having children too close together.

Some suggest that polygyny is a response to a shortage of adult males, due to hazardous male activities like warfare and hunting. If there regularly are more adult females than males, then polygyny increases the

chances that all women will find husbands and therefore helps provide her and her children with resources and an inheritance.

Disparity in the age of marriage might contribute to the frequency of polygyny. Typically, males are quite older than their wives, partly because they need time to accumulate resources for bridewealth, as discussed later. So, the number of women of marriageable age increases relative to the number of men, allowing some men to have more than one wife and all women to have husbands. Polygyny then would solve a social problem caused by a discrepancy in marriage ages for women and men.

As you have noticed in these three explanations, it is difficult to disentangle effects and causes. For example, does the postpartum sex taboo help cause polygyny? Or do polygynous men not demand sex from their wives with young children because they have other wives, making the taboo more likely to develop as a means of increasing childhood survival and health? Does the fact that men marry later in life than women make polygyny more likely? Or do men marry later because they need resources to acquire a wife, *because* of the fact that polygyny makes wives in such short supply that women’s fathers demand resources for them?

Whether these sorts of factors, or other sets, account for polygyny is debatable. It is generally agreed that men acquire many benefits from plural wives. Men themselves generally recognize the benefits. In societies that allow it, polygyny ordinarily is a man’s preferred form of marriage. Generally, men of high rank and status or wealthy men are the ones who have plural wives, although there are many exceptions.

Men usually have both social and economic incentives for marrying several women. Socially, a man’s status commonly is directly related to the size of his family and, hence, to the number of his wives and children. Also, when a man marries more than one woman, he acquires a new set of affines—fathers- and brothers-in-law whom he can call on for support, exchange relationships, or political alliances.

There are also short- and long-term economic benefits, especially in horticultural and pastoral adaptations, where a woman’s labor is important in providing food and wealth to her family. The more wives and children a man has, the larger the workforce available to his household. In pastoral societies in Africa and elsewhere, polygyny enables a man to increase the size of his herds because he has more herders (wives and

As interactions between people of diverse nationalities and cultural traditions increase, people from different regions have more chance to get to know one another. Students cross national and cultural boundaries in search of better educations or new cultural experiences. Employees of multinational companies fly all over the world buying and selling. Migrants settle in new homelands. Tourists go abroad to see the world or just to increase their stock of travel stories and photos to show and tell their friends.

Cross-cultural (or transnational) marriages and adoptions are increasing. Allow one of your authors (J. P.) a personal story. In the 1950s, my great-uncle married a Japanese American woman. He was a tobacco country boy from North Carolina, born into a family that included die-hard racists among its members. She was a California girl whose family had been in an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. Both families objected strenuously to the marriage, though for different reasons, and ostracized the couple for years. (Eventually, the families accepted the relationship.) In the 1980s, my first cousin married an African American woman who had two daughters, and they soon had a daughter of their own. In the 1990s, another of my first cousins married a man from the Philippines. No one from either family thought much about it, and both families now dote on their two grandsons. In the early 2000s, another of my first cousins (unmarried) adopted a one-year-old boy from a Chinese orphanage. Everyone in the family is delighted. Family reunions include black Americans, white/black Americans, two Philippine American boys, and Chinese-looking lad named Jake—all now members of an extended family whose (Anglo) grandparents were semiliterate tobacco sharecroppers in North Carolina until the 1940s. My own son graduated from college in 2007. His first college girlfriend was from China, his second from India. If none of this seems unusual to you, then you were probably born in the *late* twentieth century.

In the old times, when discussing such relationships, many racially or culturally intolerant people talked about “sticking with your own kind.” More polite people discussed all the “problems” such marriages would have because of “society’s attitudes.” Such attitudes are still around, of course, but interracial, intercultural, and international marriages are becoming so common that soon almost everyone will know someone who has married inter-someplace. Perhaps we will someday live in a world where most people consider everyone their “own kind.”

Some effects of globalization on marriage and family are more indirect and subtle than my family’s story. Take Japan, for example. Japan has been buying from and, especially, selling to the global marketplace since the late nineteenth

century, when the nation was “opened up” by the Americans under threat of force. After losing World War II and having two cities destroyed by the only nuclear weapons ever detonated against civilian targets, Japan recovered within two decades. It already had many advantages over countries that Westerners then called *underdeveloped*. It was predominantly urban. Most of its citizens were very well educated. It had been industrialized for decades and was reindustrialized in the 1950s and 1960s. It was comparatively homogeneous linguistically and culturally as well as “racially,” so most Japanese agreed on their values and goals. It was politically stable with little crime.

By the 1970s, Japan was such an economic powerhouse that American car makers and electronics manufacturers justifiably felt threatened. After World War II, Japan was the first non-American, non-European nation to develop its economy from global trade. As it grew wealthy by exporting its autos, motorcycles, consumer electronics, and other high-tech products, more and more of Japan’s rural people left the family farm in search of a better life in the city. This is a common, predictable effect of development: people migrate from farms to cities because of job opportunities and other attractions of city life. Urban households buy their food from farms, theoretically increasing the income of rural people with their purchases.

But a marriage and family problem developed in the Japanese countryside. There was an ancient custom known as *primogeniture*, in which the eldest son inherits the family farm, including the farmhouse, equipment, any livestock, and the land. Younger sons made their own ways, perhaps working for their eldest brother on the family estate, joining a Buddhist monastery, or moving to another region. What about the women? If a woman’s parents were able to arrange her marriage to an eldest son, then she moved in with her husband’s family, to live with her father- and mother-in-law. Usually, marrying an eldest son was a desirable match for a woman with rural parentage—she would have to work hard serving her husband’s parents as well as working on the land of her husband, but she had considerable security for herself and her children, and eventually *she* expected to become the mother-in-law of her eldest son’s wife. Then she could take life a bit easier.

As Japan’s economy grew after the war and rural-to-urban migration picked up, younger sons from farms migrated and provided much of the unskilled labor in factories, low-level services, and the enormous construction industry. There was still considerable family pressure on eldest sons to remain behind on the family farm. Land is scarce and valuable, and many Japanese value what’s left of their countryside and rural life. Parents, grandparents, and other relatives did not want

land that had been in their family to be sold off. Japanese people love rice for its symbolic value as well as for its nutritional value. The dominant political party did not want to see the country become even more dependent on imported foods, so it limited rice imports by various means and heavily subsidized Japan's remaining rice farmers. It might appear that the eldest sons were doing well.

Unfortunately, few Japanese women were interested in marrying an eldest son. Farm work is hard, and small farm towns are boring. Many Japanese city women have never been to a farm, and most who have would never dream of moving there. A farm wife probably will live with her husband's parents, with little privacy, and will have to care for them when they grow old. Throughout the countryside, new marriage norms eroded the ability of parents to control the marriages of their daughters, so even most young, rural women were unwilling to marry a farm boy. Better to marry a "salaryman"—a professional man with a reliable and well-paying job in Tokyo or Kyoto or Osaka or another city where work is easier and payoffs higher. In cities, salarymen work long hours and might not come home until midnight, but until recently Japanese wives expected much less socially and romantically from their husbands than Western wives. Odds are, a Japanese husband will turn control over his salary to his wife, who can use it for household expenses and save for their children's education.

The shortage of wives for farmers became a crisis. In one village in the late 1980s, of unmarried persons between ages 25 and 39, 120 were men and only 31 were women, a ratio of 4:1. Some Japanese villages organized to find wives for their unmarried men, not all of whom were still young. One mountain village placed newspaper ads, promising free winter skiing vacations to all young women who visited and agreed to meet its men. Over a five-year period, 300 women responded, but none became wives as a result. In another mountain village of 7,000, there were three bachelors for every unmarried woman, so the local government became a marriage agent. It brought in 22 women from the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and other Asian countries to marry its men, many in their 40s and 50s. Some marriages endured, but others ended in divorce because of the labor demands of farm life, the burden wives bore in caring for their husband's elderly parents, and cultural differences. Small businesses developed that offered counseling services for bicultural couples and served as marriage brokers to match Japanese men with foreign women.

Even today, many Japanese farm men remain bachelors. Farming in Japan is now primarily a part-time occupation—farmers find off-season jobs in construction or other tasks,

unable to make an acceptable living even with government subsidies. And farming is now largely performed by older persons. For example, in one important rice-growing area, between 1980 and 2003, the number of people making most of their money from farming fell by 56 percent, and the number of people between ages 15 and 59 fell by 83 percent. There was one increase, though: there were 600 more farmers older than 70 in 2003 than in 1980.

In the 1990s, many Japanese began to worry about another marriage and family problem: more and more women are postponing marriage into their 30s, or choosing not to marry at all. Many continue to live with their parents long past the age when formerly they would have married and had children. Some Japanese refer to these women as *parasaito* ("parasite singles"), because they reside with parents even though many have well-paying jobs. Stereotypically, *parasaito* are first-class consumers of luxury goods, buying such expensive purses and clothing that they seem overly self-indulgent in a culture that values submission to authority.

However, the choices these young women make are understandable, given their circumstances. Rents in Japanese cities are among the world's highest. Companies have a tendency to get rid of women once they have children. Women know that when they have children much of their time will be spent seeing that the kids get the high grades and test scores that are so important for their future careers. Many Japanese women have good reason to believe that their future husbands will be inattentive because of job pressures.

Still, such choices will worsen one of Japan's problems. For three decades, Japan's birth rate has been falling. In 2010, an average Japanese woman had only 1.2 children over the span of her life. A mean fertility rate of about 2.1 children is required just to replace the population. As a consequence, since 2007, Japan's population has actually been declining. Nearly one-fourth of Japan's people are over the age of 65. How will the country support so many aged persons in future decades?

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you know people who have married interculturally or interracial? Do they have any special problems?
2. The Japanese government could stop supporting Japanese farmers and let the Japanese people buy most of their grains in the international market. Is this a good idea?

SOURCES: Bernstein (1983); C.I.A. *The World Factbook* (online version <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>, retrieved May 23, 2010) James Brooke, "Japan Farms: An Old Man's Game," *New York Times*, November 7, 2003 Kunio (1988); Joji Sakurai, "Japan Looks to Foreign Brides to Save Its Villages," *Delaware Gazette*, May 19, 1997, p. 12; Zielenziger (2007)



Polygyny is allowed as a form of marriage in many of the world's cultures. This is a Maasai man with his wives and children. Maasai are a cattle-herding people of Kenya and Tanzania.



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children) to tend livestock. Similarly, in those farming societies in which female labor is important, a polygynous man has more family members to tend fields and harvest crops. As he grows older, he will have more children and grandchildren to look after his herds or work his fields and care for him. Thus, as long as he has the resources to support them, a man usually tries to acquire additional wives.

What determines whether a particular man is *able* to acquire more than one wife? The answer is usually wealth: only well-to-do men are able to afford more than one wife. “Afford,” however, does not mean what North Americans might think; it is often more a matter of being able to *acquire* additional wives than of being able to *support* them. Most polygynous peoples have the custom of bridewealth (discussed later), which requires a prospective groom and his relatives to give livestock, money, or other wealth objects to the kin of the bride. Although fathers and other relatives are typically obliged to help a young man raise bridewealth for one wife, only a minority of men can get together sufficient resources to provide bridewealth for additional wives.

From the female perspective, in many societies polygyny has the beneficial effect of ensuring that virtually all women find husbands. Becoming married is often important for a woman's welfare because marriage legitimizes her children, and in many cultures children are her main or only source of social security

—they are the people she depends on to support her in old age. There is another reason a woman wants to marry: to ensure that her children are well provided for. In the majority of polygynous societies, inheritance of land, livestock, and other wealth and productive property passes from fathers to sons. A woman need not marry to bear children, but she does want a husband to ensure that her sons have an adequate inheritance (her married daughters usually acquire their resources from their own husbands). Thus, in societies in which for some reason there are more adult women than men, polygyny provides a means for almost all women to gain the benefits of husbands for both themselves and their children.

There often are social and economic advantages for the co-wives of a polygynous man. Contrary to the view that no woman would want to share a husband with another woman, in many cases wives do want to be co-wives. Often the most prestigious marriage for a woman is to a man of wealth and status—the type of man most likely to have married other women. Not only will the woman herself be better provided for, but her children may also receive larger inheritances of land, livestock, wealth, or other property. In addition, co-wives may lighten a woman's workload. Co-wives usually work together and cooperate on chores such as producing, processing, and preparing food, tending livestock, and caring for children. Thus, in many societies, it is not unusual for a wife to encourage

her husband to take additional wives to assist her in her chores.

However, polygynous marriages have inherent problems. A common problem is rivalry between co-wives and favoritism by husbands. Several strategies are used in polygynous societies to minimize friction within these families. One way is for a man to marry women who are sisters, a widespread practice known as *sororal polygyny*. The rationale for sororal polygyny is that sisters are raised together, are used to working together, have preexisting emotional bonds, and are likely to be less jealous of one another. Sisters are, therefore, likely to be more cooperative than wives who are not related to one another—a point consistent with evolutionary psychology (see Chapter 4).

In most cultures in which a man marries a number of women who are unrelated, each wife usually has her own separate dwelling, which helps to minimize conflict among the co-wives. Also, co-wives are usually allocated different livestock to care for, and they may have separate gardens to tend and harvest. The effect of such practices is that each wife, together with her children, is semi-independent from the other wives. Despite such practices, rivalry and jealousy among co-wives are problems in many polygynous marriages.

### Polyandry

Polyandry, the marriage of one woman simultaneously to two or more men, is a documented practice in only about a dozen societies. Much has been written about this unusual form of marriage, but ethnologists have not yet satisfactorily explained it. Some believe that female infanticide is partly responsible, arguing that the death of large numbers of girls would produce a shortage of adult women, which would lead several men to be willing to share a wife. All else being equal, female infanticide does indeed have the effect of decreasing the number of marriageable women, but far more human groups allow many of their female infants to die than practice polyandry. Female infanticide is not a *general* explanation for polyandry.

Rather than discussing general explanations, we note that wherever polyandry exists, it does so as an alternative form of marriage. Like polygyny, polyandry is *allowed*, but it is not the *predominant* form of marriage; most couples are monogamous even where polyandry is allowed. Therefore, to understand the reasons for polyandry, we indicate some of the special conditions that lead some people (namely, husbands and their joint wife) to choose to join in a polyandrous marriage.

The insufficiency of a family's land to support all its heirs is one such condition. Many families in farming communities have faced the following dilemma: Our land is barely adequate, and all available farmland is already owned by another family or by a landlord, so we cannot provide all our children with enough land to support them and their families. Many European peasants faced this problem during the Middle Ages and even into the nineteenth century. In Ireland and some other parts of Europe as well as Japan, one solution was *primogeniture*, or inheritance by the eldest: the oldest son inherited the farm and most of its property, and the younger sons had to find other ways of supporting themselves. Younger sons served in the army or became priests or found some other occupation. Daughters who did not marry usually either remained at home or joined a nunnery. After the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s, many migrated to cities and went to work in factories.

Some peoples of the Himalayas developed another solution—polyandry. The rugged topography and high altitude of Tibet and Nepal sharply limit the supply of farmland. A farm may be adequate to support only a single family, but many couples have three or more sons. If the sons divide their inheritance by each taking his own wife, the land would become so fragmented that the brothers' families would be impoverished. To solve this problem, sometimes all the sons marry one woman. This form of polyandry, called *fraternal polyandry*, helps to keep the farm and family intact and limits the number of children in the family. Although the oldest son usually assumes primary responsibility for the wife and children, the joint wife is not supposed to favor him or his brothers sexually. When children are born, ideally each brother treats them as if they were his own, even if he knows that a particular child was fathered by one of his brothers.

What are the benefits of fraternal polyandry? For the brothers, sharing a wife preserves the family property, keeping the land, the livestock, the house, and other wealth together. Also, one brother can stay in the village and work the family land during the summer, while another brother takes the livestock to high mountain pastures and a third brother (if present) visits towns in the lowlands to sell the family's products. This system also has advantages for the wife, who has multiple husbands to work for her and help support her and her children. Her life is usually less physically strenuous, and she usually has a higher standard of living than a woman married to only one man.

Although Himalayan polyandry has economic advantages, problems can arise. A younger brother can

decide at any time to end the arrangement, claim his portion of the family property, marry another woman, and establish his own family. The oldest brother does not have this option because, as head of the family, he bears primary responsibility for supporting the wife and children.

## Marriage Alliances

Cultures vary in the importance they attach to the tie between wives and husbands. In some cultures, there is no formal wedding ceremony. Instead, a couple is socially recognized as “married” when they regularly live together and as “divorced” when one of them moves out. Each partner retains her or his own separate property, so the separation or divorce is not very “messy.” In the contemporary United States, the wedding ceremony is often a big and expensive affair; marriages are supposed to endure; and couples usually own houses, furniture, and other property jointly. Yet about half of all new American marriages will end in divorce, many quite messy because of conflicts over property and custody of the children. For many Americans, monogamy turns out to be *serial monogamy*, meaning only one legal spouse at a time.

Many cultures consider the marital relationship to be far more serious. In many, marriage establishes lasting social relationships and bonds not just between the couple but also between their families and other relatives. The affinal ties between kin groups created by intermarriage are frequently important not only socially but also economically, politically, and often ritually. Marriage establishes an *alliance* between the members of two kin groups, and in many cultures **marriage alliances** are critical for the well-being and even survival of the intermarried groups. This appears to have been the case among the ancient Israelites because Moses says in Genesis (34:16): “Then we will give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.”

The Yanomamö are a horticultural and hunting tribe of the Amazon rain forest. Most Yanomamö villages feared attacks by enemies, so a village had to be prepared to defend itself. Also, men of each village periodically went on raids intended to capture the women and resources of

their enemies. It was, therefore, advantageous for villages to establish and maintain military alliances for mutual defense and offense, because the more men a village could mobilize as warriors, the more likely it was to be successful in conflicts. Having allies was also helpful in case of military defeat: a defeated group could take refuge with an allied village, whose members would feed and protect the refugees until they could establish productive gardens in a new location.

Intermarriage was a key strategy in creating and maintaining these alliances. When the men of a Yanomamö village wanted to form an alliance with another village, they began by trading. If no trouble broke out during the trading—for a Yanomamö village did not even trust its longtime allies, much less its prospective allies—the relationship might extend to mutual invitations to feasts. If the feasts did not turn violent, the men of the two villages would agree to give some of their “sisters” (female relatives) to one another. The act of exchanging sisters was the final stage of alliance formation, although even these relatively secure alliances were frequently broken.

The Yanomamö illustrate how intermarriage creates bonds and establishes important political relationships between villages. Among many peoples, these bonds and relationships are important to families or entire communities. If marriages are a means of establishing ties that are critical to a group’s material well-being or survival, then the choice of which group to marry into may be too important to be left entirely up to the woman and man whose marriage creates the relationship. Older, wiser, and more responsible people should be making such critical decisions.

Understanding that who marries whom is so important to families and even larger groups helps to explain one widespread custom—*arranged marriages*—that many Westerners view as an infringement on a person’s freedom to choose. Try looking at it from a different perspective: under certain conditions, a young couple’s freedom to choose their own spouse is an infringement on the freedom of their parents and other relatives to form advantageous relationships with other families. How serious this infringement is, and whether the “freedom” of one party or another takes precedence, is not absolute but depends on circumstances. Perhaps some of our readers will find arranged marriages less offensive when they realize that in many societies a poor marriage choice puts more people at risk than just the couple themselves.

The importance of the intergroup ties created by intermarriage is also revealed by two other widespread customs. In one, called the **levirate**, if a woman’s

**marriage alliances** The relationships created between families or kin groups by intermarriage.

**levirate** Custom whereby a widow marries a male relative (usually a brother) of her deceased husband.



husband dies, she marries one of his close kinsmen (usually a brother). The relationships between the intermarried kin groups are too valuable for a woman to be returned to her own family because then she might marry into another kin group. Therefore, a male relative of her deceased husband takes his place. Notice also that the levirate provides most widows with a new husband, which generally enhances her life. The levirate was known to the ancient Israelites (see Deuteronomy 25: 5–10).

The converse custom, the **sororate**, also preserves the affinal ties between kin groups. If a woman dies, her kin group is obliged to replace her with another woman from the group, and no additional bridewealth is transferred. The Zulu of southern Africa, as well as many other African peoples, practiced both the levirate and the sororate. In societies with these customs, marriages—and the affinal ties they create—endure even beyond death.

## Marital Exchanges

In most cultures, the marriage of a man and a woman is accompanied by some kind of transfer of goods or services. These *marital exchanges* take numerous forms, including the North American custom of wedding showers and wedding gifts. In these, the presents given by relatives and friends supposedly help the newlyweds establish an independent household. We give things that are useful to the couple jointly, with food preparation and other household utensils the most common type of gift. Most couples today even register at stores so that their relatives and friends will provide the items they want.

Comparatively speaking, the most unusual feature of North American marital exchange is that practically nothing is transferred between the relatives of the groom and bride: the couple treats the gifts as their private property. Like most of our other customs, this seems natural to us. Of course, the gifts go to the couple—what else could happen to them?

Plenty else, as we describe in a moment. For now, notice that the couple receives the gifts and how this fits with several other features of Euro-American marriage. First, in addition to creating new nuclear families, marriage is the bond through which new independent households are started. So, the husband and wife need their own stuff. If, in contrast, the newlyweds moved in with one of their relatives, they would not have as great a need for their own pots and pans, wine glasses, silver candlesticks, dishes, and other household items.

Second, North American marriage-gift customs fit with cultural values about the privacy of the marital relationship: it is largely a personal matter between the husband and wife, and their relatives should keep their noses out. If the in-laws get along and socialize, that's great, but our marriages generally do not create strong bonds between the families of the bride and groom. (In fact, the two families often compete for the visits and attention of the couple and their offspring.) As we saw in Chapter 7, gifts make friends, and vice versa. The fact that the in-laws do not exchange gifts with each other is a manifestation of the absence of a necessary relationship between them after the wedding. If, in contrast, the marriage created an alliance between the two sets of relatives, then some kind of an exchange would probably occur between them to symbolize and cement their new relationship.

Third, the gifts are presented to the couple, not to the husband or wife as individuals, and are considered to belong equally and jointly to both partners. But there are marriage systems in which the property of the wife is separate from that of her husband; if divorce should occur, there is no squabbling over who gets what and no need for prenuptial legal contracts.

With this background in mind, what kinds of marital exchanges occur in other cultures?

### Bridewealth

**Bridewealth** is the widespread custom that requires a man and/or his relatives to transfer wealth to the relatives of his bride. It is easily the most common of all marital exchanges, found in more than half the world's cultures. The term *bridewealth* is well chosen because the goods transferred are usually among the most valuable symbols of wealth in the local culture. In sub-Saharan Africa, cattle and sometimes other livestock are the most common goods used for bridewealth. Peoples of the Pacific islands and Southeast Asia usually give their bridewealth in pigs or shell money and ornaments.

Bridewealth is often mentioned in the Old Testament. In Genesis, a man named Shechem defiled a young woman and then asked her fathers and brothers to give her to him: “Ask me for as great a bride price

**sororate** Custom whereby a widower marries a female relative of his deceased wife.

**bridewealth** Custom in which a prospective groom and his relatives are required to transfer goods to the relatives of the bride to validate the marriage.

and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.” (Genesis 34:12, English Standard Version)

One of the most common rights a man and his relatives acquire when they transfer bridewealth to his wife’s family is rights over the woman’s children. Reciprocally, one of a wife’s most important obligations is to bear children for her husband. This is well exemplified by the Swazi, a traditional kingdom of southern Africa. A Swazi marriage is a union between two families as well as between the bride and groom. The payment of bridewealth—in cattle and other valuables—to a woman’s relatives establishes the husband’s rights over his wife. A woman’s main duty to her husband is to provide him with children. If she is unable to do so, her relatives must either return the bridewealth they received for her or provide a second wife to the husband, for which he need pay no extra bridewealth. Reciprocally, a man must pay bridewealth to gain rights of fatherhood over the child of a woman, even though everyone knows he is the child’s biological father. If he does not do so, the woman’s relatives will keep the child; if the woman herself later marries another man, her new husband will not receive rights over the child unless he pays bridewealth.

### *Brideservice*

**Brideservice** is the custom in which a husband is required to spend a period of time working for the family of his bride. A Yanomamö son-in-law is expected to live with his wife’s parents, hunting and gardening for them until they finally release control over their daughter. Among some Ju/’hoansi bands (see Chapters 6 and 7), a man proves he can provide by living with and hunting for his wife’s parents for 3 to 10 years, after which the couple is free to camp elsewhere.

Like bridewealth, men among the ancient Israelites sometimes paid brideservice. In Genesis 29, Jacob agreed to work for seven years for the foreign father of Rachel in return for her. But by the custom of the foreigners, Jacob first had to marry Leah, the eldest daughter, before her father would give him Rachel. So, Jacob worked 14 years for both his brides. Note also that Jacob practiced sororal polygyny. (Genesis 29:1–30)

**brideservice** Custom in which a man spends a period of time working for the family of his wife.

**dowry** Custom in which the family of a woman transfers property or wealth to her and/or her husband’s family upon her marriage.

Brideservice is the second most common form of marital exchange; it is the usual compensation given to the family of a bride in roughly one-eighth of the world’s cultures. Sometimes it occurs in addition to other forms of marital exchange, however, and occasionally it can be used to reduce the amount of bridewealth owed.

### *Dowry*

Marital exchange is called **dowry** when the family of a woman transfers a portion of its own wealth or property to the woman (their daughter) and/or to her husband and his family. The main thing to understand about dowry is that it is *not* simply the opposite of bridewealth; that is, it is not “groomwealth.” The woman and her family do not acquire marital rights over her husband when they provide dowry, as they would if dowry were the opposite of bridewealth; rather, the bride and her husband receive property when they marry, rather than when the bride’s parents die. By providing dowry, parents give their female children extra years of use of the property and publicly demonstrate their wealth.

Sometimes dowry is the share of a woman’s inheritance that she takes into her marriage for the use of her new family. Dowry may represent an occasion for a family to display their wealth publicly by ostentatiously moving furniture and clothing from their house to that of their daughter’s husband. Among other peoples, the family of a man will not allow him to marry a woman unless she and her family are able to make a dowry payment. Typically, the cultural rationale is that women do not contribute as much to a family as do men, so a family must be compensated for admitting a new female member. (Interestingly, this rationale is usually found among societies in which the domestic labor of the female is both difficult and valuable.)

Historically, dowry transfers were common in Eurasian (Europe, southern Asia, and the Middle East) cultures. Most peoples that practiced it were intensive agriculturalists and had significant inequalities in wealth. It has always been a relatively rare form of marital exchange, occurring in only about 5 percent of the societies recorded by anthropology.

Although a minority of societies practice dowry, some of these societies are quite populous. Dowry is common today in parts of southern Asia (India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan), where dowry includes jewelry, household utensils, women’s clothing, and money. Much of the dowry is presented to the bride on her wedding day, but her parents and maternal uncle often provide gifts periodically throughout the marriage.



© Ed Kashi/CORBIS

In most societies that have the dowry custom, a woman takes wealth from her family into her marriage. This jewelry-bedecked Pakistani bride is waiting for her wedding.

In recent decades, the demands of Indian families for dowry have led to thousands of tragic deaths. Rather than a one-time marital exchange, some Indian families demand additional, continual payments from the parents of a woman who has married one of their sons. They ask for large sums of cash, household appliances like refrigerators and televisions, motorbikes, and other consumer goods. If the wife's family refuses, their daughter may be severely injured or even killed by burning (in "accidental kitchen fires"), beatings, withholding food, falls, or other retaliations. About 7,000 Indian women suffered "dowry deaths" in 2003, according to official figures, but the actual number is likely much higher. If these numbers sound large, be aware that India has more than a billion people, so dowry deaths are not common statistically.

There are other forms of marital exchanges, including some in which both sets of relatives exchange gifts as a material symbol of the new basis of their relationship. And the three forms discussed above are not mutually exclusive. For example, in most of traditional China, both bride-wealth and dowry occurred at most marriages. The groom's family would make a payment to the bride's, and the bride's family would purchase some furniture and other household goods for their daughter to take with her when she moved into her husband's household. For wealthier families, dowry was usually displayed as it was transported ostentatiously through the streets between

the houses of the bride and groom. Dowry thus became a Chinese status symbol. Sometimes, if the bride's family was substantially poorer than the groom's, part of the bride-wealth payment would be spent on purchasing goods for the woman's dowry. This was legal and common until after the Communist Revolution in 1949, when Communist Party leaders outlawed both bride-wealth and dowry, with only partial success.

Although the preceding information about marriage rules, forms, alliances, and exchanges has barely introduced these complicated topics, enough has been presented for you to glimpse both the cross-cultural diversity of marriage customs and the societal importance of marriage. Marriage is tied up with adaptation, economics, and, quite obviously, politics and religion. Similar interrelationships among marriage, politics, and religion are seen in the contemporary United States, as the recent political wars over gay marriage illustrate (see the following A Closer Look feature).

## Kinship Diagrams

At this point, we need to introduce a set of notational symbols used in the remainder of this chapter and the next. This notation allows us to express diagrammatically how any two persons are (or believe themselves to be) related by bonds of kinship. The symbols are shown in Figure 8.1, along with how they are used to show a married couple with five children. By stringing a number of symbols together, we can make a complete chart—called a *genealogy*—that shows all the relatives of a given individual and how they are related to that individual. In these charts, or kinship diagrams, it is useful to have a reference individual, or a person to whom everyone on the chart is related. It is customary to call this reference individual "ego." In Figure 8.1, ego is symbolized by a square to show that his or her gender is irrelevant for the purposes of the genealogy. (If ego's gender mattered, we would symbolize him or her with either a triangle or a circle.)

## Postmarital Residence Patterns

In modern Euro-American societies, most newly married couples establish a new domestic group (household) in their own apartment, condo, or house. Elsewhere, couples do not set up a new household but



In early 2004, the newly elected mayor of San Francisco issued marriage licenses to gay couples. In May of the same year, the state of Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriages. Alarmed at the prospect of other states passing similar legislation, President George W. Bush and conservatives in the U.S. Congress pressed for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. After several rewrites, when brought to a vote on July 14, 2004, the amendment read:

Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any state, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman.

In the vote, the proposal failed to gain even a majority in the U.S. Senate, where a two-thirds vote is required for passage of a constitutional amendment. Leftists, liberals, and most moderates opposed the amendment. Liberals saw it as either the latest attempt at gay-bashing or just another symbol of cultural intolerance. Some viewed it as a shameless effort by neoconservatives and religious fundamentalists to gain political support in the November 2004 elections by forcing their opponents (mainly Democrats) to vote yes or no. This allowed them to claim that the “no” voters were antifamily and didn’t share mainstream values. However, some conservatives opposed it because they believed it infringed on states’ rights. Even without the amendment, 11 states later passed amendments to their constitutions to ban gay and lesbian marriages.

Why did gay marriage become so politicized? The short answer is that the issue is part of the American “culture wars.” Among the battles are whether there are absolute standards of right and wrong; the role that Judeo-Christian teachings should have in schools, courtrooms, and other public institutions; whether individuals are morally responsible for all their actions; pornography and sexual permissiveness; and how much multicultural diversity “one nation under God” can absorb without tearing itself apart from within.

Same-sex marriage provides ammunition for culture warriors: Is it “immoral” or merely another “alternative lifestyle”? Given that many Protestant denominations welcome gays and lesbians and some even allow their ordination, is it against biblical teachings? Are homosexual desires, like heterosexual desires, rooted in genes and hereditary, or is being openly gay a “choice”? Is being lesbian or gay a “mental disorder,” and, if so, can it be “cured”? What would happen to the nation as a whole if diverse forms of marriage were legalized? If same-sex marriage is legalized, will polygamy be next?

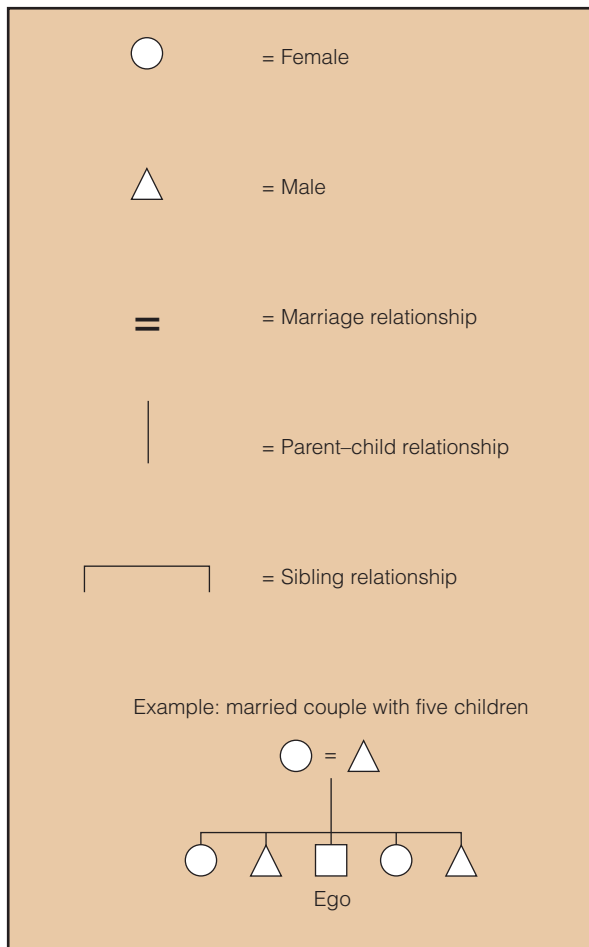
By mid-2007, 10 states had passed laws allowing gay and lesbian domestic partners to adopt children together, rather than as individual parents. One partner can become the legal parent of the adoptive child of the other. Perhaps these laws mean that more Americans are willing to accept gay marriage, and indeed a 2006 Pew Center poll reported that opposition to gay marriage fell from 65 percent in 1996 to 51 percent in 2006. The Catholic Church and conservative Protestants remain opposed to gay adoption, with one Protestant leader saying it harms kids “because it intentionally creates motherless or fatherless families.”

By 2010, four states and the District of Columbia legally recognized marriages between gays and lesbians. In California, the Supreme Court ruled in summer 2008 that same-sex couples have the right to marry, but voters passed an initiative the next November that amended the state constitution to recognize only heterosexual marriages.

Many who object to lesbian and gay adoption insist that children need both a mother and a father, and no substitutes will do. Strong opponents of same-sex marriage hold that marriage between one woman and one man is the bedrock of human society, so changing it is likely to endanger social order in lots of unpredictable ways. In July 2004, in a Saturday radio address former American President Bush said, “The union of a man and a woman in marriage is the most enduring and important human institution. . . .”

No matter how fiercely culture wars are fought to preserve the normative and valued marriage practices of the moment, these practices are sure to change and then change again. Whether people can marry outside their race or ethnicity, what goes on during courtship, how people choose their spouse, what they expect from marriage, what obligations wives have toward husbands, how enduring marriages will be, how the children resulting from the “union” of a man and a woman are raised—all these and most other features of marriage as we know it today would be viewed with consternation and even horror by North Americans of a century ago. No doubt at least some of them would have foretold the horrific effects on society if blacks and whites were ever allowed to marry, if premarital sex were to become common, if many women were the main family breadwinners, if half of all marriages ended with divorce, and if large numbers of couples entrusted their preschool-aged children to something called “day care centers” for 40 hours a week.

SOURCES: *San Francisco Chronicle*, Monday, July 12, 2004, pp. A1, A8; Thursday, July 15, 2004, pp. A1, A14; Tim Padgett, “Gay Family Values,” *Time*, July 16, 2007, pp. 51–52; website of the National Conference of State Legislatures, updated April 2010 (<http://www.ncsl.org/IssuesResearch/HumanServices/SameSexMarriage/tabid/16430/Default.aspx>) retrieved May 21, 2010.



**Figure 8.1** Symbols Used on Kinship Diagrams.

more often move into an existing household—that of either the husband or the wife. Where most newly married couples in a society establish their residence is known as the **postmarital residence pattern**. Cross-cultural research shows that our own pattern, in which couples form new households separate from their parents, is uncommon.

What are the common patterns? By splitting enough hairs, it is possible to identify a dozen patterns, but here we present only six (in order from most to least frequent):

1. **Patrilocal**—Couples live with or near the parents of the husband.
2. **Matrilocal**—Couples live with or near the wife's parents.
3. **Ambilocal**—Couples may choose to live with either the wife's or the husband's kin; roughly half of all couples choose each.

4. **Bilocal**—Couples move back and forth between the households of both sets of parents according to preferences and circumstances.
5. **Neolocal**—Couples live apart from both parents, establishing a separate dwelling and independent household.
6. **Avunculocal**—Couples live with the maternal uncle of the husband.

About 70 percent of all societies have patrilocal residence as the predominant pattern. Thirteen percent have matrilocal residence. Bilocality, ambilocality, neolocality, and avunculocality together account for the remaining 17 percent.

### *Influences on Residence Patterns*

What sorts of factors affect postmarital residence patterns? What determines whether newly married couples live separately or move in with some kind of relatives? And, if most couples co-reside with some relatives, as they do in most societies, what affects which set of relatives?

There is no simple answer, but property rights and inheritance forms are important influences on postmarital residence. In societies in which men own the most important productive property and inheritance passes from fathers to sons, brothers have good reasons to join their fathers (and each other) in a common household to cooperate and protect their interests in land, livestock, or other wealth. When the sons of most families in a community bring their wives and children into

**postmarital residence pattern** Where the majority of newly married couples establish their own residence.

**patrilocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the husband's parents.

**matrilocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the wife's parents.

**ambilocal residence** Residence form in which couples choose whether to live with the wife's or the husband's family.

**bilocal residence** Postmarital Residence in which couples move between the households of both sets of parents.

**neolocal residence** Residence form in which a couple establishes a separate household apart from both the husband's and the wife's parents.

**avunculocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the mother's brother of the husband.

their father's household, this behavior leads to the residence pattern anthropologists call *patrilocal*. Where important resources are controlled or owned by women, and especially if female labor is important in supplying food for their families, then sisters tend to live and work together. *Matrilocal* residences develop as the sisters bring their husbands to live with them.

Ambilocal and bilocal patterns are most common in societies in which inheritance of important resources passes through both sexes and the labor of both women and men is important to household subsistence. Most hunter-gatherers have one of these two patterns. As explained in Chapter 6, most families in a foraging band need or want to maintain access to several territories, so the rights to gather and hunt in a particular area are flexible. Nuclear families may live off and on with the husband's and wife's bands, depending on sentimental ties or short- or long-term availability of resources. If all or most couples do this, the result is bilocal residence. Or, the couple may settle with whichever parental family has the most resources or with whichever they have good relations, leading to ambilocality.

Modern industrialized nations are usually neolocal for two major reasons. First, job availability forces many couples to move away from the place where they were born and raised. This is especially true for "upwardly mobile" couples seeking higher incomes, better opportunities, and the more materially rewarding lifestyle valued by many. Second, in industrialized countries, most workers do not rely on their family connections for access to their livelihood but instead sell their labor on an impersonal market to an employer they have never met. In other words, most ordinary citizens do not inherit *productive* property from their parents and do not rely on their parents for their livelihood. This leads most couples to establish independent domiciles free from parental control and interference. The result is neolocal residence and an emphasis on nuclear family ties.

Although control over resources and form of inheritance are important overall influences, no single factor "determines" postmarital residence. For instance, if most couples rely on the wife's family for access to the resources they need to survive and raise children, then most couples will live with the wife's family and matrilocal residence will be the pattern. But a multitude of other factors also affect residence choices. In fact, in some societies, even though women have much control over land, residence is not matrilocal because these other factors are locally more important than keeping

sisters together in a common household. Similar complexities apply to the other residence patterns, so there is no single explanation.

There are other complications that make generalizations difficult. For one thing, a great many peoples do not have a single residence pattern; rather, where people live varies over time. Among some Inuit (Es-kimo) peoples, often couples lived neolocally in the summer and patrilocally in the winter. For another, even within a single society, different families make different choices. For example, China's industrial economy is growing at a staggering rate, and its residence is transforming from the pre-twentieth-century patrilocal pattern to a neolocal pattern. Yet many rural couples live with the husband's family, and even many young urban couples live with relatives because of housing shortages and the (ever-weakening) obligation to support one's elderly parents.

Lest the subject of postmarital residence seem trivial, notice that patrilocal residence has the effect of isolating an in-married wife and daughter-in-law in the household that includes a set of brothers and their wives. Notice that matrilocal keeps sisters together. What effects might these two patterns have on women's abilities to control their own lives and make their own choices?

## Residence and Households

Other reasons exist for our interest in residence patterns. One is that they affect the kinds of family relationships that are most important in a human community.

A moment's reflection reveals that both matrilocal and patrilocal residences place a new nuclear family (usually created by a new marriage) with one set of relatives rather than the other set. In turn, whom a newly married couple lives with influences whom they will cooperate with, share property with, feel close to, and so forth. If postmarital residence is patrilocal, for instance, then the husband lives with and works with his own consanguineous relatives (his father and brothers, paternal uncles and cousins *through his father*). The wife is likely to cooperate in household chores, gathering, gardening, and doing other tasks with members of her husband's family, more than with her own.

Postmarital residence also affects the relatives with whom children are most likely to develop strong emotional bonds. If residence is matrilocal, for example, then the children of sisters (who are cousins *through*



*their mothers*) live together in a single household (much like biological sisters and brothers) and are likely to view their relationship as being like real siblings. The children of brothers, on the other hand, will live in different households and are less likely to play together and develop strong emotional attachments.

Most important, the prevailing form of residence affects the kinds of household and family units that exist among a people. Consider neolocal residence, for example. If all or most newlyweds set up their own households, distinct from and independent of that of either of their parents, then a new household and family unit is established with each new marriage. This pattern emphasizes the social and economic importance and independence of nuclear families because mothers and fathers—and not more distant relatives—are most likely to be the main teachers of their children and breadwinners for the household. Of course, most couples maintain relationships with their parents, siblings, and other relatives, but neolocal residence tends to lead to an emphasis on nuclear families as the most culturally important and stable family unit.

In the United States, marital residence has economic consequences. Since the last half of 2007, falling real estate prices and homeowner defaults on their mortgage payments contributed to the severe recession. Even homeowners who continued their payments fretted that they would not make as much money when they sold their houses as they had anticipated from past experience or forecasts. If loan defaults can have such widespread effects on the housing market and the economy, think of what would happen to the construction industry and home prices if large numbers of newly married Americans began moving in with one of their parents—thus practicing some form of residence other than neolocal.



## Family and Household Forms

People use relationships created by marriage and family ties to create different kinds of households, some as small as a mother and her children, others composed many dozen members.

### Matrifocal Households

Some people believe that the nuclear family is the basic unit of kinship. (Notice that “individuals” cannot be the basic unit of kinship because kinship is inherently

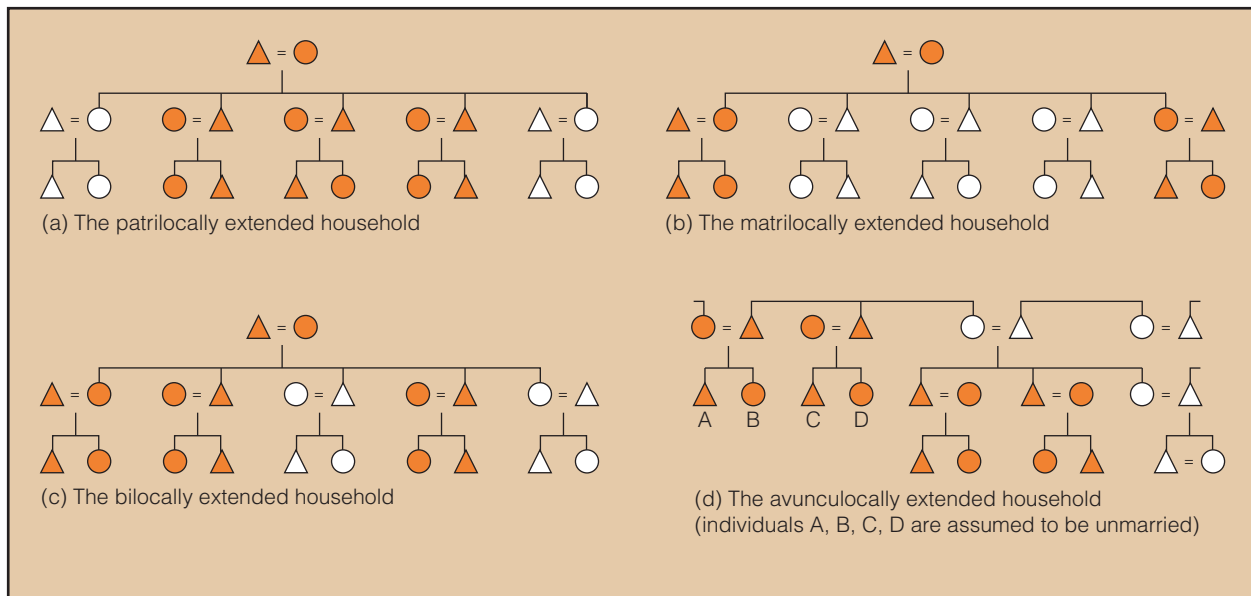
about *relationships* among individuals.) Possibly, though, those who think the nuclear family is somehow “basic” believe this only because they live in a society in which a couple and their offspring are the most visible family form.

There is another view: that the “basic unit” of kinship is a woman and her offspring. People who think this point out that fathers are more frequently separated from their children than mothers. Fathers may separate temporarily or permanently for many reasons. In subsistence economies, men may be absent for long periods hunting, herding, trading, raiding, or carrying out other duties. In communities—and in modern countries—where most families depend on wage labor, husbands/fathers may take jobs in distant cities or countries for many months or even years. The money they send back to their families at home (called *remittances*) is surprisingly large: in 2004, around 10 million migrants (predominantly men) from Mexico and other Latin American countries remitted \$30 billion to their home countries.

Historically, male absence for extended periods was especially common in regions that were colonies of a major world power. In sub-Saharan Africa, especially, European colonial powers imposed taxes on men or introduced new commodities that soon became virtual necessities, such as kerosene lanterns, nails, metal tools, and cooking utensils. In order to earn money to meet expenses, married men went to work for foreign companies on distant diamond or gold mines or left their families to work on plantations owned by Europeans. This pattern continues in much of Africa and other regions even today. For the families left behind, the result is the **matrifocal family**, where a mother (with or without a husband) bears most of the burden of supporting her children economically and nurturing them emotionally and intellectually.

Matrifocal families occur in modern industrial societies as well, whenever households are “female-headed,” as the U.S. Census Bureau calls them. About half of all African American children live in households with a female head. Some say that matrifocal families are an important cause of poverty, crime, and other social problems today. Adult men would act more responsibly if they had jobs that supported their nuclear families, they say. Sons need male role models and

**matrifocal family** Family group consisting of a mother and her children, with a male only loosely attached or not present at all.



**Figure 8.2** Household Forms. The shaded individuals are members of a single household.

supposedly find them elsewhere if their fathers are not around. Mothers would be much better mothers if they didn't have to struggle so hard to pay the bills.

In modern nations, it is true that poor families are more likely to be female-headed than affluent families. But this does not mean that matrifocal households are a significant cause of poverty and other social ills. Matrifocal families are also a consequence of poverty: lack of job skills or other factors lead to high unemployment among men, causing many women to decide that having a permanent male presence is too costly. Female-headed households in the United States and elsewhere are not necessarily the result of men's refusal to act responsibly or of women's moral choices: they also are adaptations that people make to their economic and social environment.

### Extended Households

Extended families are made up of related nuclear families. Because the related nuclear families usually live in a single household, here we use *extended family* and *extended household* as synonyms. Extended households typically include three and sometimes four generations of family members.

Many anthropologists think that the form of family (household) that is prevalent in a society depends on its postmarital residence pattern. For example, with patrilocal residence, the married sons of an older couple

remain in the household of their parents. Sometimes, each son builds his own house on his parents' land, near their dwelling, but they cooperate with one another and pool or share resources. As they grow up and marry, the daughters leave to live with their husbands' parents. If all the sons and daughters of a couple do this, the resulting household type is called *patrilocally extended*—brothers live in a single household with their own nuclear families and parents (see Figure 8.2a). If all families in the village, town, or other settlement follow this pattern, then the settlement consists of patrilocally extended households. Notice that the residents of each household are related to one another through males. The married women of the community live scattered in the households of their husbands. Perhaps many of them have married out of the community altogether.

The converse occurs with matrilocal residence. The mature sons leave as they marry, and the daughters bring their husbands to live with them in or near their parents' households. The household type formed by the co-residence of daughters and sisters with their parents is called the *matrilocally extended household* (see Figure 8.2b). The sons of an elderly couple are scattered in the households of the women they have married, either in their own home community or in another community. If most people follow this residence pattern, then the community consists of households lived

in by women related through females, plus their husbands and children.

The same relationship between residence and prevalent household form applies to the other residence patterns. With bilocal and ambilocal residence, there is no consistency in whether households are made up of people related through males or females. Some couples live with the husband's family, others with the wife's family. The household type is *bilocally* (or *bilaterally*) *extended* (see Figure 8.2c). The community's households are a mixture of people related through both sexes, in roughly equal frequency. With neolocal residence, the settlement—be it village or modern suburb—consists of relatively small domestic units made up of nuclear families.

The avunculocal residence pattern associates nuclear families with the husband's mother's brother. If everyone resided this way (which they usually do not), then the settlement would consist of households composed of older men (the household heads) and the families of

their sister's sons. This is called the *avunculocally extended household* (see Figure 8.2d). It includes men (and their wives and children) who are related to one another through women (their mothers). Avunculocal residence might seem odd, but it is a product of how people keep track of their kinship ties and property ownership (see Chapter 9).

We can now see another reason postmarital residence patterns are important: they give rise to various household and family forms. The kinds of family and domestic groups found among a people result from where newly formed families go to live. Stated differently, the prevalent household type in a human community represents the crystallization of the pattern of postmarital residence. And who lives with whom—the household type—is important because households so often hold property in common, cooperate in production and other economic activities, enculturate children together, and sometimes even worship the same ancestral spirits.

## Summary

**1 Discuss the main theories of the culturally universal incest taboo.** Incest taboos are rules that regulate who may have sex with whom. The taboo is more puzzling than it seems, and there are four main hypotheses that try to account for it: “Marry Out or Die Out,” “Peace in the Family,” “Inbreeding Avoidance,” and “Familiarity Breeds Disinterest.”

**2 Analyze why marriage is so difficult to define cross-culturally.** The wide diversity in marriage customs and beliefs makes marriage difficult to define, but there is some agreement on its major functions for both individuals and societies. Some form of marriage is nearly universal, although the particular form of marriage, the kinds of rights and duties it establishes, and many other aspects of the marital relationship vary. The Nayar and Tiwi illustrate unusual forms of marriage, and the Musuo of southern China seem to have no marriage at all.

**3 Describe the major forms of marriage and the leading ideas about their causes.** Marriage systems are commonly classified by the number of spouses an individual is allowed: polygyny, monogamy, and polyandry, in order of relative frequency. There are many plausible explanations for why various peoples develop one or another marriage form, but no single explanation seems sufficient. Marriage is often the

cornerstone of alliances between families or larger kin groups, as illustrated by the Yanomamö. The levirate and sororate are customs that preserve affinal relationships even after the death of a spouse.

**4 Describe patterns of marriage exchanges and the rationale behind them.** New marriages are usually accompanied by the exchange of goods or services between the spouses and the families of the bride and groom. The most common forms of marital exchange are bridewealth, brideservice, and dowry. These exchanges are used to create affinal relationships, compensate a family or larger kin group for the loss of one of its members, provide for the new couple's support, or provide a daughter with an inheritance that helps her attract a desirable husband.

**5 Discuss the types of postmarital residence and some influences on them.** *Postmarital residence patterns* refers to where newly married couples establish their residence. From most common to least common, the patterns are patrilocal, matrilocal, ambilocal, bilocal, neolocal, and avunculocal. There are many influences on which of these forms will be most prevalent in a given community, including economic forces and inheritance patterns. But no single factor is adequate to explain the cross-cultural variation in residence patterns.

**6 Describe the main household forms and analyze the main influences on them.** Anthropologists study postmarital residence patterns mainly because where a newly married couple goes to live influences which kinship relationships are most emphasized in a society. In particular, the prevalent forms of family

and domestic groups in a community arise out of many couples living with one or another set of relatives. Patrilocally, matrilocally, bilocally, and avunculocally extended families are often interpreted as the crystallization of postmarital residence patterns.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 9

# KINSHIP AND DESCENT



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## **Introducing Kinship**

*Why Study Kinship?*

*Cultural Variations in Kinship*

## **Unilineal Descent**

*Unilineal Descent Groups*

*Descent Groups in Action*

*Avunculocality Revisited*

## **Nonunilineal Descent**

*Cognatic Descent*

*Bilateral Kinship*

## **Cultural Construction of Kinship**

*Logic of Cultural Constructions*

*Varieties of Kinship Terminology*

*Why Do Terminologies Differ?*



All the world's cultures recognize and keep track of relationships between family members, but they do so in several ways. This is an extended family in Mumbai (formerly "Bombay"), India.

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** why kinship relationships are important in forming groups and organizing activities in so many premodern cultures.
- 2 **Describe** the two main forms of unilineal descent and the kinship groups that result from them.
- 3 **Describe** the two main forms of nonunilineal descent.
- 4 **Elaborate** on the cultural construction of kinship, and explain the wider associations of four of the major terminological systems.

Humans are among the most social mammals. We are born into, live with, and die among other people. Young children rely on parents and other adults for the food, shelter, protection, and socialization needed to raise them to social maturity. Even as adults, we rely on cooperation with others for survival, economic well-being, and emotional gratification. When we die, relatives, friends, and coworkers mourn our passing.

Social groups based on kinship are those whose members culturally recognize themselves as biologically related according to some principle. In this chapter, we cover how kinship relationships are used in a variety of ways by different peoples to organize relationships and create cooperative groupings. We also describe some of the main ways that members of different societies culturally construct their kinship systems and kinship terminologies.



## Introducing Kinship

Like relationships established by marriage and family/household forms, relationships and groups defined by kinship organize a variety of tasks and activities. The kind of tasks and activities, and the kinds of relationships and groups, vary from people to people, as you have come to expect.

### Why Study Kinship?

Why are anthropologists concerned with kinship? In Western society and that of developed nations, kinship relationships certainly are important in individuals' lives. But, compared to many other peoples that anthropologists work among, kinship is not an important *organizing principle* of society as a whole. Instead, different kinds of specialized groups organize different

kinds of activities. For example there are economic groups (small businesses, corporations), religious groups (churches, synagogues, mosques, temples), and educational groups (schools, colleges). Each of these groups organizes different realms of our lives, and individuals belong to several such groups and associations. Some groups are *formal*, meaning its members are organized as a group, with officers, membership criteria, explicit goals, rules, and so forth. You might belong to formal groups such as a university, conservation organization, church, political party, and business.

At the same time, you are active in informal *networks* made up of fellow students, neighbors, friends, and perhaps coworkers if you socialize with them after work. The members of your social network do not necessarily have any relationship to one another, but you have personal relationships with each of them as individuals.

Notice two important characteristics of these groups and networks. First, they are *voluntary*: if your interests change, or if you find another group or network that satisfies you more, you are free to change jobs, churches, neighborhoods, and friends. Second, for the most part, the groups have *nonoverlapping membership*: each typically consists of a different collection of people. We cooperate and interact with different individuals in the various groups to which we belong. Members of each group have varying and sometimes contradictory expectations about how we should behave because we perform different roles in each. Our behavior differs according to the identity and expectations of the particular persons (the *social context*) we are associating with at the moment—we act one way at home, another at church, and yet another at work. Fortunately, our fellow church members seldom observe how we act on the job.

In contrast, among many indigenous peoples, one lives with, works with, socializes with, and often

worships with the same people, most of whom are relatives. Kin groups and kin relationships are *multifunctional*, meaning that the same groups organize many aspects of peoples' lives, such as who cooperates in work, who owns which lands, who carries out rituals together, and who quarrels with whom. We could not understand modernized nations without knowing about businesses, schools, churches, governments, and laws. Similarly, we cannot understand how kinship-based societies work without understanding their kinship groups and relationships.

### Cultural Variations in Kinship

In over a century of studying kinship systems and analyzing their role in cultures, anthropologists have discovered surprising variations. Among the most important variations are the following.

#### Ways of Tracing Kinship Ties

In most of North America and Europe, people believe they are related equally and in the same way to the extended families of both their mother and father. Particular persons develop closer ties with one or another side of their family according to circumstances and personal preferences, such as whether only one set of grandparents live nearby. But there is no systematic *cultural pattern* of feeling closer to or socializing with relatives according to whether they are paternal or maternal kin.

In many other parts of the world, people place primary importance on one side of the family—either the paternal or the maternal side—in preference to the other. For example, in many cultures, individuals become members of only their father's kin group. In such systems, relatives through one's mother are considered kin, but kin of a fundamentally different and less important kind than paternal relatives. There are also systems in which kin groups are organized around maternal relationships, and paternal kin are culturally deemphasized.

#### Normative Expectations of Kin Relationships

The kinds of social relationships a people believe they should have with various kinds of relatives are part of the norms of kinship. Kinship norms are surprisingly variable from people to people. There are societies in which brothers and sisters must strictly avoid one another after puberty; in which sons-in-law are not supposed to speak directly to their mother-in-law; in which a boy is allowed to joke around with his maternal uncle;



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One way kinship systems vary is in whether the most important relationships are traced through males, females, or both sexes. On this Micronesian woman's home island, relationships through females are emphasized.

but must show utmost respect toward his paternal uncle; and in which people are expected to marry one kind of cousin but are absolutely forbidden to marry another kind of cousin. In brief, many social behaviors toward relatives that members of one culture regard as normal are different in other cultures.

#### Cultural Construction of Relatives

Except for fictive kinship (see Chapter 8), kinship relationships are created through biological reproduction. When a woman gives birth, her relatives and those of her mate become the biological relatives of the child. The kinship relationship between any two people appears to depend on how these individuals are related biologically.

Yet anthropologists claim that kinship is a cultural—as opposed to a biologically determined—phenomenon. Peoples differ in how they use the biological facts of kinship to create groups, allocate roles, and classify relatives into various kinds. In North America, whether a woman is our maternal or paternal aunt makes no difference: we still call her *aunt* and think of both our maternal and paternal aunts as the same kind of



relative. But the side of the family makes a difference in some other kinship systems, where the father's sisters and mother's sisters are considered different kinds of relatives and are called by different terms. A people's kinship system is, in part, culturally constructed.

Keeping this overview of kinship diversity in mind, let's look at kinship in more detail.



## Unilineal Descent

Consider what it means to be consanguineous relatives. If “kin” are defined in strictly biological terms, then someone is your relative because you and that person share a common ancestor in an earlier generation. Thus, your sister is the female child of your parents, your aunts and uncles are the children of your grandparents, your first cousins are the grandchildren of your grandparents, and your second cousins have the same great-grandparents as you. Stated differently, people are biological relatives if they are *descended* from a common ancestor who lived some number of generations ago.

Notice that you are descended from 4 grandparents, 8 great-grandparents, 16 great-great-grandparents, and 32 great-great-great-grandparents. Everyone alive today who is descended from these 32 people is related to you to some degree. Going back in time, the number of your ancestors doubles every generation. So, even if you count back only four or five generations, you have an enormous number of living *biological* relatives descended from those ancestors. This is why it's not a big deal if you are descended from George Washington or another founding father or mother.

Obviously, no society keeps track of all biological kin. From the total range of potential relatives, all cultures consider some as more important than others. The number of relatives is reduced in two main ways: (1) by forgetting or ignoring the more remote kinship

relationships, and (2) by emphasizing some kinds of kinship relationships and deemphasizing others. All peoples use the first method, or they would recognize tens of thousands of relatives. In the West, most people have little reason to keep track of relatives more distant than second cousins because there is so little interaction with them. (As an exercise, try to name your second cousins.)

Many peoples also use the second method: they place more importance on some relatives than on others. The most common way of doing this uses the sex of connecting relatives as the basis for defining which kin are close or most socially important. For example, if a given culture places more importance on relatives traced through males, then individuals will think that their father's relatives are more important than their mother's relatives—for some purposes at least. Relationships through females will be deemphasized and perhaps forgotten in two or three generations. If you lived in such a culture, your second cousins on your father's side might be quite important relatives, but you might barely know your second cousins through your mother.

Culturally speaking, then, kinship relationships are defined by how people trace (keep track of) their descent from previous generations. How people in a given culture trace their descent is called their **form of descent**. Descent can be traced through males, females, or both sexes.

Cultures that trace relationships through only one sex have **unilineal descent**: people place importance on either their mother's ancestral line or their father's ancestral line, but not both. The two main categories of unilineal descent are:

1. **Patrilineal descent**—People trace their primary kinship connections to the ancestors and living relatives of their father. In cultures with patrilineal descent, a person's father's relatives are likely to be most important in his or her life. Individuals are likely to live among their father's kin, and most property is inherited by sons from fathers.
2. **Matrilineal descent**—People trace their most important kinship relationships to the ancestors and living relatives of their mother. In matrilineal descent, it is the mother's relatives who are most important in a person's life. People are most likely to live with or near their mothers' relatives and usually inherit property from their mother or mother's brothers.

Of these two forms of unilineal descent, patrilineal is the most common. There are about three times as many patrilineal as matrilineal cultures.

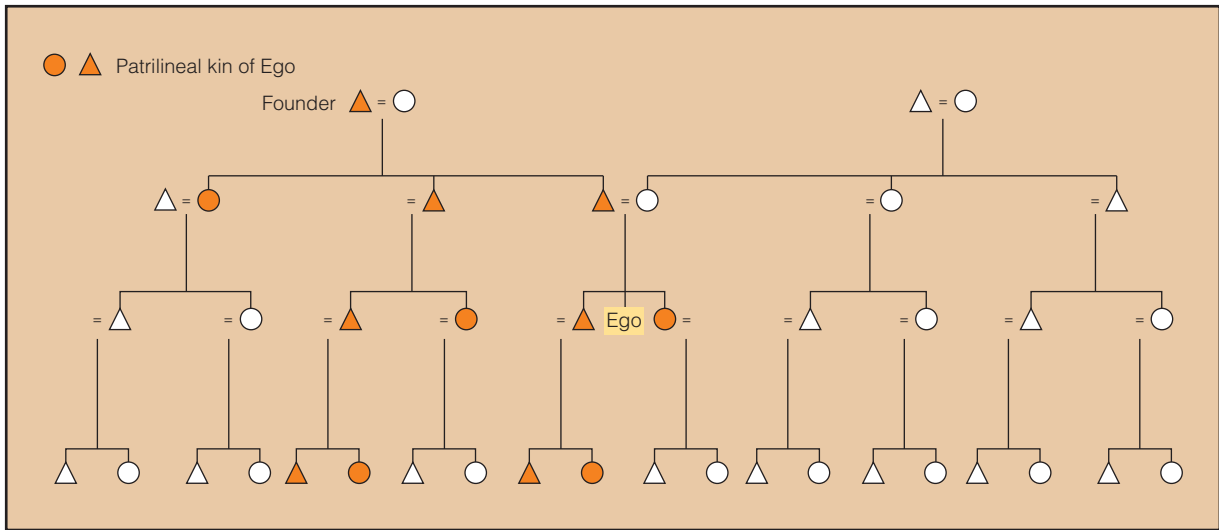
**form of descent** How a people trace their descent from previous generations.

**unilineal descent** Descent through “one line,” including patrilineal and matrilineal descent.

**patrilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals trace their most important kinship relationships through their fathers.

**matrilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals trace their primary kinship relationships through their mothers.





**Figure 9.1** Patrilineal Descent.

Let's look at each form of unilineal descent more closely to see which relatives are considered most important for an individual. In Figure 9.1, the patrilineal relatives of the person labeled *Ego* are shaded. The kinship diagram shows that *Ego*'s patrilineal kin include only those relatives related to *Ego* through males. For instance, *Ego*'s father's brother's children are related to *Ego* through males, whereas *Ego*'s other first cousins (through *Ego*'s mother or father's sister) are not.

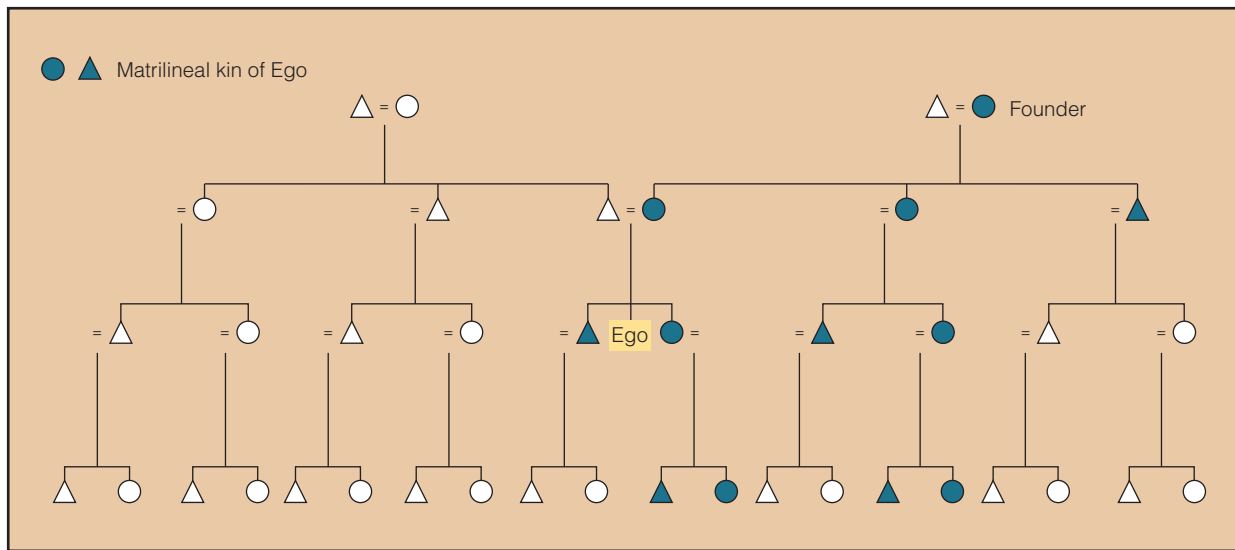
Looking at patrilineal descent another way, we see that *Ego*'s patrilineal kin include all the people descended *through males* from the man labeled *Founder* in Figure 9.1. In fact, any two individuals shaded in the diagram are related to each other through males. Women as well as men are patrilineal kin. But because incest and exogamy rules usually prohibit sex and marriage between patrilineal relatives, the children of the women are not patrilineal kin.

How does patrilineal descent affect behavior between different relatives? In all sorts of ways, but the most widespread and important effects are the inheritance of property and obligations to relatives. In patrilineal societies, property is passed down through the male line or, in other words, from fathers to sons. We can see the significance of this effect by contrasting it with inheritance in North American society. You think of yourself as related in the same way to both your grandfathers. But if you lived in a patrilineal society, your father's father would play a far more significant role in your life, and it would be from him and your father that you would expect to inherit wealth or

receive land rights. Your mother's father would pass his property on to his sons and sons' sons—not to you because you are related to him through his daughter, not his son. A similar distinction would exist between paternal and maternal uncles: paternal uncles would be far more important.

In patrilineal kinship systems, individuals have greater obligations to patrilineal relatives. People know their mother's family, of course, and often have close emotional ties with them depending on residence and individual circumstances. But one's primary duties are to relatives through the father, not through the mother. For example, if you are a man, you mainly work the land or care for the livestock of your father's family, you remain with or near your father's household through most of your life, you are obliged to care for your parents in their older years, and so forth. Because most patrilineal peoples are also patrilocal, most often a woman leaves her own family when she marries to join her husband's family. In regions like East Asia and most of South Asia, families who had daughters brought them up only to have them leave upon marriage, so a great many families preferred male children to female children. The Globalization box discusses some consequences of the preference for sons in China's recent history.

In contrast, if you lived in a matrilineal society, your most important relatives would be your mother, mother's mother, mother's mother's mother, plus the daughters of all these women and their children. In Figure 9.2, *Ego*'s matrilineal relatives are shaded. Note



**Figure 9.2** Matrilineal Descent.

that only one set of cousins—Ego’s mother’s sisters’ children—is shaded in the diagram. They are all related to Ego through female links, and therefore Ego is likely to have closer relationships with them than with other cousins. Property is most likely to be inherited from one’s mother and maternal grandmother and from the brothers of these women. In matrilineal societies, men usually leave most of their property not to their own children but to their sister’s children. As a result, maternal uncles (mother’s brothers) are important figures in one’s life, and in some respects they assume the role with its rights and duties that we usually associate with fathers.

In unilineal descent systems, relationships such as aunt, uncle, and cousin differ from those to which most of our readers are accustomed. Some cousins, in particular, are more important relatives than other cousins: father’s brothers’ children in patrilineal systems, mother’s sisters’ children in matrilineal systems. Not all cousins are culturally perceived as the same kinds of relatives in unilineal societies. This fact leads anthropologists to distinguish between *parallel cousins* and *cross cousins*. Two sets of cousins are parallel cousins if their parents are siblings of the same sex, so your parallel cousins are your mother’s sisters’ children

and your father’s brothers’ children. People are cross cousins if their parents are siblings of the opposite sex, so your cross cousins are your father’s sisters’ children and your mother’s brothers’ children. The significance of this distinction is that in unilineal descent systems, one set of parallel cousins always belongs to the same kin group as Ego, as you can see by contrasting the cousins shaded in Figures 9.1 and 9.2. On the other hand, no cross cousin is ever in Ego’s kin group in a society with a unilineal descent form.

### Unilineal Descent Groups

In Chapter 8, we saw how various peoples form household groups by associating nuclear families together in patterned ways. Much larger kin groups of people—also known as **descent groups**—can be established on the basis of kinship ties.

Take matrilineal descent, for example. A matrilineal descent group exists when people who are descended from the same woman through females recognize their group identity and cooperate for some purposes. When a matrilineal rule of descent establishes a group of people all related to one another through females, we say that the group is created using the *matrilineal principle*. We can state the matrilineal principle as “everyone joins the descent group of his or her mother.” Alternatively, we can say, “only children of the female members of a group become members.” Looking back to Figure 9.2, we see that all the individuals in the diagram are

**descent group** A group whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor.

members of a single descent group. The children of the group's men join the descent groups of their own mothers because of incest and exogamy rules.

Conversely, groups can develop by repeated application of the *patrilineal principle*: In any given generation, only males transmit their membership in the group to their offspring. The result of applying this principle for several generations is a group of people related to one another through males, as you can see in Figure 9.1. Assuming the patrilineal kin group is exogamous, the children of the group's women become members of their father's patrilineal group.

A **unilineal descent group** is a group of relatives all of whom are related through only one sex. A *matrilineal descent group* is a group whose members are (or believe themselves to be) related through females, or who trace their descent through female links from a common female ancestor. A *patrilineal descent group* comprises people who trace their descent through males from a common male ancestor.

Unilineal descent groups can be small or enormous, depending mainly on the genealogical depth of the group—that is, on how far back in generational time any two members of the group must go to trace their relationships to each other. A small matrilineal group with a few dozen members might consist of people descended matrilineally from a woman who lived four or five generations ago. A large matrilineal group with many hundreds of members might consist of people who trace their ancestry back to a woman who lived nine or ten generations ago. Anthropologists often use genealogical depth as a way to define different kinds of unilineal groups. From “shallowest” to “deepest,” these groups are called unilineally extended families, lineages, and clans. (There are other types, but they are not discussed here.)

**Unilineally extended families** consist of people who cooperate and have mutual obligations based on their descent from an ancestor who lived only three or four generations ago. Extended families may be defined either patrilineally or matrilineally. Such families may or may not live in the same household (see Chapter 8), but they recognize their close ties, may hold common property, may cooperate in work, and may have shared ritual responsibilities.

**Lineages** are unilineal groups composed of several unilineally extended families whose members are able to trace their descent through males or females from a common ancestor who typically lived four or five or more generations in the past. By the conventional definition, the extended families that make up the group



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In patrilineal societies, relationships traced through males can be used to form large groups of people, such as lineages and clans.

must be able to state how they are related to one another for anthropologists to call the group a lineage. Lineages may be either patrilineal (patrilineages) or matrilineal (matrilineages), depending on the form of descent prevalent among a given people.

**Clans** are unilineal descent groups whose members believe they are descended from a common ancestor through either the male line (patrilclans) or the female

**unilineal descent group** A group of relatives, all of whom are related through only one sex.

**unilineally extended families** Family grouping formed by tracing kinship relationships through only one sex, either female or male, but not both.

**lineage** A unilineal descent group larger than an extended family whose members can actually trace how they are related.

**clan** A named unilineal descent group, some of whose members are unable to trace how they are related, but who still believe themselves to be kinfolk.

China has one of the world's oldest civilizations, going back at least to the Shang dynasty of about 3,500 years ago. For most of this history, the Han Chinese, the most numerous cultural/ethnic and linguistic group, were rather rigidly patrilineal and patrilocal. Property inheritance, family names, responsibilities to honor ancestors, obligations to others—all these and more passed from fathers to sons. When their parents arranged their marriages with a suitable man and his family, women left their own homes and families. When they moved into their husband's family, they became subject to the authority of his parents (as was he) and worked hard to keep the family prosperous (as did he). A woman was not completely separated from her own biological family. A wife was allowed to visit her parents and brothers, provided it was not too often and she didn't remain too long.

However, a woman's main duty was to her husband's family. This was symbolized by her bowing before the ancestral shrine and tablets of his family after they married. If he was wealthy enough to support them, a man could take concubines into his household. His wife was not supposed to object provided he lived up to his obligations to support her and her children. All these practices and beliefs were reinforced by the philosophical tradition called Confucianism. Some scholars even call the above characteristics the "Confucian family."

Going along with the patrilineal and patrilocal system was a strong cultural preference for sons. Girls were expensive to raise and could not carry on the family name. The resources and time expended on a girl's childhood usually brought little return when she married out. Chinese strongly desired male children. In fact, one reason for taking a concubine was if the wife did not produce a son. The failure to bear a son was one of the seven reasons a man could divorce his wife, if he so desired.

line (matrilineal). The major difference between a clan and a lineage is generational depth. With clans, the common ancestor lived so far in the past that not all the members of the clan are able to state precisely how they are related to one another. Like lineages, clans are usually exogamous. Members of the clan think of themselves as relatives and frequently refer to one another as "clan brother" or "clan sister." In many societies, clans own or control land and other forms of property. Generally, each clan is further subdivided into two or more lineages.

Among many peoples, clans are *totemic*, meaning that their members are symbolically identified with certain supernatural powers associated with particular

Chinese trade with the West and Japan intensified in the 1800s and 1900s. It did not improve the lives of most of China's peasants. After decades of political disorder and poverty, in 1949 Chairman Mao Zedong's Communist forces won a civil war. The Chinese Communist Party soon instituted government ownership of land and most other productive property. Chairman Mao's reforms helped China become more independent of Western dominance. He also helped restore law and order and undertook specific policies to improve the lives of women. To aid the goal of socialist development, the Chinese government placed great emphasis on public education for both sexes.

In the last half of the twentieth century, the lives of women (relative to those of men, at least) improved substantially. This happened even in rural areas, according to anthropologist Yunxiang Yan. Young women have a stronger voice in choosing their husbands and now usually make the final decision about whom to marry, if only by vetoing her parents' selections. Couples can go out together, which means that marriages are more likely to be based on romantic love rather than formally arranged. Women's education exposes them to new ideas and gives many of them new economic opportunities by helping to level the playing field in the competition for jobs.

After Mao's death in 1976, his successor, Deng Xiaoping, began the economic reforms that led to China's phenomenal growth by exporting factory goods to the global economy. China's powerful leaders had long realized that they had to do something to reduce the rate at which the nation's population was growing if China was to avoid a food crisis and develop its economy. In 1979, they instituted a law that became known as the "one-child policy." Under it, couples who lived in cities could have only one child. Generally, in rural areas, couples were allowed two children. The law was further relaxed for China's 56 minority peoples. Knowing the continued cultural preference for sons, in practice officials in rural regions allowed a couple to

animals, plants, and natural forces such as lightning, the sun, and the moon. Clans commonly take the name of their primary totemic symbol, and thus have names such as the bear clan, the sun clan, the reed clan, and the eagle clan. Commonly the association with particular supernatural powers entitles specific clans to organize particular religious rituals. Although the functions of clans varies from people to people, they are usually among the most significant economic, social, and political units in the society.

Often people need to call upon different numbers of relatives for different purposes. A woman may need help with her gardening chores and will ask her extended family members for help. Or a group may



try again for a boy if the first child was female. But there were penalties for having extra children: state-owned employers penalized people in pay and promotions, extra fees were imposed for health care and education, fines could be imposed, and extreme social pressure was applied to encourage conformity.

Still, the old preference for sons remained. In the 1980s and 1990s, many couples found ways of eliminating unwanted female pregnancies and children. These included abortions, hiding second pregnancies from officials, and leaving one's community during late pregnancy to have a secret baby that, if female, was often placed in an orphanage. In the 1980s and 1990s, significantly more boys than girls were born. As a consequence, projections suggest that by about 2020, China will have approximately 30 million more males than females. Where these men will find their spouses is a problem that receives little Western media coverage, but it is potentially important to China's future stability.

The one-child policy helped lower China's population growth, although other factors also contributed heavily to couples' choice to have fewer children. The policy also resulted in tens of millions of Chinese who have no sisters or brothers. The publicity (some say "propaganda") campaign that accompanied the policy, along with a multitude of other factors, significantly raised the status of females in China. Today, whether you have a boy or girl matters much less than it used to—what matters most now is that your only child receives the education that will allow her or him to get ahead in their careers. Many parents, along with grandparents, are quite attentive to their only son or daughter. Some Chinese call the only children "little emperors," especially if they are boys, because of what they view as extreme parental indulgence.

However, unlike real emperors, children are under a lot of pressure to succeed in school and to pass the national exams that lead to placement in Chinese colleges. Obligations to live up to parental expectations generally are greater among Chinese

than among North Americans, and this extends to parents' wishes about colleges and careers. Some Chinese call the result of the one-child policy "4-2-1": 1 child is the center of attention of 2 parents and 4 grandparents. But 4-2-1 cuts both ways: the same 6 adults have such high expectations for success that many children who don't measure up feel terrible about disappointing their older relatives. Parents care about their children's success because they love their little emperors, of course, but also because they rightly expect that their children will become their main source of support in their elder years. As Vanessa Fong discusses in her 2004 book, *Only Hope*, rising expectations for upward mobility by both parents and children results in intense competition in schools, but also in new frustrations when rising hopes are not realized.

As is also true in Japan and South Korea, Chinese parents make large sacrifices to maximize the life chances of their children. Some spend hours a week going over lessons. They try to get their 6-year-olds into the best elementary schools so they will have a head start. They pay big bucks to send their children to cram schools, which offer extra lessons after the regular school day that will give a leg up on the intense competition over the college entrance exams. Private companies, both Chinese and foreign, specialize in selling educational materials to Chinese families. Learning English is viewed as one key to a successful future. In 2003, Disney was selling packages titled "Magic English" and "Baby Einstein," and Time-Warner was market-testing a 40-CD interactive set of English lessons in Shanghai that sold for around \$3,300.

### Critical Thinking Question

1. Why do Chinese parents and grandparents seem so concerned that their children do well in school?

SOURCES: *China Daily* (November 5, 2003); Fong (2004); Jackson and Howe (2006); Yan (2006)

need to defend itself against enemies, for which purpose they need to mobilize dozens or even hundreds of men to serve as warriors, so they call upon their lineagemates or clanmates for aid. Unilineal descent is a useful organization for these and many other purposes because it allows people to mobilize varying numbers of their relatives when they need assistance. Using one of the unilineal descent principles, smaller kin groups can be nested inside larger ones.

For example, in a patrilineal society, a nuclear family is a part—a "segment"—of a patrilineally extended family. In turn, the extended family is a segment of a larger group (a small patrilineage), while the small patrilineage is a segment of a larger patrilineage, which

in turn is a segment of a patrilineal. Using this *segmentary organization*, dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of relatives can be mobilized, depending on the circumstances. The flexibility of segmentary systems makes them useful for many economic and political purposes (see Chapter 12).

### Descent Groups in Action

The preceding description is abstract. Realize that, like families, descent groups are made up of living people who work in gardens, conduct rituals, teach their children, construct their dwellings, and carry out innumerable other activities together. When people work

together for common purposes, they have ways of creating groups and ensuring their continuity over time; they have ways of assigning group members to roles and allocating tasks to them; they have ways of making decisions that affect the members. In a word, they are *organized*. In many regions even today, descent groups and kinship relationships provide and organize a variety of cooperative activities.

Two examples illustrate this. One is a patrilineal people of a Pacific island who call themselves the Tikopia. The other is the Hopi, a matrilineal Native American people of the Southwest.

### *Tikopia: A Patrilineal Society*

Tikopia is a western Pacific island with only 6 square miles of land area. In the late 1920s, when Raymond Firth studied it, about 1,200 people lived on the island. All Tikopians belong to one of four patrilines, each with its own name. Each patriline is subdivided into several patrilineages, averaging 30 to 40 members. The members of each patrilineage trace their descent back to a common ancestor—the founder of the patrilineage—who lived four to six generations ago. The oldest male member of a patrilineage is usually its head. Lineages are exogamous, so the children of a lineage's women are not members of it.

What are the functions of Tikopian lineages and clans? The lineage controls rights to land and certain other kinds of property. Each lineage owns house sites and several parcels of land planted in the four major crops, including yams, taro, coconut, and breadfruit. The families of the lineage have the right to plant and harvest crops on lineage land. They cannot, however, sell, trade, or give it away to members of other lineages. Thus, patrilineages own land and allocate use rights to parcels among their members, and each family acquires most of its food through farming the land of their lineage.

Each nuclear family cultivates mainly the lineage land of its husband-father. Although Tikopians are patrilineal, the female members of a patrilineage retain their use rights to their own lineage's land even after they marry. When a woman marries, a parcel of the land of her lineage is divided off for the use of her nuclear family. A woman may not, however, pass any rights to this land along to her children, for it belongs to her patrilineage as a whole. Thus, each patrilineage allows its married female members to use plots of land for subsistence during their lifetimes but not to transmit rights to the land to their offspring.

The social rank of individuals is also determined largely by their lineage membership and their status

within it. One lineage of each clan is considered the highest-ranking and senior lineage, because the Tikopians believe its living members are descended (through males) from the founder of the clan. Because of its superior rank, the senior lineage also has the right to select one of its male members to serve as the chief for the whole clan. Tikopian kinship thus has a political dimension because authority over others is gained largely through lineage membership and rank.

Like people everywhere, Tikopians believe in supernatural powers. These beliefs are also tied to the kinship system. Each clan has specific ritual duties to perform. Each of the four clan chiefs serves as the religious leader and organizer of important religious ceremonies. Each clan has its own ancestral spirits, who were the deceased former chiefs of the clan. Each clan also has its own gods, with whom its chief acts as intermediary.

One religious duty of clan chiefs is to carry out rituals that ensure the availability of food. Each of the four major subsistence crops is mystically associated with one of the clans. The gods of this clan control the crop. The clan chief performs the rituals that ensure the continued supply and fertility of whichever crop “listened to” (as the Tikopia phrase it) the gods of his clan. Thus, each clan—in the person of its chief—has ritual responsibilities toward the other three clans. A patrilineage, too, has an ancestral home with sacred shrines where its members gather to honor their ancestors.

Tikopians exemplify the diverse functions that are often assigned to kin groups. Patrilineages control use rights to land and some other kinds of property and influence an individual's social rank. Patrilines have political functions, and their chiefs carry out rituals that Tikopians believe are essential for the well-being of all islanders.

### *Hopi: A Matrilineal Society*

In northeastern Arizona live a matrilineal people known as the Hopi. The Hopi divide themselves into about 50 exogamous matrilineal clans (some of which are now extinct). Clans are not residential groups; most clans have members who live in more than one of the Hopi's nine *pueblos*. A Hopi pueblo, or village, often is a single large apartment-like building divided into many rooms in which families reside. Each clan is subdivided into several matrilineages. The female members of a Hopi matrilineage usually live in adjoining rooms within a single pueblo.

Traditionally the Hopi are matrilineal, so after marriage a man usually joins his wife, her sisters, and her other matrilineal relatives to form a matrilocally extended household. Most Hopi extended families consist of one or more older women, their daughters together with their husbands, and sometimes even their granddaughters and their husbands. Because of lineage and clan exogamy and matrilineal residence, husbands are outsiders, and—as the Hopi say—their real home is with their mother’s extended family. The women of a matrilineage usually live close to one another throughout most of their lives. The married men of the matrilineage live scattered among the households of their wives. Men remain members of their mother’s lineage and frequently return to their matrilineal home for rituals and other responsibilities or in case of divorce.

Most property, including ceremonial objects, is inherited matrilineally. Living space, for instance, passes from mothers to daughters. Traditionally, the Hopi were horticultural, skillfully working the arid land to produce corn and other crops. Each lineage has use rights over particular parcels at any one time. The husbands of the lineage’s women do most of the farming to support their families, turning most of the crops over to their wives.

Membership in a matrilineal clan also establishes one’s relationships with the supernatural world. Each clan is mystically associated with a number of supernatural powers called *wuya*. Clans usually take their name from their principal *wuya*, such as bear, rabbit, corn, badger, snake, cloud, sun, and reed. In prayers to their *wuya*, members of a matrilineal clan ask for protection and for bountiful harvests.

Hopi religion features a ritual calendar that includes a large number of annually required ceremonies. In most cases, each ceremony is “owned” by the members of a certain clan, meaning in Hopi culture that this clan has primary responsibility to see that the ceremony is performed on time and in the proper manner. Every clan represented in a particular village has a clanhouse, in which the masks, fetishes, and other sacred items used in the ceremonies it owns are kept when not in use. The clanhouse usually consists of a room adjoining the dwelling of the senior female member of the clan. This woman, the *clan mother*, is in charge of storing ritual objects and seeing to it that they are treated with the proper respect.

There is also a male head of each clan with religious duties. He is in charge of organizing the men of the clan to perform the clan ceremonies. The male head

of a clan teaches his younger brothers or sister’s son the ritual knowledge they will need to know to perform the ceremonies properly. In this way, culturally important ritual knowledge is kept within the clan.

As with most other matrilineal peoples, among the Hopi the roles of father and husband differ from those in patrilineal systems. When a husband moves in with his wife and her relatives after marriage, he brings little property other than his clothing and a few personal items. The house, its furnishings, the food stored there, and other goods remain the property of his wife’s family. A man provides food for himself and his family by working in the fields of his wife, but the products of his farm labor belong to his wife.

Finally, the combination of matrilineal descent and matrilineal residence affects relationships between fathers and children. A child’s relationship with her or his father is usually close and tolerant. A father seldom punishes his own children. Culturally, this is not considered his appropriate role because—after all—children and fathers belong to different matrilineages and matrilineal clans. The father’s sisters and brothers likewise exhibit warm feelings for their nieces and nephews, often providing them with gifts and affection. The main disciplinarians of children are their mother’s brother and other members of their mother’s kin group. This is partly because a child’s behavior reflects well or poorly on the kin group of the mother, so members of this group have the primary duty of monitoring and correcting children.

Hopi illustrate how the matrilineal principle recruits people into kin groups in which they perform various economic, political, and religious roles. They also show how the form of descent found among a people influences interpersonal relationships, including between fathers and children and maternal uncles and their nieces and nephews.

Neither the Tikopia nor the Hopi “typify” patrilineal and matrilineal kinship. A wide range of diversity occurs in patrilineal and matrilineal systems. The two peoples do illustrate some of the main differences between patrilineal and matrilineal peoples with respect to recruitment into groups, allocation of roles, nature of emotional attachments, and organization of important activities.

### *Avunculocality Revisited*

Hopi women have a great deal of influence on domestic life and control over property—land in particular. (As we discuss in Chapter 11, Hopi women owe their

The unmarried status of these young Hopi women is shown by their hairstyle. In Hopi villages, traditionally the husbands of women worked the land of their wives' families and moved into their wives' house-holds. Hopi matrilineages and matrilclans also organize many other economic and ceremonial activities.



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relatively high status partly to their control over land and partly to matrilineality and matrilocality.) Because Hopi are matrilocal, sisters live together and their husbands live apart from their matrilineal relatives for as long as the marriage lasts.

Although most matrilineal people are matrilocal, more than one-third of all matrilineal societies have avunculocal residence, in which married couples live with or near the husband's mother's brother (see Chapter 8). Now that we are aware of matrilineal descent and know that matrilineages and matrilclans often control property, we can understand this unfamiliar residence pattern.

The mere fact that a people are matrilineal does not necessarily mean that women control property and politics. That is, *matrilineality*—descent through females—should not be confused with *matriarchy*—rule by women or dominance by women. Even in most matrilineal societies, elder men control and make decisions about the use and allocation of land and other forms of wealth and have more of a say than women in public affairs. Of course, in contrast to patrilineal peoples, in a matrilineal society, a lineage elder has authority over his sister's children rather than his own children. This is because a man's children supposedly have their property and loyalties with the group of their mother.

How can a male lineage elder have his sisters' sons living with or near him, where he can keep an eye on them, and where they can look after their own interest

in land and common property? The answer is avunculocal residence (see Figure 8.2d in Chapter 8). If a man's maternal nephews bring their wives to live with them in a common residence, then the elder and young male members of a single matrilineage live in a single place. The married women of the matrilineage are scattered among the households of their own husbands' mothers' brothers. The children of the matrilineage's women are likewise scattered among the households of their fathers, so long as they remain unmarried. But as they marry, they return to their own mother's brothers' households—the place of their own lineage.

In short, avunculocal residence has the effect of localizing male matrilineal relatives who have a common interest in land, wealth, or other material property and/or who share ritual responsibilities. It therefore makes perfect sense once we see how the matrilineal principle forms kin groups that hold common property, and once we realize that men have control over wealth and public affairs among most matrilineal peoples.

## Nonunilineal Descent

Once you understand how people become members of various kinds of unilineal groups, they seem simple enough. If your society is matrilineal, for instance,



you and everyone else joins their mother's kin groups and, as a consequence, everyone in your lineage or clan is related through females.

But actual social life is rarely so rule-governed. In real societies where either unilineal principle is the norm, the actual membership of lineages and clans is not as well defined as the principles make them appear. For instance, in matrilineal systems, circumstances vary and change: adoptions, childless women, inability to get along with one's matrikin, insufficiency of land owned by the matrigroup, and other factors make it likely that some individuals will join a group other than that of their mother. More generally, even in unilineal systems, there is some degree of choice about which group to join, depending on personal preferences and circumstances. Still, there is a norm or rule about what "should" happen.

In societies with **nonunilineal descent**, individuals do not regularly associate with either matrilineal or patrilineal relatives, but make choices about whom to live with, whose land to use, and so forth. There are different forms of nonunilineal descent, two of which are most common: cognatic and bilateral.

## Cognatic Descent

Cultures with **cognatic descent** (also called *ambilineal descent*) have no formal principle or rule about whether individuals join the group of their mother or father. Some people join with their father, others with their mother, entirely or largely according to preferences and circumstances. A **cognatic descent group** consists of all the individuals who can trace their descent back to the common ancestor (founder) of the group through either female or male links. Some people have a female ancestor in the group; others join through male ancestral links.

More than in unilineal systems, in cognatic descent, people make choices about the groups they want to join. The choice is commonly based on factors such as chances of inheriting rights to land use or other forms of property or wealth, the desire to associate with a relative of high status or rank, childhood residence, and emotional ties. For example, you might decide to reside and cooperate with your mother's relatives if her kin group has a lot more land available for you to cultivate than does your father's group. Or if a coveted political office or honorific title is about to become vacant in your father's group, you might decide to try to acquire it by moving in and working with his relatives.

Cognatic descent is found in all world regions, but it is especially prevalent among Polynesians, including Samoans, Hawaiians, Tahitians, and the Maori of New Zealand. Details vary from island to island, but generally speaking, people can join any cognatic group or groups to which they can trace ancestry. Membership in the group bestows rights to agricultural land, house sites, and some other kinds of property.

In contrast to unilineal systems, in cognatic systems, everyone potentially belongs to several groups because everyone has the opportunity to join all the groups to which their parents belong, and each parent is a member of at least two groups. So, cognatic descent groups have *overlapping membership*. This potentially poses a problem for access to land and other culturally valued things. For example, if all members of a group have rights to the land collectively owned by this group, and if one-half or more of the entire population potentially has such rights, then the "right" does not mean much.

In Polynesia, most people keep up their membership in several groups simultaneously by contributing labor and foods to feasts sponsored by the groups and generally showing their interest in and commitment to the groups. The islands of Samoa provide an example. Each Samoan village has a council that plans public activities, levies fines, and performs other functions for the whole community. Each village includes several cognatic kin groups known as *'aiga*. Although each *'aiga* has branches represented in several villages, every *'aiga* has an ancestral village that its members consider their homeland. In its homeland village, each *'aiga* has the right to select one or more of its men to hold important titles. These title holders serve as the *'aiga's* representatives to the village council. Acquisition of a title carries great honor as well as authority to regulate use of the *'aiga's* land, resolve disputes among the *'aiga's* members, organize feasts and ceremonial gifts, and assess the members for contributions to marriages, funerals, and other events.

**nonunilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals do not regularly associate with either matrilineal or patrilineal relatives, but make choices about whom to live with, whose land to use, and so forth.

**cognatic descent** Form of descent in which relationships may be traced through both females and males.

**cognatic descent group** A group of relatives created by tracing relationships through both females and males.



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In bilateral societies, kindred are ego-focused and usually come together only on special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, and, as here in Maine, family reunions.

When a title becomes vacant because of death or some other reason, all members of the entire *'aiga* have a voice in choosing the new holder of the title, whether they live in the homeland village or not. Because people belong to several *'aiga* at the same time, they have a voice in choosing the new title holder for several groups, although they do not necessarily exercise their rights in every *'aiga* to which they belong. Because men belong to several groups, they have the right to compete for and gain a title in these groups. A young man might anticipate a future title vacancy in one of his *'aiga* and decide to move to the village where that *'aiga* is represented on the council to concentrate his energies on acquiring that particular title. This general kinship and village-level political organization persists in much of rural Samoa to this day.

The Samoan *'aiga* illustrates some of the common functions of cognatic kin groups: They can hold property and regulate access to land, organize cooperative

activities, and serve as the basis for acquiring honored and authoritative political roles. In these respects, they are similar to the lineages and clans of unilineal systems. But in cognatic systems, the range of individual choice about group membership is much wider than in unilineal descent.

### Bilateral Kinship

**Bilateral** (two-sided) **kinship** systems differ from unilineal descent in that bilateral kinship relationships are traced through both genders. Individuals regard their relatives through both parents as equal in importance. Bilateral kinship differs from both unilineal and cognatic descent in that no large, well-defined, property-holding groups exist. Rather than lineages and clans, the tracing of kinship relationships bilaterally produces networks of relatives known as the **kindred**. A kindred consists of all the people a specific person recognizes as relatives through both sides of the family.

Bilateral kinship exists in most contemporary Western countries, but it is also common in other parts of the world. To understand bilateral kinship and the kindred, imagine a Canadian named Liz, who recognizes her relatives through her father and mother as equivalent and interacts with them in much the same way (unless she has established strong bonds with someone because

**bilateral kinship** kinship system in which individuals trace their kinship relationships equally through both parents.

**kindred** All the bilateral relatives of an individual.

Forms	Defining Characteristics	Associated Kin Groups
<i>Unilineal</i>		
(a) Patrilineal	through male line	(patri)lineages and (patri)clans
(b) Matrilineal	through female line	(matri)lineages and (matri)clans
<i>Nonunilineal</i>		
(a) Cognatic	through either male or female line	cognatic descent groups
(b) Bilateral	equally through both parents of Ego	none: members of Ego's kindred associate only temporarily, on Ego's behalf

he or she lives close by, or for some other reason). The more distant the relationship, the less likely Liz is to interact with or even know who her relatives are. The only times she is likely to see many of her kindred in the same place are at events such as weddings, funerals, and family reunions. Many of Liz's relatives do not know one another (her cousins on her mother's side are unlikely to know her cousins through her father, for example). All the members of her kindred do not consider themselves relatives, and they certainly do not own any common property. The only thing that ever brings them together is the fact that they are related to Liz. As this hypothetical example shows, a kindred is *ego-focused*, meaning that each individual is the center of his or her own set of relatives. Only you and your siblings share the same kindred; your mother has a different kindred, as do your father and all your cousins. Both unilineal and cognatic descent groups, in contrast, are *ancestor-focused*, meaning that people are members of a descent group by virtue of the fact that they recognize descent from a common ancestor whose identity is known or assumed.

The Concept Review will help you keep track of the various forms of descent and the kinds of groups that are associated with each.

We have presented four of the major forms of descent and kinship found among humanity. This diversity is surprising and puzzling. Surprising, because genetically your biological relatives are determined by your parentage, so why would some peoples emphasize their mother's line, others their father's line, and others both lines equally? Puzzling, because so far no general explanation of descent and kinship has emerged, despite many attempts. Asking the people themselves why they have one kind of kinship rather than another usually does not help. If you are from a bilateral society, you will see this by trying to answer the following question: Why doesn't your society attach more importance to

relatives through mothers than through fathers? The A Closer Look feature presents some of the most influential ideas about the causes of diversity in kinship and descent.

## Cultural Construction of Kinship

In Chapter 2, we noted that one of the major components of cultural knowledge is the way a people construct the real world, both natural and social. Kinship relationships and groups are an important part of social reality in all human cultures. Just as cultures differ in the ways they trace their descent and form social groupings of relatives, so do they differ in how they place relatives into kinds, with labeled categories. The labeled categories are called **kin terms**, and the way a people classify their relatives into these categories is called their **kinship terminology**.

You might think that kin terms reflect the way those relatives are related to biologically (genetically). In English, this is true for *some* terms: *mother, father, sister, brother, son, and daughter* all define individuals related to you in distinct (unique) biological ways. For example, no other female relative other than your *sister* shares your parentage (setting aside considerations of fictive kinship, such as adoption, foster parenting, and step relatives).

**kin terms** The words (labels) that an individual uses to refer to his or her relatives of various kinds.

**kinship terminology** The logically consistent system by which people classify their relatives into labeled categories, or into "kinds of relatives."



Anthropologists have wondered for decades why cultures have the form of kinship they do. Why are the Tikopia patrilineal, the Hopi matrilineal, the English bilateral? Are there any general explanations? So far no one has identified a single factor or even a small number of factors that account for why different cultures develop different kinship systems. There are, however, a number of factors that *influence* (as opposed to *cause*) which form of kinship a people will have.

One influence is how people relate to their environment. For example, about 60 percent of foraging peoples are non-unilineal. Why? Nonunilineal kinship gives individuals and nuclear families a lot of choice about which of their many kin relationships to activate at any given time. The Ju/'hoansi (see Chapter 6) and most other foragers must adapt to seasonal, annual, and spatial fluctuations in wild food availability. So, it is beneficial to keep your options open by maximizing the number and range of people to whom you can trace kinship connections, which is done with nonunilineal kinship. Note that this influence is consistent with materialist approaches (see Chapter 4).

Relationships with the environment affect other descent forms, too. About three-fourths of pastoral societies are patrilineal. According to one hypothesis, nomadic herding is associated with patrilineal descent because livestock are most commonly owned by men, although among many peoples wives and daughters actually care for the herds or flock day by day. To conserve labor in protecting and moving animals to seasonally available pastures, brothers often combine their animals into a single herd. This is one reason ownership of animals typically passes from fathers to sons. Brothers tend to stay together to cooperate in herd management and look after their common inheritance; therefore, they will reside patrilocally. Patrilocal residence associates male relatives

together in a single location, whereas it disperses females. Over many generations, patrilineal descent develops as a consequence because men who stay together through most of their lives tend to form close relationships and to pass ownership along to sons.

Patrilineal descent has also been viewed as a way to improve success in intergroup warfare. Examples include the Maring of New Guinea (see Chapter 7) and the Yanomamö of the Amazon (see Chapter 8). Patrilineal descent encourages male solidarity (bonding) and thereby increases male willingness to cooperate in battles, as well as decreases the chances of male relatives becoming antagonists. Evolutionary psychology (see Chapter 4) might explain patrilineal descent in these terms. Several cross-cultural studies have found an association between patrilineal descent and warfare frequency. But exactly why this correlation exists is a subject of much dispute, especially because war also is important among many matrilineal peoples.

What sorts of factors influence the formation of matrilineal descent? Some anthropologists think it is connected to the way peoples acquire their food. Matrilineal descent is more likely to be found among horticultural peoples than among foragers or intensive agriculturalists (see Chapter 6); nearly 60 percent of matrilineal cultures are horticultural. This association is probably related to the fact that women perform so much of the daily subsistence work in most horticultural populations, as we discuss in Chapter 11.

A cross-cultural study by Melvin Ember and Carol Ember suggests that horticulture plus long-distance warfare or trade often leads people to develop matrilineal descent. The reasoning is that if men are far away fighting or trading much of the time, they have less time for garden work, so women take over most of the garden labor. Women are more likely to work effectively if they cooperate with close

However, other English kin terms do not faithfully reflect genetic relatedness. Consider *uncle* and *aunt*. They refer to siblings of your parents, distinguished only by their gender. But the individuals you call *aunt* and *uncle* are related to you in four different ways: your father's siblings, your mother's siblings, your father's siblings' spouses, and your mother's siblings' spouses. Note that both consanguineous and affinal relatives are included in the English terms *uncle* and *aunt*. The same idea applies to some other terms: a particular term may group together several individuals related to you in different ways. Thus, *grandfather* and *grandmother* includes both your mother's and our father's father. *First cousin* refers to a wide range of people connected to you biologically in different ways.

Even terms with seemingly unambiguous biological referents like *sister* and *brother* are treated in varying ways. In old China and Korea and many other places, terms for siblings were modified by birth order, producing distinctions like *first brother*, *fourth brother*, and *second sister*. The Chinese and Koreans applied the Confucian respect for elders to sibling terminology: the fact that elder brothers outranked younger ones was reflected in how they addressed one another.

Thus, a people's kinship terminology only imperfectly reflects the biological relationships among individuals. More fundamentally, kin terms reflect the various norms, rights and duties, and behavioral patterns that characterize social relationships among kinfolk. Speaking broadly, collapsing relatives of different kinds into a single term



female relatives than if they are working with or for their husbands' relatives. Also, a middle-aged or elderly couple will want to keep their daughters around after they marry, to work their land and help support them in their old age. So, postmarital residence is typically matrilocal in horticultural cultures in which men are often absent. Matrilocality places a group of sisters and other female matrilin in a single household or village. Their brothers move away after their marriage, and the children of these brothers develop closer relationships with their mother's family than with their father's relatives. This ultimately leads to the tracing of descent through females.

For evolutionary psychology (sociobiology), the most puzzling aspect of matrilineal descent is that most men give more material support to their sister's children than to their own children. This is "puzzling" because ordinarily men are more closely related to their own children than to the children of their sisters, and evolutionary psychology predicts that people are more likely to help closer genetic relatives than more distant ones. Back in 1974, Richard Alexander suggested that matrilineal descent can be explained in terms of genetic relatedness. Under some conditions, a male is more likely to be more closely related to the children of his sister than to the children of his wife.

When will an average man be more closely related genetically to his sister's children than to his own? The answer: when the "probability of paternity" falls below about 0.25—that is, when an average man is only about 25 percent sure that the children of his wife are, in fact, his children. The mathematics of this are outside our scope. But the idea is that a man and his sister know that they have the same mother, so they automatically have some genetic relatedness even though there is good chance they have different fathers. Therefore, a man knows that his sister's children

are related to him. But if there is about a 75 percent chance that he is not the father of his wife's children, then few of his own children are genetic relatives. Therefore, it pays off genetically to support his sister's children rather than those of his wife.

Around one-sixth of human societies are matrilineal. Is it likely that there are this many societies with a paternity probability lower than 0.25? No, because this assumes that in the matrilineal one-sixth of all societies, a woman is roughly three times more likely to be impregnated by a man other than her husband. Although sexual behavior, and especially extramarital sexual behavior, is difficult to research, this number is unrealistic.

However, evolutionary psychology can *potentially* help us understand why there are so many societies whose social organization is based on kinship. Groups that own resources, cooperate in labor, raise children together, go to war together, and the like are most often relatives in pre-modern societies, which is consistent with evolutionary psychology. Critics of the approach argue against this idea in several ways, most notably that humans are more likely to cooperate with people they trust. We tend to trust people we know well, and whom do we know better than those we were raised with, regardless of whether they are our biological relatives?

As you can see, there is a lot of controversy about the causes of kinship systems, and probably most anthropologists doubt that any universal explanation exists. It may be that cross-cultural variations in kinship systems are influenced by so many kinds of factors that no generalized explanation is possible.

*SOURCES:* Aberle (1961); Alexander (1974); Divale (1974); Divale and Harris (1976); C. Ember (1974), Ember and Ember (1971); Ember, Ember, and Pasternak (1974)

reflects the cultural fact that people think of them as the same kind of relative. In turn, people conceive of them as the same kind of relative because they have similar kinds of relationships with them.

As already described, peoples vary in the ways they trace their main kin ties, in the kinds of relationships and groups created by those ties, and in how they classify relatives into labeled categories. These variations do not perfectly reflect the degree of genetic relatedness between relatives, so anthropologists commonly say that kinship is *culturally constructed*. The **cultural construction of kinship** implies two things: (1) as children grow up in a certain community, they socially learn the logic by which their

culture classifies "relatives" into categories, and (2) those categories do not simply reflect biological/genetic relationships. (If they did, we might be justified in saying that kinship is *biologically determined*.) In fact, as we'll see in a moment, the labeled categories of kinship sometimes hardly match up at all with biological relationships.

**cultural construction of kinship** The idea that the kinship relationships a given people recognize do not perfectly reflect biological relationships; reflected in the kinship terminology.

## Logic of Cultural Constructions

Before we can discuss particular kinship terminologies, we need to understand the logic by which they are culturally constructed. By “logic” we mean the principles that people use to distinguish one kind of relative from others. There are many principles, but only five are relevant for our purposes.

First, every kin term has a reciprocal term. For example, the reciprocal term for *grandfather* is either *granddaughter* or *grandson*. If you call a woman *mother*, she will call you *son* or *daughter*.

Second, for some terms, the gender of the individuals to whom the term applies makes a difference. In English, gender matters for terms like *brother* and *sister*, *uncle* and *aunt*, and *grandfather* and *grandmother*. Indeed, gender is the only criterion that distinguishes the relatives just mentioned from one another. Gender is irrelevant, however, for *cousin*.

Third, kinship terms usually reflect whether the individual referred to is of the same or a different generation than Ego’s. In English, specific terms are used for relatives in Ego’s own generation (like *cousin*), in Ego’s parents’ generation (*aunt*), and in Ego’s children’s generation (*niece*). In describing kinship terminologies, we call Ego’s parents’ generation the *first ascending generation* and Ego’s children’s generation the *first descending generation*. Although the terms used in most kinship terminologies reflect generational differences, some systems use terms that transcend generations.

Fourth, the sex of the relative who connects Ego to another relative usually matters. The distinction between cross and parallel cousins illustrates this logical principle: among many peoples, mother’s brother’s daughter is called by a different term than mother’s sister’s daughter. Often, too, father’s sister and mother’s sister have different labels.

Side of the family is a fifth criterion by which kin terminologies are constructed. In English, side of the family is irrelevant: your relatives through your mother receive the same terms as relatives through

your father. As we know, many other cultures place special emphasis on relationships through females (mothers—matrilineal) or males (fathers—patrilineal). As you suspect, this emphasis is reflected in terminological systems.

These five principles are among the ones that various peoples use to culturally construct kinship. The most general point is that different peoples combine these logical principles—as you can see, they are logical *possibilities*—in various ways to form categories or kinds of relatives.

## Varieties of Kinship Terminology

The world’s diverse peoples have developed many ways of classifying relatives into labeled categories. The classification systems have names like Eskimo, Hawaiian, Sudanese, Iroquois, Omaha, and Crow. (Don’t be misled by the names of these systems. The American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan developed the classification system for kinship terminology in 1871. He named each system after the first people among whom he encountered it. In fact, all the systems are found on many continents, although four of them were named after the Native American peoples that Morgan learned about.)

Here we cover only four systems: Eskimo, Hawaiian, Iroquois, and Omaha. We further simplify things by considering only terms used for consanguineous relatives in Ego’s generation and in Ego’s first ascending (parental) generation. To make these systems easier to understand, we translate the terms into their closest English equivalents. Keep in mind that these translations are only rough approximations and that some terms have no exact English equivalents.

### Eskimo

**Eskimo terminology** is the easiest for English speakers to understand because this is the system most of us are familiar with (see Figure 9.3). In this system, Ego’s biological mother is called *mother*, and Ego’s biological father is called *father*. These are the only two persons to whom these terms apply. The term *aunt* is used for both Ego’s father’s sister and Ego’s mother’s sister, and the term *uncle* is used for Ego’s father’s brother and mother’s brother. The terms *brother* and *sister* are used for only the children of Ego’s mother and father. The term *cousin* is used for all children of Ego’s uncles and aunts.

### Hawaiian

**Hawaiian terminology** uses the fewest terms (see Figure 9.4). All of Ego’s relatives in the first ascending

**eskimo terminology** Kinship terminology system in which no nuclear family kin term is extended to more distant relatives; nuclear family members have unique terms.

**hawaiian terminology** Kin terminology system in which only sex and generation are relevant in defining labeled categories of relatives.

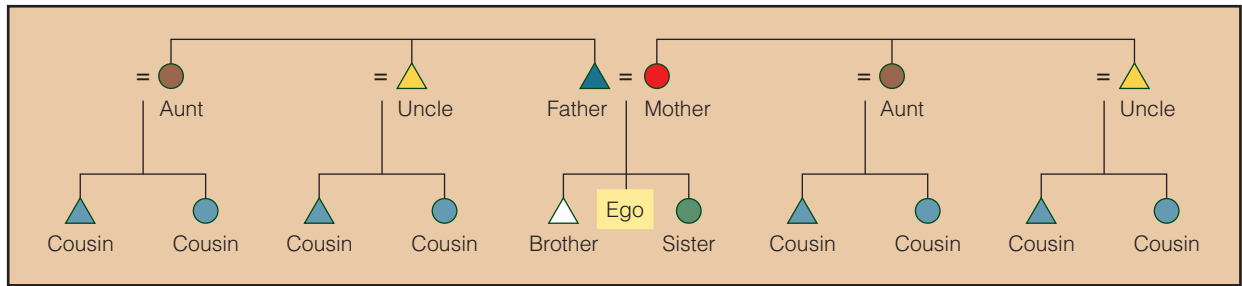


Figure 9.3 Eskimo Kinship Terminology.

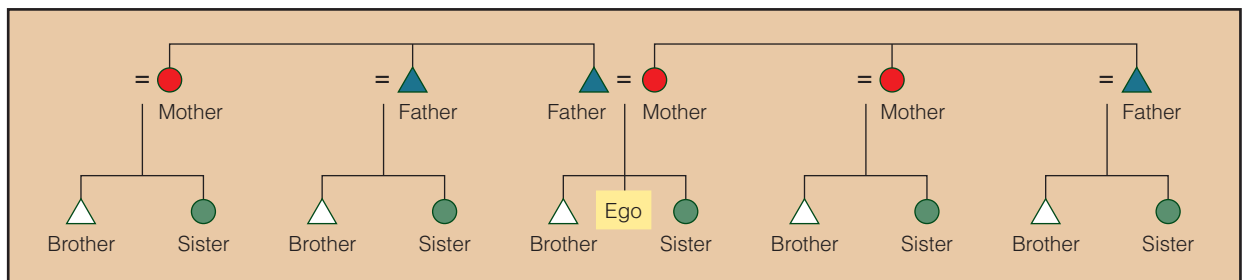


Figure 9.4 Hawaiian Kinship Terminology.

generation are called either *mother* or *father*: the term *mother* is extended to include Ego's mother's sister and Ego's father's sister, and *father* is extended to include father's brother and mother's brother. In Ego's own generation, all relatives are called either *brother* or *sister*. Thus, Hawaiian terminology includes no terms equivalent to the English terms *uncle*, *aunt*, and *cousin*. Although the Hawaiian system extends the terms *mother* and *father*, this does not mean that individuals are unable to distinguish their biological parents from their other relatives of the parental generation.

### Iroquois

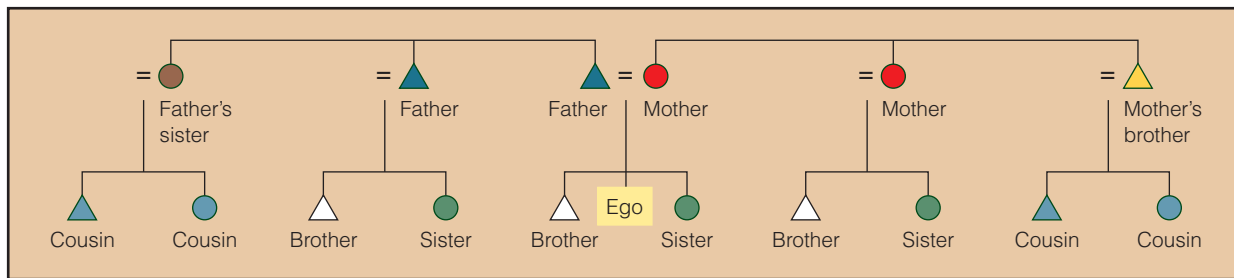
People who use the **Iroquois terminology** categorize relatives very differently than the Hawaiian and Eskimo systems (see Figure 9.5). The term *father* includes father's brother but not mother's brother. *Mother* includes mother's sister but not father's sister. Mother's brother and father's sister have their own unique terms. Looking at Ego's own generation, we also see a difference. The children of father's brother and mother's sister are called *brother* and *sister*. The children of mother's brother and father's sister are called by a term that might be translated as *cousin*.

Although this distinction may seem unusual to us, it also exists in the Omaha system, so we need to understand the logic behind it. Peoples who use the Iroquois

system distinguish between parallel and cross cousins. They give their parallel cousins the same terms they use for their own brothers and sisters. They distinguish cross cousins from parallel cousins, calling cross cousins by a unique term (here we translate the term as *cousin*, although obviously it has no exact English equivalent).

To understand the logic behind calling parallel cousins *brother* and *sister* and cross cousins by a different term, go back to the terms used for Ego's parents' siblings. Ego's father's brother and mother's sister are called *father* and *mother*, respectively. Thus, it is logical to call their children *brother* and *sister*. (What do you call the children of the people you call *mother* and *father*?) Ego calls his father's sister by a term that might be translated as *aunt*, although the indigenous term is often something close to "female father." Ego's mother's brother is *uncle* (or "male mother").

**iroquois terminology** Kinship terminology system in which Ego calls parallel cousins the same terms as siblings, calls father's brother the same as father, calls mother's sister the same as mother, and uses unique terms for the children of father's sister and mother's brother.



**Figure 9.5** Iroquois Kinship Terminology.

So, it is logical to call their children (who are Ego's cross cousins) by another term we might translate as *cousin*.

### Omaha

**Omaha terminology** is difficult for English speakers to grasp (see Figure 9.6). The terms used in the first ascending generation are identical to the terms in the Iroquois system, and parallel cousins are called *brother* and *sister*. The difference between Iroquois and Omaha is how cross cousins are treated. Omaha terminology has no term similar to English *cousin*. In addition, in Omaha terminology, a distinction is made between cross cousins on the mother's side (the children of mother's brother) and cross cousins on the father's side (the children of father's sister). Mother's brothers' daughters are called *mother*, and mother's brothers' sons are called *mother's brother*. Thus, Ego's maternal cross cousins are grouped with individuals in Ego's parents' generation. For Ego's paternal cross cousins, the term depends on Ego's sex. If Ego is a male, he calls his father's sisters' children *niece* and *nephew*. If Ego is a female, she calls her father's sisters' children *son* and *daughter*.

Why are there two separate terms for father's sisters' children, depending on the sex of Ego? This distinction is perfectly logical. Remember that kinship terms are reciprocal and that Figure 9.6 shows only the terms used by Ego. To understand why the sex of Ego is important in this relationship, ask: What would father's sisters' children call Ego? In Figure 9.6, you see that Ego is their mother's brother's child. Thus, if Ego is female, they would call her *mother*, and she would reciprocate by calling them *son* or *daughter*. If Ego is

male, they would call him *uncle*, and therefore he would call them *niece* or *nephew*.

There are other systems, but these four are the most common and widespread. This diversity is surprising, and some of the ways of classifying relatives are puzzling. Can we account for them?

### Why Do Terminologies Differ?

In previous chapters, we emphasized that cultures are integrated: one aspect "fits" with others and sometimes makes sense only when understood in context. Kinship terminology systems are an example of cultural integration.

First, notice that the four terminologies described can be separated into two types. In the Eskimo and Hawaiian, the side of the family does not matter in classifying relatives; in the Iroquois and Omaha, it does. Stated another way, among the diverse peoples who use the Eskimo or Hawaiian system, the principle of distinguishing relatives according to the side of Ego's family is irrelevant; they *could* recognize the distinction between mother's and father's kin, but they do not. Among the many cultures who use the Iroquois or Omaha system, the principle of distinguishing relatives according to family side *is* relevant. Why should the side of the family matter in some terminological systems but not in others?

As you've guessed, the side of the family matters in some terminologies because some people trace their descent through only one of their parents. The side of the family makes no difference in other systems because these populations trace their kin connections equally through both parents. *In general*—there are exceptions—the way a people trace their descent affects the relationships between kin, which affects the terms used to refer to various kin.

Consider the Eskimo classification. Contrasting to other terminologies, it differs in two main ways: (1) it

**omaha terminology** Kinship terminology system associated with patrilineal descent in which Ego's mother's relatives are distinguished only by their sex.



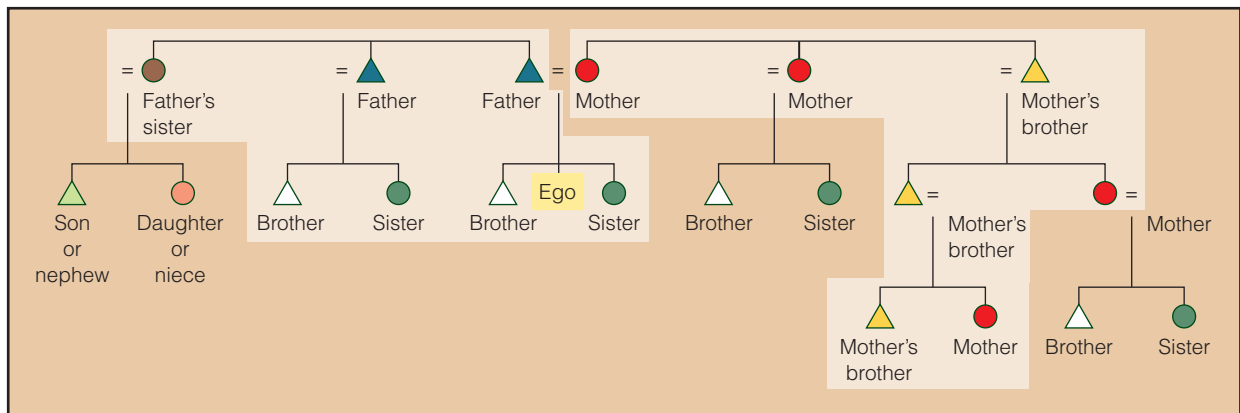


Figure 9.6 Omaha Kinship Terminology.

makes no distinctions between Ego's father's and mother's relatives, and (2) no other relatives of any kind are lumped together with nuclear family relatives. Assume that these two features mirror people's ideas about how various kin are related. We might conclude that people think (1) that both sides of the family are equally important to an individual (or, rather, there is no systematic *social pattern* of importance through one side over the other) and (2) that nuclear family relatives are somehow special and thought of differently than are other kinds of relatives. In the case of North America, our surnames are inherited mainly through males, but other than this, we are no more likely to have special relationships with our kin through our fathers than through our mothers. And, generally, the members of our nuclear families *are* special: we do not expect to inherit much, if anything, from other relatives; we usually do not live in extended households; kin groups larger than the nuclear family do not usually own property in common; and so on.

More generally, we expect the Eskimo classification of relatives to be associated with cognatic or bilateral kinship. And usually it is: about 80 percent of all societies that use the Eskimo terminological system have a nonunilineal kinship system. This is because neither side of the family is consistently emphasized, so people do not think of their mother's or father's relatives as being any different. The absence of a special relationship with kin through either parent is reflected in the terminology.

What about the Hawaiian system? As in the Eskimo system, family side is irrelevant. Logically, then, it ought to be associated consistently with cognatic or bilateral kinship. The fact that it lumps other relatives with nuclear family members seems to indicate that the

nuclear family is submerged or embedded in larger extended households. Ego should have important relationships with the siblings of his or her parents and with their children. Despite this logic, the Hawaiian terminology is not as consistently associated with cognatic or bilateral kinship as is the Eskimo terminology; in fact, about 40 percent of societies with the Hawaiian classification are unilineal. The Hawaiian system is apparently also compatible with unilineal descent.

And the Iroquois? Ego's father and father's brother are assigned a single term, which is different from mother's brother. Mother and mother's sister are given the same term, which is not the same term that Ego uses for father's sister. Thus, Ego distinguishes between maternal and paternal aunts and uncles in the first ascending generation. The fact that the side of the family matters in this generation seems to imply unilineal descent. And, the Iroquois system is usually found among peoples who trace their descent unilineally: about 80 percent of all Iroquois terminologies occur in unilineal descent forms. If you look back at Figure 9.5, you will see that Ego classes with his own brother and sister the children of relatives he classes with his mother and father. This certainly makes logical sense—if you call someone *mother*, it follows that you will call her son *brother*. The cross cousins have a separate term because their parents are not classed with Ego's own biological parents, which again is logically consistent.

The Omaha system carries the distinctions between the mother's and father's side “down” into Ego's own generation. If you compare Figures 9.5 and 9.6, you will see that the Omaha differs from the Iroquois by distinguishing cross cousins according to whether they are related to Ego through Ego's mother or father. Mother, mother's sister, and mother's brother's daughter are lumped

together, although they are members of different generations. Mother's brother and mother's brother's son likewise are lumped together under a single term.

What can explain this way of classifying relatives? The fact that these relatives are all related to Ego through Ego's mother must mean something, and the fact that they are classified together and distinguished only by their gender must be significant. Indeed, both these features are clues to the logic behind the Omaha terminology. It is found among peoples who use the patrilineal principle to form kin groups.

How does patrilineal descent make sense of the Omaha system? In Figure 9.6, we have lightened the background around those relatives in the diagram who belong to Ego's own patrilineal group. Notice that the cousins in Ego's group are called *brother* and *sister*, which reflects the social fact that they are in Ego's own lineage. We have also lightened the background of those relatives who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineal group. Notice that all the members of this latter group are assigned only two terms—one for the male members of the group and one for the female members of the group. The two terms have no English translation, but they mean roughly “female member of my mother's group” and “male member of my mother's group.” Their common *social identity* as members of Ego's mother's kin group overrides the *biological fact* that they are members of three generations. If you have followed the argument, you will agree that the Omaha system makes perfect sense, provided it is associated with patrilineal descent forms. And, indeed, more than 90 percent of all cultures that use the Omaha terminological system are patrilineal.

Another system, the Crow, is essentially the mirror image of the Omaha. You will not be surprised to learn that the Crow system is strongly associated with societies that have the matrilineal form of descent.

Thus, terminological systems make sense once we understand that they reflect the prevalent relationships and groupings produced by various ways of tracing kinship connections. The ways various people culturally construct and label their relatives reflect the social realities of their kinship system, though not perfectly. These ways look mysterious until we understand these classifications and labels in the context of the kinship systems that give rise to them. The Eskimo terminology used by Americans would probably look strange to people who use, say, the Omaha terminology. Our failure to distinguish between relatives through one's mother and father would be strange because to them these relatives are clearly differentiated, given the way their kinship systems place people in different kin groups.

The various peoples who use one or another of these kinship classification systems cannot state the logic of their classifications in the same way we just did. For instance, people who use the Omaha terminology cannot tell you why they label their relatives as they do because they lack a comparative perspective of their own kinship system. To them, their mother, mother's sister, and mother's brother's daughter are called by the same term because all these women are the same kind of relative, just as *aunts* are all the same kind of relative in some other cultures. They do not realize that in Eskimo systems these females all have separate terms; nor are they aware that their terminology reflects the groupings and relationships of their kinship system.

But then again, people who use the Eskimo system cannot account for our own classification system either until, of course, they become aware of the diversity in human kinship systems discovered in the past century by anthropologists. The way we classify kinfolk seems quite natural until we learn that other people do it differently.

## Summary

**1 Discuss why kinship relationships are important in forming groups and organizing activities in so many premodern cultures.** Many of the functions and activities organized by specialized groups in modernized, urbanized societies are organized by kinship groups in many premodern cultures. Kinship groups often organize economic, political, military, ritual, and other activities. Kinship ties also help form a person's social identity and determine social rank.

**2 Describe the two main forms of unilineal descent and the kinship groups that result from them.** Although kinship derives from biological relatedness, societies vary in their kinship systems. One variation is how people trace their relationships back to previous generations—in how they trace their *descent*. In unilineal descent, relationships traced only through one sex are emphasized. Unilineal descent groups may be formed using the matrilineal or patrilineal principle,

which yields kin groups composed of people related through females and males, respectively. In order of increasing inclusiveness and genealogical depth, the main kinds of descent groups are extended families, lineages, and clans. The avunculocal residence pattern is understandable once we realize that it consistently occurs in matrilineal cultures.

**3 Describe the two main forms of nonunilineal descent.** In cognatic descent, people trace their ancestry through both males and females. Cognatic descent groups exist that own common property and cooperate in various contexts. Individuals are able to join all the groups to which they can trace ancestry and can choose those groups with which they want to associate closely, as illustrated by the Samoan *'aiga*. People who trace their kinship relationships bilaterally have no kin groups larger than extended families because the kindreds of different individuals

overlap so much. Unlike unilineal descent, kindreds are ego-focused, and large numbers of Ego's relatives are likely to congregate only on certain occasions, such as weddings, funerals, and family reunions.

**4 Elaborate on the cultural construction of kinship, and explain the wider associations of four of the major terminological systems.** A people culturally construct their kinship systems by applying logical principles in diverse ways. This application produces several systems of kin terminology, of which we discuss four: Eskimo, Hawaiian, Iroquois, and Omaha. Generally speaking, the ideas people have about how they are related to one another are strongly influenced by how the descent form of their society sorts people into groups and establishes relationships of certain kinds between kinfolk.

## Media Resources

**The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center**  
[www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.





# 10

# ENCULTURATION AND THE LIFE COURSE



Children learn culture through both formal teaching and by learning social lessons through interacting with others.

While having a good time, these London girls also are learning social skills.

© Gideon Mendel/Corbis

## **Growing Up**

### **Diversity in Child Care**

### **Two African Examples**

*Aka*

*Gusii*

*Implications for Modern Parents*

## **Life Course**

*Infancy and Childhood*

*Adolescence*

*Rites of Passage*

*Adulthood*

*Old Age*



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Discuss** how cultures vary in their child-rearing and socialization practices, using the Aka and Gusii of Africa as examples.
- 2 **Describe** rites of passage and analyze why they are important in human societies.
- 3 **Elaborate** on some of the cross-cultural variations in the life stages of infancy/childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.
- 4 **Analyze** how cultures differ in their regard for and treatment of the elderly.

The development of a human being requires the social learning of culture. Because acquiring culture is necessary to make a complete, functioning individual, anthropologists are interested in *enculturation (socialization)*, the process by which newborns learn the cultural knowledge needed for physical survival, getting along with others, and interpreting the world around them (Chapter 2). Human groups vary in how they nourish, support, teach, and value children, as we shall see in this chapter.

As children mature, they pass through various stages of life: They move temporally through infancy to childhood, reach puberty, get married, eventually most become parents and—hopefully—grow old. Progress through these life phases brings new roles, privileges, and responsibilities, which vary from people to people. In all cultures, formal ceremonies called rites of passage mark and celebrate at least some of these changes in the life course. We also cover life course changes and their associated rites of passage in this chapter.



## Growing Up

Children learn how to think, feel, speak, and behave in the context of a social environment made up of other people and the cultural traditions they live by. Theoretically, children socialized in similar social environments should think, feel, and act in similar ways.

As most parents know, this is not always the case. Even within the same society or other cultural group—indeed, even within the same family—individuals can be remarkably different. They react differently to people, situations, occurrences, and circumstances. Often, we say individuals feel and act differently because they have different *personalities*, but in everyday speech this is just another way of saying that there is something

inside their heads that makes them feel and act the way they do. The interaction between an individual's biological makeup and total life experiences makes each person unique in some respects. This interaction must be incredibly complex because even identical twins raised in the same household are different, sometimes surprisingly so.

Cultural anthropologists have paid a lot of attention to how diverse peoples socialize children. Enculturation practices include many things. Here are some that have been proposed as important in shaping persons as they mature into adulthood:

- How infants are nursed, held, carried, weaned, and toilet trained
- How parents and other adults interact with children (e.g., with indulgence or discipline)
- The relative physical presence and participation of fathers in infancy and childhood
- The kinds of behaviors that are punished and rewarded
- How parents and other caretakers administer punishment and give rewards
- Methods of teaching kids the basic skills needed for success in their society
- The form of physical attention and love children receive from parents and other caretakers
- What kinds of work expectations adults place on children

It is important to note that variability always exists in how families interact with youngsters, even within a single cultural tradition. Nonetheless, by virtue of the fact that they were raised in the same culture, adults share many ideas and beliefs. These include factors such as norms about the best way to bring up children, values that they wish their kids to acquire, habits children should form, and patterns of thinking and feeling

that are likely to contribute to success. Within a single cultural tradition, parents may broadly agree on how to interact with toddlers, on the proper age and methods for nursing and weaning infants, on appropriate awards and punishments, and on other practices. For example, most North Americans agree that it is possible to “spoil” young children by indulging their every whim, whereas most Japanese mothers are less likely to worry about this. In contrast, most Japanese and South Korean mothers push their children toward high performance in education to a degree that most Westerners find stultifying to the development of a well-rounded person.

It is certainly true that norms, ideals, values, and other cultural knowledge about raising children affect parental behavior. It is equally true that child rearing is affected by factors other than parental *beliefs*. In some societies, families are subject to economic or social pressures that do not let them raise their children the way their ideals say they ought to be raised. For example, if men are frequently away on hunts, in wars, or on jobs, then fathers and other male relatives may not take as active a role in child care as women, and this will affect child rearing.

Today, many North American fathers want to be more involved in the care of their children, feeling that both they and their children will benefit from a close relationship. Most mothers, too, have to balance job and career against home and family. It used to be different in the old days, when fathers were breadwinning and moms were homemakers, right? No—circumstances constrain the actual child-rearing behavior of mothers, fathers, and other caretakers everywhere, not just in industrialized nations, as we shall see.



## Diversity in Child Care

A brief discussion of weaning and discipline methods illustrates some of the diversity in child-rearing beliefs and behaviors.

Cultures differ in their ideas about whether infants should be allowed to nurse whenever they desire or only at certain times. Mothers in many sub-Saharan African ethnic groups practice on-demand nursing, meaning that infants feed whenever they wish. There are culturally variable norms about the proper age of weaning and how it should be accomplished. Among the foraging Ju/’hoansi (see Chapter 6), it is common for a mother to breast-feed her children for four years, or even longer. How children are weaned from breast milk likewise varies: some people believe that infants

should be allowed to wean themselves, whereas other mothers coat their nipples with bitter substances to discourage nursing after a certain age. In some African societies, people believe that one or both children will be harmed if a mother becomes pregnant again before her previous baby has been weaned.

For example, the Chagga people, who live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro of Tanzania, believe that a woman should not become pregnant again while she is still nursing an infant. So, when she discovers she is pregnant, a mother quickly weans her child. According to Mary Howard and Ann Millard, this and other Chagga child-rearing practices interacted with global forces to affect child malnutrition (see the Globalization box).

Norms about disciplining children likewise vary. In some societies, people believe that physical punishment is an integral and necessary part of childhood discipline (as in the old saying “Spare the rod and spoil the child”). In others, correcting children’s behavior by slapping or beating them is rare (as in the modern view that physical punishments teach children that violence is acceptable behavior). Children may be indulged until they reach a certain age, after which they are punished severely for their misdeeds. On many Micronesian islands, an infant of either gender is caressed, fondled, and played with and is generally the center of interest of the whole family. Such indulgence and attention continue until a younger sibling is born; then attention shifts to the newborn and it takes the older child a while to adjust. In some cultures, adults threaten children with animals, ghosts, spirit beings, and the like (as in “the boogey man will get you if you act like that”).

Among the Hopi of Arizona, children are threatened by *kachinas*, or masked dancers impersonating spiritual beings whom Hopi believe live in the mountains to the west of their villages. When a Hopi child seriously misbehaves, parents often get someone to put on a costume (including a frightening mask) of a *kachina* believed to eat children. When the *kachina* tries to steal the child for misbehaving, the parents come to the child’s rescue. *Kachinas* also reward “deserving” children by passing out gifts of toys or food during their dances.

Numerous other differences in child-rearing norms and practices exist. Everywhere, the care of infants is entrusted almost entirely to mothers, but by the time children are walking, caretaking roles vary from people to people. In some places, parents do almost all the care of their toddlers, but elsewhere children aged 6 to 8 competently look after their 1- and 2-year-old siblings.

Fathers in many cultures are hardly involved with their children and, in fact, are absent much of the time, but in other cultures men are more equal partners in child care. Children's social interactions with adults vary widely as well—children are constantly fussed over among one people, left alone more to amuse themselves among others. On some islands of the Pacific, sisters and brothers associate freely until puberty, but after that they are supposed to avoid being alone together.



## Two African Examples

Rather than continue to generalize, as illustrations of differences in socialization we consider two African peoples in some detail: the Aka of the rain forest of central Africa and the Gusii of Kenya. Their comparison makes the point we mentioned earlier: how a people raise and enculturate their children depends on more than just their ideas and beliefs. Equally, or more important, it depends on the conditions of their wider society, such as economic and political conditions.

### Aka

The Aka are one of several short-statured (“pygmy”) groups who have lived in the African rain forest for centuries. Like other Pygmies, Aka are mainly foragers who exploit the natural products of the forest by a combination of hunting, fishing, collecting honey, and gathering fruits, roots, and leaves of plants. Although they do not plant gardens for themselves, for three or four months of each year the Aka trade with and work in the fields of their agricultural neighbors in exchange for manioc (cassava) and other cultivated foods. Most of the year, though, they live largely on the animals and plants of the forest.

Barry Hewlett, who studied the Aka in the 1970s and 1980s, reports that Aka parents are indulgent toward infants and children. Infants have physical contact with a parent or other caregiver most of the time. Mothers and fathers deal with infants' crying almost immediately. Whenever children wish, their mothers nurse them, and nursing continues until the child is 3 or 4 years old or until the mother becomes pregnant again. Infants sleep with their parents, as do other dependent children. Parents do not worry about spoiling their children or creating too much dependency. Children crawl and walk whenever they are ready; Aka do not believe children have to be systematically taught how to do such things.

After infants learn to walk and talk, they assume some tasks and responsibilities. Parents may ask them to gather firewood or fetch water, for example. But the Aka place great value on individual autonomy, even of children, so parents usually do not enforce their commands. Like parents in most groups, they may yell at their kids, but corporal punishment is rare—indeed, one parent striking an infant is reason for the other parent to ask for a divorce. By accompanying adults on their gathering and hunting trips, 7- or 8-year-old children learn the tasks needed to assume adult roles. Generally speaking, boys learn from their father and girls from their mother, but there is considerable overlap between the two.

Aka infants typically have many caregivers. As foragers, the people travel in small groups that average about 25 or 30 members. Most adults in the camp are relatives of the children. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and older siblings care for infants much of the time, actually holding them more often than their own mothers while they are resting in camp. Despite this pattern, caregiving is not “communal” because the mother and father are considered to have the main responsibility for nurturing and teaching children.

Aka fathers are heavily involved in the care of their infants and young children. On the basis of his detailed field study, Hewlett reports that the Aka have the highest degree of father participation and involvement in infant care of any known human group. Fathers of infants younger than 4 months old hold or carry their babies one-fifth of the time when they are in camp, even though the infants are dependent on their mothers for nourishment. Fathers also make it a point to be generally available to their infants and children. Far from the role of remote but respected disciplinarian found in many other cultures, Aka fathers are emotionally intimate with their babies. As a result, older children become attached to their father and report having as warm feelings toward him as toward their mother, Hewlett says.

The reasons a particular people raise and socialize their children in a particular way are complex. Is the main factor their worldview? Their values? How they make their living? Their family organization? All these and many other forces matter to different degrees among different peoples.

In the case of the Aka, how their bands are organized is one of the important factors. Married couples have their own sleeping huts, but the entire band of about a dozen families live in close proximity, with little domestic privacy. Both men and women are

The Chagga live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in the African nation of Tanzania. Once relatively prosperous because of their agricultural skills and the fertile soil on the mid-altitude lands of the mountain, in the 1970s and 1980s thousands of Chagga families became so poor that their children suffered from malnutrition and many died from hunger-related diseases.

Yet most of these poor families lived near relatives who were relatively affluent from wage labor in the service economy and from the coffee they produced and sold on global markets. Traditionally, Chagga norms called for people to help their needy relatives, and many did offer money and food. But others failed to provide adequate assistance. Health care and nutritional professionals who were supposed to help malnourished children usually blamed the parents—especially mothers—for the hunger of their children. Many of the professionals told mothers that they needed to learn how to feed their kids a balanced diet. Extended relatives of the parents often joined the experts in blaming parents. This made the parents ashamed of their poverty and of their “failure” to provide their children with enough food. How did this happen?

In their 1997 book, *Hunger and Shame*, Mary Howard and Ann Millard describe and analyze the relationships among child malnutrition, child care ideas and practices, and the global economy for the Chagga people. Superficially, the causes of childhood hunger were not hard to determine: in the 1970s, Tanzania was beset by a combination of drought, a disease of the coffee plant (the main cash crop, produced for export), a worldwide drop in coffee prices, and other external factors over which the Chagga themselves had no control.

Looking deeper, though, the causes are more complicated. The drought was widespread and hurt all farmers, but it hit some families much harder than others. At any rate, falling income from coffee production did not directly put children in danger. Indeed, to some extent, the land that Chagga had planted in coffee over the decades reduced the amount of land that could be used to produce food. But the Tanzanian government had a policy of increasing exports and made it illegal to uproot coffee trees, even if the land was replanted with food crops in a time of decreasing prices for coffee. Population growth in the twentieth century reduced the amount of land available per person, and over time competitive pressures left some families landless or nearly so. These families had little choice but to try to support themselves by wage

labor, but there were many of them and few jobs, so wages were low on the few coffee plantations and in the local Catholic missions. Population growth meant that the land available to Chagga had to support more people even as more and more land was planted in coffee and the income earned from coffee exports was falling. No wonder some families were unable to make a living and became impoverished.

But why did people blame poor Chagga parents for the malnutrition of their children? The answer lies in the interrelationships among the breakdown of old political and social relationships, the incorporation into the global economy, and Chagga child care ideas and practices, plus some influences of the Catholic Church.

In earlier years, Chagga had hereditary chiefs who collected tribute but also had responsibilities to care for the poor through redistribution (see Chapter 7). The wealth of chiefs and other persons was mainly in cattle, cloth, beads, and a few other items. Families of different social ranks could and did accumulate these valuables, but accumulation was limited by mutual obligations. One responsibility of chiefs was to care for the needs of the poor through hospitality, use of lands, and redistribution of food. Wealthy commoners needed the labor of their less-well-off relatives to help care for their cattle and work their land. There was economic inequality, but it was balanced by obligations of redistribution and reciprocity.

Unlike cattle, money can be accumulated in unlimited amounts. Unlike cattle, it can be hidden away out of sight of needy kinfolk. Moreover, money can buy labor on the impersonal market, so when the cash portion of the economy grew large enough, old mutual reciprocal obligations broke down as more and more people looked outside their local community for their economic welfare and security. Many Chagga poor no longer had the traditional social safety net to fall into when times got tough because of weather or markets. There was still a sense of duty toward poorer relatives, but generally assistance would be offered once and not again.

Like many other East African peoples, for Chagga the ideal interval between births was two to four years, so most women tried not to have another baby until their last-born child was two to four years old. There were spiritual beliefs about the relationship between an infant and a child still in her or his mother’s womb. Mothers were not supposed to become pregnant until they had weaned their infants. If they did, then the unborn baby or its deceased patrilineal ancestors

needed to get food for the family, and in fact mothers and fathers contribute about equal amounts to the daily food supply. Cooperation beyond the range of the nuclear family is essential. Often the entire band,

including women and men, cooperate in hunting with nets. From the child’s perspective, both the mother’s and the father’s sides of the family are about equally important. There is almost no difference in access to



would cause the older child to become sick and possibly die. The birth interval had the useful consequence of reducing the rate of overall population growth. It also meant that a couple would not have too many young mouths to feed or to compete for mother's breast milk. Birth spacing occurred by means of reducing the amount of sexual intercourse between husbands and their wives who were still nursing their babies. But by the middle of the twentieth century, efforts to space births increasingly were ineffective. There were several reasons for this, but one was Catholic teachings that all birth-control methods except the rhythm method were sinful, which, one woman said, "did not work when her husband was drunk" (Howard and Millard 1997, 122).

Chagga believed that the symptom of childhood illness caused by babies born too close together was swelling of the belly. This symptom actually is the medical condition called *kwashiorkor*, or protein-calorie undernutrition; that is, not enough food. Well-off Chagga, including even the relatives of couples with sick, hungry children, often blamed the parents' sexual activity for improper birth spacing, thus shaming them in the eyes of the community.

Likewise, when families of hungry children sought help at a government-funded clinic, the medical staff usually thought the problem was the mothers' lack of education about the proper foods to feed their children. For example, the flyer that announced the opening of the clinic contained statements like these:

1. If [the mother] prepares the right food for the child and if the child eats enough of this good food, he will be a healthy child again.
2. The mother must *learn* exactly what good food is, how to prepare it and how to give it to the child.
3. [At the clinic] the mother is therefore shown in detail how to cook good food. She will learn what kind of food that [*sic*] is good for building the child's body strength. She will also learn what kinds of foods give energy and which foods protect the body from certain diseases.
4. The mother will be shown how much to take of each kind of food, how to mix the food and how to cook it. She will also be told how often the child needs food....
5. If the mother has been through all the lectures and knows well how to cook and care for her child, she will get a certificate at the end of her training. She can bring this home to show to her family and it will remind her of the

weeks she has spent at the unit treating her own child. We hope she will feel happy. (Howard and Millard 1997, 184–185)

Obviously, the medical professionals felt that a Chagga mother who visited it did not know how to feed the proper food, in the proper mixture, in the proper amounts to her undernourished children. Once she had become educated, she would be given a certificate to take home to show that she recognized her earlier mistakes. The shame that she and her husband felt over their failures would be made even more public. This was supposed to make her feel "happy."

But most Chagga women know, as they have always known, how to feed their children. Their "techniques," their "backwardness," their "lack of education" were not to blame. Their lack of access to resources was the main problem. "Without money, what can we do?" one Chagga woman asked (Howard and Millard 1997, 187). And resource shortages were due largely to factors outside the control of families, including the drought, past population growth, and how these factors related to the global market for coffee, the world price of which fluctuates notoriously.

There are wider lessons in the story of the Chagga's hungry children. When we see or hear of poverty, hunger, or—for that matter—homelessness in the United States, it is too easy to blame such problems on the personal characteristics of individuals. If children are hungry, it is the fault of their lazy, ignorant, uncaring, and/or abusive parents. If someone is homeless, it is because of the person's drug/alcohol abuse, unwillingness to get a job, lack of education, mental condition, or some other aspect of the person him/herself. Are we wrong? Not necessarily, but problems like hunger and homelessness are rooted in social and economic conditions as much as in choices individuals make. The "choices" made under conditions of deprivation may be merely ways of coping with these conditions. Sometimes, at least, we act like those Chagga whose cultural assumptions led the parents of undernourished children to feel shame.

### Critical Thinking Question

1. Chagga cultural beliefs and practices interacted with forces from the global market to affect families in different ways. Can you think of other ways "inside forces" might interact with "outside forces" to affect local communities?

SOURCE: Howard and Millard (1997)

valued resources within an Aka band. Sharing is so ingrained as a norm that Hewlett calls it "demand sharing," meaning that an individual will give up an object

if someone else asks for it. Finally, like the Ju/'hoansi, who have the custom called "insulting the meat," the Aka avoid showing off. No one brags about his or her



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Compared to most other peoples, Pygmy fathers are heavily involved in the care of infants and young children.

accomplishments or skills, and, in fact, a man who shows a tendency to flaunt his talents may find other men and women putting him in his place by joking about the shape and size of his genitals.

### Gusii

The Gusii's child-care beliefs and behaviors contrast with those of the Aka. The million or so Gusii live in the highlands of southwest Kenya. Unlike the hunting and gathering Aka, the Gusii traditionally made their living by growing crops and herding livestock (cattle, sheep, and goats). In recent times, many Gusii men began working for a wage. Women now improve their own economic welfare by selling grain at local markets. Robert A. LeVine, Suzanne Dixon, Sara LeVine, and their collaborators studied infant and child care among the Gusii for a period of 17 months in the 1970s. Their 1994 book, *Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa*, focuses especially on children from birth until about 30 months of age.

Gusii care of infants and small children differs both from the Aka and the practices familiar to most Westerners. Most North Americans observing Gusii mothers interacting with infants would find the mothers very attentive to their children in some respects, but lacking in other maternal qualities considered essential or desirable for childhood development in Europe, Canada, or the United States.

In providing for the physical needs of their infants, Gusii mothers are diligent. Infants are rarely allowed to cry for more than a moment before the mother nurses or soothes them. This is easy for a mother because she and her baby are in nearly constant contact—mothers carry infants with them almost everywhere, either in their arms or tied into a sling on their back. Even when a woman is working in her garden, her baby is on her back or on a mat beside her. Infants sleep with their mother every night because on-demand nursing is customary and no decent mother would fail to nurse her demanding child during the night. A mother continues to nurse her child for the first 16 to 20 months, with no

fear of making the baby too dependent on herself. Aside from nursing and comforting, mothers are careful that their children avoid physical danger, such as fires and animals.

On the other hand, a Westerner might feel that the Gusii mother–infant relationship is deficient in intellectual stimulation and emotional attachment. Gusii think that a mother can take good care of her baby without engaging in much “baby talk,” playful interaction, and frequent affectionate touches and loving caresses. Crying babies are always calmed, but intellectual stimulation, smiles, and excitement are not important goals of the mother during infancy. Language development, too, does not seem high on a Gusii mother’s priorities: when babies “babble,” mothers do not encourage it with baby talk of their own, but tend to avert their gaze to avoid exciting the infant.

After an infant has grown into a toddler, mothers ease off in their attention. A Gusii woman, after all, has a lot of work to do. There are fields to plant and weed, grain to harvest, meals to cook, and firewood to gather. There are likely to be other children to attend to, since most women bear several children during their lifetime. After the phase of high physical dependency has passed in the life of her child, a mother resumes her full workload in the house and garden. When she is away, the 1- to 2-year-old child is left behind in the care of older siblings, some of whom are only 5 or 6 years old themselves.

Westerners might consider such “day care” under the supervision of children a kind of parental neglect, but it is normal in Gusii families and in most other parts of Africa. Older sisters are responsible for much socialization. They assist their younger siblings in language, work skills, and social development.

A Gusii woman in her 30s or 40s typically has several children. Soon after childbirth, the mother resumes garden work and other physical labor. As her children grow up, more of her time is spent managing their activities and supervising their work. For the most part, she issues commands and assigns tasks, which children are expected to complete—although actual task completion varies a lot. Mothers seldom give detailed instructions or show their youngsters how to do something, although their older siblings do. Nor do mothers provide much encouragement or praise for a task well done. Mothers who praise their kids are felt to be encouraging selfishness, disobedience, and overly large egos. Apparently, the development of their children’s self-esteem and self-confidence is not high on a Gusii mother’s priority list. She becomes a more

authoritarian presence as her children grow up, although she remains diligent in supplying them with food.

By the time they are in their early teens, most daughters will marry and move in with their new husband. When boys become strong and responsible enough by the teen years, they join other young men at the cattle camps—small roaming groups of young males that tend and protect cattle. When sons marry in their twenties, most bring their wives to live with them near their mother. Sons thus are a woman’s primary support in old age.

So far, we have said nothing about Gusii fathers. This is because most Gusii men are barely involved in caring for their children, even infants. The Gusii and Aka live only about 1,200 miles away from each other on the African continent. But in the degree of father involvement, the two peoples are worlds apart. To understand the difference between their child-care practices, we must consider additional facts about the Gusii way of life. We must understand Aka and Gusii child care holistically, in the total context of the way the two peoples live.

The most relevant facts are these: The Gusii are a patrilineal, polygynous, patrilocal, decentralized tribal people with high fertility and child mortality rates. How does this context affect Gusii child rearing?

Because of patrilineal descent, a male inherits most of his land and livestock from his father and father’s father. Men are clearly the heads of Gusii extended family units or homesteads. Normatively speaking, a wife obeys her husband, but she often responds to his demands by assigning tasks and responsibilities to her children. Family life, then, is fairly hierarchical and authoritarian, compared to that of the Aka (and to that of most Western nations, at least in modern times).

Polygyny is much less common today, but in the 1950s about 60 percent of Gusii women were co-wives. Which men have more than one wife? Basically, those who can come up with the resources (in livestock, mainly cattle) to pay the bridewealth for several wives. Accumulating so many livestock takes time, so it is mainly older men who can afford to be polygynous. Most men’s first marriage is in their early twenties, but most women marry much younger.

A Gusii wife lives on the family lands of her husband. In fact, by the time they are in their early teens, most daughters have married and moved in with their new husband. A polygynous man has an obligation to provide each wife with a separate dwelling for her and her children, with garden land and a few livestock for milk. The mini-household where a wife-mother lives



with her own children is called by a term that translates as “house,” indicating that it is culturally regarded as semi-independent from the larger, polygynously extended household. Generally, wives provide for their own offspring, although co-wives may help one another and share some tasks.

*Decentralized tribal people* means that Gusii have no formal chiefs or other kind of political authority that issues commands, settles disputes, or prevents warfare among Gusii themselves or between Gusii and neighboring tribes. Defense is up to the younger men of the settlement, so they must be available and willing to fight to defend themselves, their families, their livestock, and their local community against attack. Being a willing warrior was a valued male role. Any group whose men did not fight back and retaliate would be considered weak and would be repeatedly attacked and have its livestock stolen.

Because of high fertility an average woman has eight or nine children between her marriage in her teens and menopause. For most of her reproductive life, she is pregnant, nursing, or looking after young children. Indeed, she expects to become pregnant again soon after she has weaned her last infant. If her husband doesn't visit her often enough, she may even demand one of her rights as a wife—that her husband impregnate her.

*High child mortality* means that many children die during their first two years of life. About 1 in 10 babies dies before the age of 2. If a baby survives the first year or two, the mother considers it to be relatively safe. Most who survive the first couple of years grow into adulthood, although in olden times, young male lives were at risk from violent clashes.

These factors interact in complex ways, but here the key point is to understand how Gusii care of infants and children makes sense in light of the overall context of Gusii life.

Why are Gusii families so large? The short answer is that children are “culturally valued.” Although this is true, there are good reasons for Gusii to value having lots of children. A man prefers to have several wives because he wants his wives and their future children to work the land and tend the livestock that are his main forms of material wealth and the main source of economic security for himself and his relatives. His sons will tend his animals when they grow up and protect them from theft, while his daughters will bring in additional livestock from the bridewealth he receives when they marry. He wants his patrilineal family line to endure and prosper in future generations, for which

large numbers of sons are useful. When a man dies, he wants his sons to bury him—an important custom in the Gusii worldview—and his later descendants to pay homage to his memory. A man also enhances his status and reputation by having several wives and many children.

As for a woman, she also wants many children to assist her with her work and to help her meet her husband's demands. Further, because a woman lives on her husband's land, she finds that having many sons is economically beneficial in her old age: her daughters marry and move out, but her sons bring their wives near where she lives to help her with her work and provide her with food. Also, because child mortality rates were so high (though they have declined in recent decades), a woman needs to have several children to make sure she has enough surviving sons. If a woman is a co-wife, it is useful for her to have many sons to help protect her interests against her husband's other wives, who are in some ways rivals.

In sum, Gusii parents do value large families, but the value they place on children is sensible and rational to both mothers and fathers, given the way Gusii live.

Why are Gusii mothers so attentive to their infant's physical needs, yet leave their toddlers in the care of their older children? Because so many children die before the age of 2, the main goal of a mother for her infant is simple survival, not providing a warm and nurturing social environment to improve the child's intellectual and emotional development. For those women who have been married long enough to have several children, spaced two to four years apart, older siblings are available to look after toddlers. It is good training for their own parenting skills, and LeVine and his colleagues believe that the toddler has few problems. Assuredly, in a culture such as Gusii, it is not a form of child neglect, as it would be considered in North America.

Why are Gusii fathers hardly involved in child care, in sharp contrast to Aka fathers? There are several reasons:

- Aka mothers and fathers regularly work together to acquire food by cooperative net hunting. Gusii couples rarely work together. This allows Aka fathers to be more continuously available to their infants.
- Aka couples live in the same hut along with their children. If married to a polygynous man, a Gusii wife has her own house and semi-independent household, and the husband-father does not live with her on a permanent basis.





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In Africa and on other continents, young children frequently assist with the child care of their younger siblings, as this Baggara girl of Sudan is doing with her baby sister.

- Among the foraging Aka, wild resources are not privately owned. In contrast, some Gusii men have more land and livestock than others. Their land can be worked and their herds increased by having a lot of dependents—that is, wives and children. So the most successful Gusii men have several wives and too many children to be as attentive as Aka fathers.
- Aka share objects and food widely and almost daily within the band, whereas Gusii men gain social advantages by engaging in balanced reciprocity with other men to make advantageous alliances. Exchanging and feasting take a lot of organizing. Children benefit from their father's success, especially when it is time to inherit his wealth, but organizing exchanges and feasts reduces his contact with them.
- Aka do occasionally have physical fights with one another, but they have no true enemies against

whom they must mobilize for defense. Gusii have land and livestock that are sometimes coveted by other Gusii as well as by other tribes, so they have to be ready and able to defend themselves from attack and theft. This takes time and energy away from fathering.

Some readers may conclude that Aka men are “better fathers” than Gusii men. But this view ignores the different ways of life of the two peoples. Good Gusii fathers look after the welfare of their children in their own customary and culturally appropriate way. They provide their wives with land, livestock, a house site, and other resources to support herself and their children. When their sons are ready to marry, Gusii fathers give them an adequate inheritance and assistance with bridewealth. They provide all their family dependents with protection from enemies. Good Gusii fathers try to increase the size of their herds so that their sons will inherit more animals and thus have better chances to succeed in life. All this is facilitated by having a large family and political connections and alliances, and maintaining such connections and alliances consumes much of a Gusii man's time.

### Implications for Modern Parents

Aka and Gusii children are brought up in different cultural worlds. Different kinds of knowledge and personal qualities are needed for success, so naturally child-care and enculturation practices are not the same. Notice also that the different degrees of paternal care among the two peoples are not *simply* determined by their ideas and beliefs about the proper way to care for and teach children.

Consider Gusii fathers, for example. Surely some fathers wish they could remain physically and emotionally close to their children. But protecting their property, providing an adequate inheritance for their sons, and achieving success in the wider society do not allow them to achieve their ideal parenting goals. A Gusii father's circumstances—the conditions to which he must adjust his fathering behavior—do not allow him to act as he wishes.

Likewise, many factors affect how a Gusii mother relates to her children. She has ideas and beliefs about the proper way to treat and teach her children. She acquired these ideas in her own childhood and from a lifetime of talk, observation, and other kinds of social learning. But she also encounters circumstances and conditions as she lives her own life and tries to be a



## Life Course

good mother. These are external factors or constraints that affect a mother's actual child-care behavior (see Chapter 2 on the relationship between cultural knowledge and behavior).

A mother's beliefs and circumstances both affect how she raises her children. Because of her *beliefs*, she thinks certain ways are better than others. Because of her *circumstances*, she finds certain behaviors to be necessary or more feasible than others. The mother may prefer to remain as attentive to her 2-year-old child as she is to her newborn, but her circumstances do not allow this: she has obligations to her husband, to other relatives, and to her older children, so she cannot always do what she prefers.

The wider message is that economic, social, and political factors beyond the control of parents and other caretakers are *universally* important influences on how parents rear their children. Many employed parents in twenty-first century industrial nations bemoan their inability to spend as much time with their children as they believe is necessary for their children's emotional well-being or intellectual development. To make up for the hours spent on the job instead of at home with the kids, modern parents believe in devoting "quality time" to their children. The implication is that in the past, no one had to worry about such things.

But parents everywhere have to cope with conditions that affect how they rear children. Societies have adjusted to these conditions, they have readjusted as these conditions have changed, and they will continue to adjust. Thus far in the United States, working parents themselves have had to make the most of the familial rearrangements needed to find child care. Although this is changing, most employers still do not offer on-site day care or help parents through flexible work scheduling. Given all the emphasis on family values in the United States, perhaps it is time for more employers to find new ways of accommodating the child-care needs of their employees. Maybe those politicians who talk so much about family values can encourage them.

**life course** The changes in expected activities, roles, rights and obligations, and social relationships individuals experience as they move through culturally defined age categories.

**rite of passage** A public ceremony or ritual recognizing and making a transition from one group or status to another.

A person's **life course** consists of the culturally defined age categories through which he or she passes between birth and death. It includes stages such as infancy, childhood, sexual maturation (puberty and subsequent adolescence), adulthood, and old age. At specific ages, a particular person will be a member of one of these age categories, whereas at other times, she or he is in between the various categories and stages of life.

Individuals everywhere go through changes that are biologically similar, but how people define and treat changes in the life course varies. A Gusii female, for example, passes through the following culturally defined age categories: infant, uncircumcised girl, circumcised girl, married woman, female elder. At each age level, certain events should happen in a female's life, and she is concerned if the events do not happen within the appropriate time frame. Thus, to become a "female elder," a woman must have children who are married, which leads some women to worry about having enough children and whether their sons and daughters will marry early enough.

Cultures vary in the number of categories they recognize, the sharpness with which they define the categories, the importance of the categories relative to other distinctions such as sex, and the roles members of the category are expected to adopt.

Transitions between life stages may take place gradually and not receive any special notice. In all cultures, though, transitions between at least some stages of life are sharply and formally defined by a rite of passage. A **rite of passage** is a public ceremony that marks, recognizes, celebrates, or is believed to actually cause a change in a person and her or his status, usually brought about or related to increasing age. Examples of rites of passage that most North Americans experience include birth ceremonies, birthday celebrations, graduation ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Other familiar rites of passage are baptisms, bar and bat mitzvahs, baby and wedding showers, and installations of officials (inaugurations). All of us enjoy (or endure) such rituals that mark new stages of our lives, but, as we shall see, some human groups "ritualize" certain kinds of transitions to extraordinary degrees.

Physical changes are visible evidence of some life course transitions, such as puberty and, in a few cultures, menopause. Here again, physical and biological markers of maturation and aging are interpreted differently and given cultural meaning in a host of ways. Stages in the life course are intertwined with physical



Stage	Some Cross-Cultural Variations
Infancy	Whether “human status” begins at or after birth; timing and significance of giving names to infants
Childhood	Assigning domestic and subsistence work responsibilities; degree to which boys and girls are separated
Adolescence	Responsibilities and privileges relative to adults; presence, elaboration, and symbolic meanings of initiation rituals
Adulthood	Defined by chronological age or by life events and experiences
Old Age	Amount of respect received from younger people; degree of control over family resources; provisions made for support

maturity, but in many cultures, an individual does not pass through a certain stage until something has happened to him or her. A person may not become an “adult” with all the rights and responsibilities the culture associates with “adulthood” until the person has married, for example. In many cultures, an initiation ritual is necessary to make a boy into a man or a girl into a woman. People do not grow up on the basis of physical changes alone. Maturation is a cultural as well as a biological process, so details of the life course vary from people to people. (The Concept Review provides a brief overview of a few of these variations.)

As individuals move through the stages of their lives, their overall role in society changes. Here, we consider four stages that all peoples recognize to greater or lesser degrees: infancy and childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. These stages serve as a convenient way to organize our discussion of the life course, but it is important to recognize that cultures vary in how they conceive of these stages and in how transitions from one to another are recognized and marked.

### Infancy and Childhood

It seems obvious that infancy begins at birth. But actually the life stage of infancy is complex because peoples differ in their beliefs about when life begins. “Infant” is a culturally defined category of person in addition to being a physiological stage of physical and mental development. For example, does one become a human being at the time of conception, at some later phase in the mother’s pregnancy, at birth, or at some time after birth?

Anthropologists often use the phrases *social birth* and *social person* to recognize that not all newborns are viewed as completely human in some cultures. There are important consequences of beliefs about

when human status is attained. Parents and families may not mourn the death of a newborn who they do not believe is yet fully human. In the wider society, an individual may not be granted legal protection until he or she is culturally considered a living human being. The American legal system has struggled with this issue for years. People of different religious beliefs, ethnic affiliations, and political persuasions do not agree on when human life begins: at the time of conception, late in pregnancy, or at birth itself. Among the Cheyenne of the American Great Plains, children in the womb were thought to be completely human and were accorded legal protection. A woman who aborted her child was considered a murderer. She might be banished for a while because taking a life polluted the whole group.

In some other cultures, though, even birth itself does not automatically confer the rights that come with human status. Where infant mortality rates are high, sometimes it is too painful for mothers and fathers to become emotionally attached to newborns. Northeast Brazil is one of the poorest regions of the Americas. Here many children are born into matrifocal families, and many mothers are unable to care adequately for some of their babies. To become social persons, babies must exhibit signs that they are likely to survive. Infants who are small and weak, who do not nurse vigorously, and who are frequently ill are believed to “want to die” and to become angels who fly up to heaven. There is little ceremony at their burial, their graves are unmarked, and the mother does not show much grief. (If a mother weeps, her tears dampen the wings of the little angel, so he or she cannot fly to heaven.) Nancy Sheper-Hughes, who worked among these women, sees the mothers’ reaction as a response to their desperate circumstances: financially and emotionally, women cannot afford to invest in babies who probably will not live.



In most cultures, an infant receives a name soon after birth. The act of assigning a name to a child is one symbol that she or he is recognized as a social person. The formal naming of a child is sometimes the first rite of passage. For the Osage, a matrilineal Native American people now living in Oklahoma, the naming rite bestowed human status on the individual. Osage parents often waited several months—in the case of a sickly child, possibly more than a year—before naming a child. A child who died before acquiring a name was quietly buried, and the family did not have to observe a year of mourning. After they were convinced the infant was going to survive, parents began to prepare for a naming ritual. A ritual specialist called a “little-old-man” from the child’s father’s clan organized and directed the ceremony. Little-old-men representing all 24 Osage matriclans gathered in a ritual lodge to hold the ceremony. Each little-old-man recited a long prayer asking God’s blessing for the child. After all clan prayers were recited, the child was handed to each of the little-old-men, who in turn blessed the child with water, cedar, corn, and other symbolic substances. Then the baby was given a name belonging to the child’s clan by the leader of the ceremony, which symbolized the acceptance of the child as a member of a particular clan. The ritual participation of members of the other 23 clans indicated the acceptance of the child as an Osage. Only after the naming ritual did Osage infancy truly begin.

In some Micronesian islands, the parents organize a large party and feast for their children on their first birthday. They invite their extended family, who bring small gifts for the child and who enjoy the food provided by the parents. Other birthdays are celebrated with much smaller events, if at all. The child is too young to be aware of the proceedings, so the events socially recognize the relationships that exist between family members and—at least in the modern era—provide parents with an occasion to live up to their obligations to extended kin, display their generosity, and gain prestige.

At some point, infants begin to toddle around, stop nursing, learn the proper places and techniques for eliminating their bodily wastes, speak long sentences, and so forth. Such events usually mark the passage into childhood, the period when people begin to acquire technical and mechanical skills. In most societies, learning technical skills begins early by Western standards, by about age 5 or 6. Simple tasks not demanding great strength are done even earlier—3-year-olds may sweep the house, feed the animals, wash the baby, pick

up in the yard, run errands, deliver messages, and so forth.

In industrial societies, much technical learning takes place in schools, where trained specialists provide instruction in the skills needed to succeed in life. Among many preindustrial peoples, children learn most skills informally by watching and imitating adults and following their instructions. For example, among the Navajo of New Mexico and Arizona, 6- and 7-year-old boys and girls begin helping with the herds of sheep and goats. While Navajo boys learn the technical skills needed by men, girls learn the skills of women, helping their mothers prepare wool for weaving, grinding corn, making clothing, and caring for their younger brothers and sisters.

## Adolescence

Most people experience physiological puberty between ages 12 and 16. In most societies, sexual maturation alone does not convey full adult status, with all its rights and responsibilities. Biologically determined sexual maturation usually precedes culturally defined social maturation, especially for males.

This intermediate stage of transition from childhood to adulthood is what we call *adolescence*. An earlier generation of anthropologists debated whether all peoples culturally recognized a stage of life comparable to adolescence: Do some peoples go directly from childhood to adulthood, with no transition period for training in fully adult roles and for achieving emotional maturity? Certainly, not all peoples have a word for adolescence in their language. Certainly, too, in many societies, girls are married before or very shortly after their first menstruation and so early on assume the role of wife. But neither of these facts means that adolescence is absent as a cultural concept, though its length may be short and its importance slight.

For males in many cultures, adolescence is a period when they prove their worth and establish their reputation. Among the Cheyenne and some other Plains Indians, older adolescent boys were expected to join war parties and to be daring and aggressive warriors and raiders. Along with adult males, they were expected to take part in hunts and help supply food for their family. In societies in which warfare is a serious concern, adolescence is frequently a period in which young male associations take part in defending a group’s land and livestock against aggressors. By being vigorous and fierce in warfare, a young man could establish a reputation that might endure for the rest of his life.



Some of these Micronesian boys are nearing adolescence. Will their teen years be filled with the same emotional responses as those of American adolescents?



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On the Micronesian island of Chuuk (formerly Truk), most young men in their late teens and early twenties get intoxicated on alcoholic beverages. There is almost no “social drinking”; men drink mainly to get drunk. Chuukese say that a drunken man loses control of himself and goes out of his head “like a sardine” (which come headless in cans). While out of his senses, a man usually acts fierce and often picks fights with other young men. More seriously, he may physically attack a close relative, which ordinarily is normatively forbidden. Mac Marshall, who worked among the people of Chuuk, believes that drunkenness is a *role* most young men adopt. While in the role of a drunk, they get away with actions that ordinarily are not allowed. This phase of their life course proves their manhood—they are fierce, they won’t back down, they are someone to be respected. But the role of drunk is a temporary phase for almost all males. Once they have children, almost all men soon become responsible adults, joining the Catholic or Protestant church and giving up the role of drunk. Those who continue to drink into adulthood are stigmatized.

As many North American parents know, adolescence is often a difficult stage of life, filled with experimentation, rebellion against parental authority, mood swings, and the like. Some researchers attribute the problems that arise during this period primarily to physiological changes, but others consider cultural factors to be the major causes. In the 1920s, Margaret Mead

examined adolescence in a Pacific culture in her classic study, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Mead found that adolescence was not a particularly traumatic time in the life of Samoan girls. She argued that the problems Americans associated with adolescence were the result of cultural factors, not physiological changes. In 1983, Derek Freeman challenged Mead’s findings in his book, *Margaret Mead in Samoa*, arguing that Samoan adolescents have about as much trouble and conflict as do American teenagers. He went on to suggest that the physiological changes that occur during adolescence have similar effects among all peoples, so this stage of the life course is always stressful no matter what the cultural context. Most anthropologists of today agree that even if physiological changes create problems for adolescents everywhere, these problems are manifested in various ways, depending on the cultural context.

### Rites of Passage

How individuals become adults and gain adult rights and responsibilities varies. In the United States, the transition to the adult stage of life is marked by rites of passage such as graduation ceremonies: one leaves the status of “student” and (parents hope) becomes an independent, wage-earning adult.

Building on the early twentieth century ideas of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner pioneered the modern study of rites of passage. In his study of male

initiation rites among the Ndembu of Zambia, Turner noted that most rites have three phases: separation, liminality (transition), and incorporation. The phases are revealed by common cultural themes and behaviors involved in male initiation rituals. The boys are often forcibly taken away from where they live, which represents a rite of separation from their houses and their mothers, and from their previous role as “children” or “boys.”

Turner noted that, once separated from their former homes and roles, boys go through a liminal phase. Typically, they are secluded and subjected to tests of their ability to endure pain without crying out. The rituals themselves frequently include beatings, genital operations, intimidation by threats and frightening stories, social seclusion, fasting, going without water, and so forth. Scarification of face and body is common because it is a visible symbol that a male has gone through the proceedings and is entitled to the privileges of manhood. These pains and traumas are usually considered necessary to strengthen the boys and prepare them for the rigors of adulthood. Such ordeals indelibly mark the transition from boy to man in the minds and usually the bodies of the males.

Turner also pointed out that a simple social structure usually characterizes the liminal period: to symbolize their equal status, the boys are typically stripped of all possessions, their faces or bodies are painted in an identical way, they are dressed alike, and their heads are shaved. All these actions make them look alike and emphasize their common identity and subordination to the elders in charge of the proceedings. (Incidentally, notice that some of these practices are similar to those that new recruits in modern militaries experience during the early weeks of their training, when they too are in the liminal phase of “no longer civilians, not yet full soldiers.”)

After their common experience, the youths are reincorporated into the group, usually with new rights and responsibilities. Sometimes, they become eligible to be married or betrothed. They may dress differently or wear new jewelry. Often, the initiation ritual marks their independence from their mother, symbolized by a change in residence. Details vary, but the youths are brought back into normal social life as new persons.

**initiation rite** A rite held to mark the transition, usually to sexual maturity, of an individual or a group of individuals of the same sex.

In many societies, the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by an elaborate set of rites of passage called **initiation rite**. Initiation rites often occur around puberty, so sometimes they are called *puberty rites*, although they do far more than simply mark a person’s sexual maturation. During many rituals, the initiates are educated in the intricate responsibilities of adulthood. Elders tell them about the changes that will soon be expected in their behavior and often share ritual secrets.

Some societies have initiation rituals for males only, others for females only, and still others for both sexes. But even those societies that hold initiation rites for both males and females almost always have separate ceremonies for each sex. This generalization suggests that an important function of initiation rituals is to incorporate children not just into adulthood but also into the adult responsibilities culturally appropriate for their sex (see Chapter 11). In fact, the most common theme of initiation rituals is to make girls into women and boys into men.

#### *Male Initiation Rituals: Highland New Guinea*

The interior highlands of the island of New Guinea is one place where male initiation rituals are especially elaborate and lengthy. In many highland cultures, people believe that females can pollute males. In their worldview, a woman’s body contains substances that endanger a man’s health unless preventive measures are taken. Above all else, men fear contact with women’s menstrual discharges, which they believe can cause them to sicken and die. Because of such beliefs, among many New Guinea peoples, women must remain in seclusion during their menstrual periods, either in a menstrual hut away from the main settlement or in a special place in their house, which men never enter.

These pollution beliefs have many implications for women’s lives. Women must take precautions to avoid accidentally causing injury to their husbands by polluting the food they serve. In some New Guinea societies, women and men travel on separate paths, lest a man unknowingly step on a female secretion and become polluted. Women have to suffer through having their young sons taken away from them by force because, according to beliefs, continued association with their sons endangers the boys once they reach a certain age.

Finally, it is common for husbands and wives to live in separate dwellings. A man’s wife or wives have their own house, where they live with their children. The husband lives in a separate men’s house, together

with all the older boys and men of the hamlet or village. By the time they are around 10, boys are usually taken away from their mother—because even contact with one’s own mother is dangerous for a boy—and brought to live in the men’s house. Male initiation rituals usually begin when a boy is taken from the company of his mother and other women and inducted into the men’s house.

The details of male initiation vary from people to people in highland New Guinea. One common cultural rationale for the rituals is to transform a boy into a man: boys do not grow up naturally but must go through a lengthy series of rituals to give them masculine qualities. Masculine courage, strength, aggressiveness, and independence are desirable not only for the boys themselves but for the group as a whole, because most New Guinea highland peoples traditionally were heavily involved in warfare with their neighbors and so needed warriors to survive. Another goal of the rituals is to protect boys from feminine contamination: initiates learn ritual procedures that will allow them to have sexual relations in relative safety.

The Awa are a New Guinea people who illustrate both themes: “maturation” and “protection.” When studied in the 1970s by Philip Newman and David Boyd, Awa believed that if female substances enter male bodies, the men will become sick or old before their time. When several boys in a region have reached age 12 to 14, they are taken from their mothers’ houses. They are inducted as a group into the men’s house during an intimidating ritual involving food and water restrictions, beating with stinging nettles to toughen them, and rubbing the inside of their thighs with a coarse vine. In Turner’s terminology, this is a rite of separation. This is only the first of five stages of their initiation, which will last until they are well into their twenties.

In the second stage, about a year later, the boys experience the first cleansing of their bodies from female pollution. At a secluded site in the forest, small bundles of sharp-edged swordgrass are rammed inside their nostrils and two small cuts are made in the glans of their penis to bleed out contamination. The men also induce vomiting by looping a vine and thrusting it down the boys’ throat. Vomiting both cleanses and helps dry out their body, which Awa believe is necessary for boys to achieve physical maturity. These acts both protect the boys’ health and promote their physiological maturity by ridding their bodies of polluting female substances.

The third ritual stage occurs between ages 18 and 20. The initiates again are purged of female contamination by nose bleeding, penis cutting, and induced vomiting. They

are also told certain ritual knowledge, known to all adult men but kept secret from women and boys. After they have been through the third stage, the young men are taught why too much contact with women is so dangerous. They learn that menstrual pollution can overstimulate their growth and age them prematurely. Because they have not yet learned to protect themselves from female substances, they are warned to avoid sexual intercourse altogether until they are married.

About five years later, in their mid-twenties, men go through the “sweat ceremony,” which is the fourth stage of initiation. They sit together next to the fire in the men’s house and sweat profusely for a week or more. The older men lecture them about their upcoming responsibilities as husbands and fathers. They are told about how to protect themselves from the dangers of sexual intercourse, and they are emphatically warned about the evils and dangers of adultery. When the men emerge from the men’s house after the sweat ceremony, they receive new clothes and body ornaments, including a boar’s tusk that they wear in their pierced nose as a symbol of their adult status.

Stages two through four are the liminal period: Awa youths have been ritually separated from their former lives as boys, but they have not yet achieved the full maturation of adulthood, which in the Awa view includes marriage. To use Turner’s terminology, the males are “no longer boys, not yet men.”

The fifth stage—appropriately called the “severe penis cutting”—occurs only a few days later. The young men are again subjected to food and water taboos, to nose-bleeding and vomiting, and to penis cutting. This time, however, canes are driven deep into their nose to cause severe bleeding. Small wedges of flesh are cut from either side of their penis, producing deep gashes in the glans.

The fifth stage is an Awa man’s rite of incorporation. Once a man has been through the fifth stage, Awa believe that he has been sufficiently strengthened by the hardships of initiation to be capable of withstanding future pollution from women. However, men continue to undergo periodic bloodletting to protect themselves and maintain their strength. After this stage, the men are in their early twenties. To celebrate their manhood, they turn their boar’s tusk upside down to show they are ready for sexual relations and marriage. They are usually married soon afterward, thus reaching adult status.

The Awa include several practices common in male initiation rituals: generating physical maturation, strengthening and protecting boys, imparting secret male knowledge, learning the importance of masculine responsibilities, marking the transition to manhood.





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Beginning in their early teens, Awa boys participate in a prolonged series of rituals intended to strengthen, protect, and instruct them. This second-stage initiate is having his nose bled to remove harmful substances from his body.

We must note that Awa initiation rites are not “typical” of rites in other cultures, which are not usually so severe. But, again, it is interesting to know that male physical maturation—growing into a man—is a cultural as well as a biological process. Indeed, to the Awa, the series of rituals do not just “mark” or “symbolize” the maturation, but they are believed to actually cause the physical changes that make men out of boys. Without male rituals, they believe, boys will never grow up.

### *Female Initiation Rituals: Mescalero Apache*

Fewer societies make the attainment of adulthood for girls into an initiation ritual. Some say this is because the physical signs of maturity are more obvious in the female body, so it is less essential for them to be socially recognized and proclaimed. Whatever the reason, where they occur, initiation rites for females most often emphasize attainment of physical maturity, instruction in sexual matters and childbearing, and reminders of adult duties as wives and mothers. (In Chapter 1, we discussed the sensitive topic of female genital mutilation, so we will not repeat it here.)

Mescalero Apache are one people who have ceremonies that recognize and celebrate girls’ attainment of puberty. Each year, around the Fourth of July, the people celebrate the attainment of womanhood in a ceremony that lasts four

days and four nights. Apache girls in the region who have had their first menses in the last year go to a place where a large tepee is erected. During the ceremony, the girls are regarded as reincarnations of White Painted Woman, a spiritual being who gave many good things to the people. The girls are blessed by singers (specialists who have gone through lengthy training to learn the stories and chants) and by their relatives and friends. Those attending participate in traditional songs and dances dedicated to the four directions and the spirits associated with them. The Apache ceremony places a lot of emphasis on the girls becoming the “Mothers of the Tribe,” perhaps because the Apache are a matrilineal people. On the fourth day, singers recount the history of the Apache and the girls are reminded of their ancestry and obligations. The ceremony honors the girls as individuals, reaffirms their commitment to the community and vice versa, urges them to act responsibly, and upholds and re-creates Apache traditions annually. According to ethnographer Claire Farrer (1996, 89), “almost invariably, the girls report having been changed, not only into social women but also at a very basic level. They are ready to put aside their childhoods and become full members of their tribe and community.” The ceremony thus helps the girls make the social transition to adulthood, with all its rights and responsibilities.

## **Adulthood**

Partly because there are no obvious physiological transformations or psychological indicators of full adulthood, some peoples have no clear idea of when someone becomes an adult. But all peoples hold that adults have both more privileges and more responsibilities than adolescents, thus recognizing adulthood (at least implicitly) as a stage of life.

Among many peoples, becoming married most clearly marks the transition to adult status. This is one reason marriage in most societies is marked ceremonially and symbolically with a rite of passage. The wedding formally tie the couple to each other, publicly recognizes their bond, legitimizes their children, and commonly brings their families into new relationships (Chapter 8). Often, weddings further signify that the couple is prepared for adult responsibilities. In this respect, it is significant that females often marry—and thereby assume adult status—earlier in life than men.

In most subsistence-based (“preindustrial”) societies, the eventual marriage of nearly every individual is expected, so there are relatively few unmarried adults. Why should marriage be so important for full adult status in so many societies?





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In a four-day public ceremony, the Apache acknowledge and celebrate the attainment of womanhood. The initiate is coated with clay to symbolize her identification with Changing Woman, a benevolent female spirit.

There are several reasons. Sociobiologists/evolutionary psychologists hold that reproduction is a primary human motive because it is the means by which genes are transmitted. Among most peoples, marriage is the bond by which legitimate reproduction occurs. Marriage legitimizes children in the eyes of others and makes children more likely to receive favorable treatment in inheritance and in social life generally. Marriage helps stabilize the female–male bond for purposes of child care and gives children greater standing and rewards in the community.

The evolutionary psychology view is plausible, but it is not very helpful in accounting for why there is a greater expectation of marriage in preindustrial than in modern industrial societies. For that, we need to bring in the economic and social benefits of marriage while recalling that marriage concerns a wide range of people, not just the couple.

In preindustrial cultures, one reason marriage is important is that children often provide the only form of economic security available for elderly people. One

needs children for support in later life. Relationships created by marriage are also important for various kin groups. Socially, a person's family members usually urge or demand that he or she marry in order to establish useful economic relationships with other families or useful political alliances with other villages.

Access to resources is usually enhanced by marriage and by strategic choice of spouses. In old East Asia, patrilineality and patrilocality meant that a woman's future—and the future of her children—was heavily influenced by the economic status and kindness of her husband's family. When those Chinese who could afford to do so painfully bound the feet of their daughters, one goal was to increase the girls' marriage prospects. Her chances of marrying into a husband of suitable wealth and status were enhanced if she had “lotus petal” (bound) feet. Generally, Chinese footbinding was an act of caring, not of cruelty.

The desire to establish some degree of economic and social independence is another reason for high marriage rates. In most subsistence economies, some form of family unit is responsible for producing and processing the food

In the United States, as baby boomers (persons born between about 1945 and 1965) retire, people now in their teens and twenties face the possibility of paying sharply rising Social Security taxes to support growing numbers of retired persons. Improved medical technology and increased attention to personal health are leading to average life spans in the high seventies. Today many Americans live another 20 or more years after they leave the labor force. Partly because there are now so many Americans in their fifties, sixties, and seventies, commentators joke that existing Social Security benefits are the “third rail” of United States politics—“touch Social Security and you die.” Older people generally need more medical care, so an aging population contributes heavily to rising health care prices. But health care for elderly persons is also widely seen as an entitlement—even by individuals who do not approve of other kinds of entitlements for other kinds of people. Because the elderly vote in such large numbers, the costs to taxpayers of Medicare (government-funded health care provided for those over 65) are increasing rapidly.

North America is not alone. Other developed nations face similar issues. Consider Japan. In 2010, its population is around 127 million. Of these, 23 percent are over the age of 65. Japan’s average life span is 82 years (86 for women, 79 for men), the world’s highest. An average Japanese woman today has only 1.2 children during her lifetime, one of the world’s lowest. Just to maintain the current size of the population, women in developed nations with good health care systems must average around 2.1 children. Japan’s population size actually began falling in 2005. (The populations of many European nations will soon begin to decline, although immigration probably will make up for most of their declining birth rate.) Fewer children today means fewer workers 20 years into the future, and rising life expectancies mean more dependent elderly. Projecting these trends into the future, by 2050 about a third of all Japanese will be elderly.

and other products. Because the domestic tasks performed by wives and husbands are often complementary, each sex requires the goods and services provided by the other. Most people who do not marry remain dependent (and typically low-status) members of someone else’s household.

More than among industrialized people, then, marriage in preindustrial societies established a person’s prestige, security, and social and economic independence. The importance of marrying and having a family has lessened in many industrialized nations, including Korea and Japan as well as Western nations. That

In Japan and East Asia generally, respect for and care of aged parents were powerful cultural values that went beyond the Judeo-Christian commandment to honor one’s father and mother. In old China, Korea, and Japan, the Confucian ethical philosophy held that *filial piety* (extreme respect and almost blind obedience to one’s parents) was a primary cultural value. Parents made most of the important decisions for their children about matters such as when and whom to marry, education, and daily work activities. In China, many stories were told to teach and reinforce filial values. In one story, the parents of an 8-year-old boy are bitten by swarms of mosquitoes. To spare his parents, the boy allows them to bite his stomach and doesn’t even swat at them for fear it will lead them to fly away and feast on his parents. In another, a 70-year-old man amuses his very elderly parents by acting like an infant in front of them, stumbling around and crying like a baby to make them laugh. During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), many violations of filial piety were considered serious enough to warrant harsh legal punishments. For example, a magistrate (acting as judge) could order the execution of a son who struck one of his parents.

In old Japan, too, there were strong normative obligations to provide for the needs of one’s elderly parents. Because of primogeniture (see the Globalization box in Chapter 8), eldest sons and their wives bore most burdens of parental support. In rural Japan, especially, even into the 1980s, elderly persons usually lived in the same household as their eldest son and his wife and family. The resident (usually the eldest) son was often so tied up in farm work and other activities that brought in income that he had little time to take care of his aging parents. Besides, the social realm of house and home was managed primarily by females—the resident daughter-in-law in most of Japan. So, when a woman married in, she took on a substantial duty to care for the parents of her husband as they grew old.

modern industrial nations have relatively high percentages of never-married people, as well as high rates of separation and divorce, is partly explained by the fact that marriage has lost many other economic and security-providing functions it so often performs in preindustrial cultures, as explored in Chapter 8.

### Old Age

*Gerontology*, the study of elderly people, has recently become a major interest of anthropologists. Part of our interest stems from conditions in North American

Of course, for decades most Japanese have lived in cities, where old practices like patrilocality and primogeniture seem to matter little. In cities, where people make their living from wages and salaries rather than from working family land, elder care obligations are more diffuse: sometimes sons take responsibility, sometimes daughters, depending on circumstances. Still, children feel a strong obligation to care for their elderly parents, who brought them into the world and who sacrificed so much for their upbringing and education.

Collectively speaking, Japan today has a lot of “elderly parents,” whose care poses a significant cost to millions of family members. (Incredibly, in the eyes of North American youth, in the mid-1990s about half of all people who cared for elderly relatives in Japan were *themselves* over the age of 60!) As the number of Japanese elderly grew, starting in 1989 the government passed laws that provided taxpayer-funded services to qualifying older persons. Today, all elder-care services are part of a national long-term-care insurance program. Services include periodic visits by nurses, assistance with daily tasks like bathing, delivery of meals, adult day care, and short-term stays at public nursing homes. There are copayments, but they depend on family income and are generally affordable. Most caregivers take advantage of these services, if only because they offer a break from their day-in, day-out responsibilities.

In the 1990s, Brenda Robb Jenike interviewed 32 caregivers in Tokyo and researched public facilities that offer services to the elderly. She found that Japanese still tended to entrust only one child with the main responsibilities, even if siblings lived nearby. Usually, this child is a son. Partly because of the feeling that management of home and family is primarily a woman’s duty, most often the caretaker is the daughter-in-law of the elderly parent. Not surprisingly, many daughters-in-law wanted more assistance from the elderly person’s “real children” and felt that their work was underappreciated (as such “family work” so often is).

Jenike also looked at how “real children” and daughters-in-law felt about transferring most burdens of elder care out of their hands to impersonal governmental agencies. Given Japan’s traditions of filial piety and the cultural emphasis on the duties of wives to their husbands’ families, despite the availability of public services many Japanese continue to think it is best that elderly parents are cared for in the home for as long as possible. Very old parents, especially men in their eighties or older, are also less willing to accept help from outside the home, and their children are likely to respect their wishes.

So, family-based caregivers (overwhelmingly female) have misgivings about using public services, both because they were socialized in a culture in which care of parents is a child’s and/or daughter-in-law’s duty, and because other family members are ambivalent about outsourcing this care. And there is a feeling that it is selfish to complain about one’s family work. One way caregivers adjust to these cultural realities is by judging the quality of care given by public services as superior to the care they are able to provide themselves. Professional service providers encourage this attitude by providing occasions for caregivers to meet for public talks and join support groups. They also routinely express gratitude for the years of elderly care services offered by these women. Thus, caregivers have their services acknowledged by professionals and also can justify (to themselves as well as others) their actions as doing what’s best for their elderly dependents.

In Japan’s elder care arrangements, women who were socialized into the norms and values of their cultural system show themselves capable of altering their behavior as circumstances change. This shows again that human behavior is not related to cultural knowledge in any simple or straightforward way, as noted in Chapter 2.

SOURCES: C.I.A. (2010); Jenike (2003, 2004, n.d.); Norimitsu Onishi, “Japan’s Population Fell This Year, Sooner Than Expected,” *New York Times* (December 24, 2005)

society, in which elderly people are often seen as a burden, both to their children and to those who pay taxes to support elderly entitlements like Social Security and Medicare. (See A Closer Look for more on the care of the elderly in the United States and Japan.)

Popular media sometimes portray elderly North Americans as unhappy, partly because of declining health and feelings of neglect by their grown children and grandchildren. Young people may be surprised to learn about a study published in 2010 indicating that, as a whole, the elderly have a greater sense of personal well-being than younger and middle-aged persons. In

2008, psychologist Arthur Stone and his colleagues conducted phone interviews with nearly 341,000 Americans of all ages and both genders. They found that people are generally satisfied with their lives until around the age of 18, steadily grow less and less content until around 50, and then feel better and better until they reach 85. Feelings of worry increased until middle age and then also fell off. Gender had little effect on these patterns, nor did other factors such as whether the interviewee had children living at home. Many older people claim they do not “feel” old, although they may “look” old to youngsters. This study suggests



that, overall, elderly people have more positive feelings than younger people recognize.

Another popular notion is that the alleged neglect of elderly people in modern American society is a recent phenomenon. Sometimes we hear or read statements like “The elderly were respected and admired for their wisdom in tribal societies.” As we have emphasized, however, “tribal” peoples are enormously diverse in all respects, including the way they regard and treat elderly people.

Among some peoples, adults who can no longer economically contribute to the family because of age, physical injury, or severe illness become burdens to their families and largely dependent on the goodwill of others. Among the Comanche, old men were often the victims of pranks by young boys, who sometimes slashed the prized painted buffalo robes of older men. Little time was spent mourning the death of an old, “useless” person. Intense mourning was reserved for people who died while still physically in their prime because only their death constituted a true loss to their community.

Among some Inuit peoples of Canada, conditions for survival were even more tenuous, and parricide (the killing of close relatives) sometimes occurred. The old or infirm who could no longer keep up with the migratory movements of the group often were abandoned by their families. In some Inuit groups, an elderly person who was no longer able to travel would be abandoned in a sealed igloo with a little food and a seal-oil lamp for warmth.

Such ethnographic cases are not “typical”—no generalization can be made about the treatment of elderly people among other peoples. The examples do show that the attitudes of some people in developed nations toward the elderly are not unique.

What are some main theories about whether elderly persons are cared about and respected? For evolutionary psychology, why people should care for their elderly parents and grandparents at all is puzzling. The benefits of helping your own children and grandchildren are clear: if you did not do so, their chances of surviving would be small, and if you do so poorly, their chances of succeeding in the wider society (and having offspring themselves) would be lessened. But the biological fitness benefits of care for children do not apply to parents and grandparents: the *fitness* benefits of caring for elders are not obvious, especially if elders are beyond their childbearing years and so cannot even have any more offspring that share some percentage of your genes. In fact, the fitness benefits of even surviving beyond the age of childbearing are not very



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Among many peoples, advanced age brings increasing respect and authority. These Uighur elderly live in China’s Xinjiang province.

clear: if your genes are already represented in the next generation, why not just die so there are more resources for the survivors?

Evolutionary psychologists have dealt with this puzzle. They argue that people survive past childbearing so they can continue to supply resources to their children and grandchildren. For example, elderly persons commonly provide material assistance, adaptively useful knowledge, and care of their grandchildren that free up parents’ time to do other things. This is related to the long period of social learning that is necessary for human maturation: if older people are active in socialization and in providing resources, then their fitness might be higher than if they just died. Evolutionary psychologists think that helping the elderly survive and stay healthy keeps such benefits flowing to the next generation, so elder care pays off in increased fitness for the children and grandchildren also. Or, they admit that not *everything* has to be explained directly by genetic fitness, so perhaps there is a generalized human disposition to help those who have helped you (as in balanced reciprocity). This would represent a kind of intergenerational reciprocity.

Cultural materialists try to explain why cultures vary in their regard for and treatment of elderly people. One materialist argument is that the elderly receive the greatest respect and authority in those societies in which they control the land, livestock, and other resources of their family group. Younger family members rely on elders for rights to land and other resources needed for survival and success, so children have economic as well as emotional reasons for acceding to the wishes of their parents and deferring to their judgments. Obedience and deference, though, are not permanent



because almost everyone who lives long enough will attain the status of family elder along with the esteem and authority it brings. Rather than fearing old age, many people look forward to it in such settings.

Another contributing factor is the contrast between literate and nonliterate people. In societies without writing, elderly people are the major repositories of historical, religious, and technical knowledge, functioning as the de facto libraries for their communities. Their knowledge makes them indispensable and gives them power, enhancing their social value and the respect they receive. In some Micronesian societies, for example, people do not reveal everything they know until near their death, which gives them some control over their children and grandchildren. This might be termed the “knowledge is power” explanation.

Another contributing factor is the rate of change a people are experiencing. In slowly changing societies with relatively stable technologies and organizations, old age is seen as imparting the wisdom that comes from decades of life experiences. Older people are

(correctly) viewed as the repositories of community knowledge, so their opinions are valued and their words are often decisive—they are “the deciders.”

In contrast, industrialization unleashed rapid changes in the technologies and economies of nations, and existing technologies quickly become obsolete. Therefore, people tend to view knowledge not as fixed but as continually changing. Experience alone does not generate the wisdom necessary for effective decision making. Like yesterday’s technology, elderly people may be seen as out of step with contemporary realities. Like the elderly themselves, their knowledge is believed to be antiquated.

If it is true that the value people place on elderly persons varies with the rate of change, then as the globalization of production and markets incorporates more and more peoples, we would expect to see cultural norms and values about the elderly in many nations break down. This would *not* be simply because they are exposed to new “cultural role models,” but because they are experiencing the same rapid changes unleashed by industrialization as happened in the West.

## Summary

**1 Discuss how cultures vary in their child-rearing and socialization practices, using the Aka and Gusii of Africa as examples.** Cultures differ in their child-rearing practices, including nursing and weaning norms, the degree and methods of discipline, toilet-training practices, nurturing, sexual permissiveness, caretaking roles, and so forth. Two African peoples, Aka and Gusii, illustrate some of the diversity in child-care and enculturation beliefs and behaviors. They also show that child care everywhere is affected by people’s circumstances as well as by their ideals and beliefs about how children should best be raised, which has implications for contemporary parents.

**2 Describe rites of passage and analyze why they are important in human societies.** Age is everywhere a relevant personal characteristic that allocates social roles and assigns duties and responsibilities. This is one reason transitions from one age category to another are so often marked by formal public ceremonies known as rites of passage. The Awa of highland New Guinea illustrate some of the physical and psychological traumas of initiation rituals for males. Among the matrilineal Mescalero Apache, female puberty rituals publicly recognize and celebrate a girl’s maturity.

**3 Elaborate on some of the cross-cultural variations in the life stages of infancy/childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.** Exactly when infancy begins and ends is defined by culture as well as by actual biological birth and physical maturation. Often, as among the Osage, a naming ritual confers human status to an infant. The passage from childhood to adolescence is especially likely to be accomplished and marked by an initiation ritual, which sometimes involves severe physical and psychological trauma. Among preindustrial peoples, the event of marriage often symbolizes that an individual is ready for adult responsibilities and privileges.

**4 Analyze how cultures differ in their regard for and treatment of the elderly.** Some influences that affect how a society regards and treats the elderly are: the degree to which elderly people exercise control over important property and its inheritance; whether people are literate (which affects whether elderly people are the main repositories of knowledge); and the rate of technological change a people are experiencing. Contrary to many popular beliefs, in North America recent studies suggest that elderly people are more content with their lives than young people.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 11 GENDER IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE



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## **Sex and Gender**

### **Cultural Construction of Gender**

*The Hua of Papua New Guinea*

*North American Constructions*

### **Multiple Gender Identities**

*Native American Two-Spirits*

*Hijra of Hindu India*

*Same Sex Marriage?*

## **The Gendered Division of Labor**

*Understanding Major Patterns*

*Understanding Variability*

### **Gender Stratification**

*Is Gender Stratification Universal?*

*Influences on Gender Stratification*

*Gender Stratification in Industrial Societies*



The roles, rights, and responsibilities of women have changed considerably in recent decades. In the 2008 American Presidential election, Sarah Palin was the Republican vice-presidential candidate and remains a major spokesperson.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Describe** how male–female physical differences affect gender roles and relationships.
- 2 **Elaborate** on the phrase “cultural construction of gender” and discuss its importance.
- 3 **Analyze** the relevance of the fact that many peoples recognize multiple gender identities for our understanding of gender.
- 4 **Discuss** the factors that influence the widespread patterns and the cross-cultural diversity in the gendered division of labor.
- 5 **Analyze** why it is so difficult to determine whether any societies have complete gender equality.
- 6 **Describe** the three most important influences on gender stratification from a comparative perspective.

Human beings feel, think, and act within a cultural framework that affects their interests, attitudes, world-views, social behavior, and other aspects of how they define themselves. As human beings, anthropologists are affected by changes in our own culture. The feminist movement—one of the most powerful social and political forces of the late twentieth century—resulted in increased anthropological concern with the role of gender in human relationships and in society generally. In the early twenty-first century, research and teaching about issues connected to gender is one of the most popular specializations. Even anthropologists who do not “specialize” in gender now take gender into account in our research on other subjects. Nearly all of us recognize that many human relationships are permeated by beliefs about gender.

Like kinship and age, gender is a universal basis for organizing group activities and allocating roles to individuals. Your identity as a male or female or as a member of an alternative gender makes a difference in who you are, what you have, how you interact, and what you can become. Anthropologists have found that in different cultures, gender matters to different degrees and in different ways. These cultural variations and the factors that affect them are the subjects of this chapter.

Research in gender is so vast that we must focus on only four of the main issues to which anthropologists have made important contributions: (1) the cultural construction of gender, (2) multiple (as opposed to dual) genders, (3) the sexual division of labor, and (4) gender stratification. Where relevant, we suggest ways

in which anthropological findings and perspectives help in understanding gender roles and beliefs about gender in contemporary societies.

In any society, gender is a key dimension of a person’s *social identity*: how other people perceive you, feel about you, and relate to you is influenced by the gender to which they assign you and by how your culture defines gender differences. Less obviously, an individual’s *self-identity* is affected by cultural beliefs and ideas: your conception of yourself depends partly on how your culture distinguishes masculinity and femininity, allocates roles to one or the other sex, and uses symbols (such as dress, behavior, speech style, and sexual preferences and practices) to help define differences between females and males. Even when interacting with someone of your own sex, your social behavior is affected by your culture’s norms, categories, world-views, symbols, and other ideas and beliefs that influence your group’s conceptions about gender. Many males are careful not to assume “feminine” poses or speech styles, for example. Finally, just as gender identity affects interactions between individuals, so do beliefs about gender affect behavior in a variety of social settings and contexts: in the workplace, home, school, church, and political arenas, to name a few.



## Sex and Gender

The world’s peoples vary in how much importance they attach to whether a person is female or male and in

what specific behaviors they expect from females and males. To emphasize such cultural variations, we make a conceptual distinction between *sex* and *gender*. Most people think that visible sexual features are determined by the X and Y “sex chromosomes.” In reality, the visible and behavioral expression of sex chromosomes are influenced by embryonic development, how efficiently physiology transmits hormones to cells and tissues, and other aspects of physiology. A person’s genetic makeup and physiology—in interaction with other factors in the environment—forms physical characteristics like genitals, hormonal quantities, and secondary sexual characteristics (breasts, pelvis, body size and musculature, and the like). Of course, not all individuals can be identified as a member of a *dichotomous* (female–male) category on the basis of their genes. Various peoples treat this ambiguity in different ways, as we shall see.

We could list many ways in which females and males differ genetically. However, there are a couple of biologically based (“sexual”) differences that have special importance in comparative studies of various cultures.

First is **sexual dimorphism**: at maturity, *most* males are physically larger and stronger than *most* females. Sexual dimorphism is a product of our evolutionary past and is a trait we share with our evolutionary cousins—gorillas and chimpanzees. This difference in size and strength has many implications, two of which are that men are more likely than women to win physical fights, and are better able to handle tasks that involve a lot of strength.

Second are differences in reproductive physiology: only women become pregnant, carry children until birth, and produce the milk that their newborns and infants require. Men do contribute sperm in one way or—with modern in vitro technology—another. *Biological* fatherhood may end there, but almost all peoples assign the role of *social* father to the biological father or another man. *Social* fathers support their partners before, during, and after pregnancy. In most cultures, fathers and other men help to greater or lesser degrees with the care of infants and children, although this varies a lot from people to people (see Chapter 10). Evolutionary psychologists explore the possible implications of male–female differences in reproductive physiology (see A Closer Look).

For anthropological interests, sexual dimorphism and reproductive physiology are two of the most important ways the sexes differ biologically. We do not agree on the overall significance of such differences for human cultures. We do agree, though, that various

cultures also construct differences and similarities between males and females.



## Cultural Construction of Gender

The phrase **cultural construction of gender** emphasizes that different cultures have distinctive ideas about males and females and use these ideas to define manhood/masculinity and womanhood/femininity. The word *construction* evokes the act of “building”—from the raw materials provided by sexual differences, different cultures build up their ideas and beliefs about how the sexes differ and what these differences mean. How males and females perceive and define themselves and each other, what it means to be a woman or a man, what roles are appropriate for men and women—these and many other dimensions of femaleness and maleness are culturally variable, not universal to the human species or constant across all cultures.

The notion that gender is culturally constructed is too easily and often misunderstood. Some scholars (especially those in the biological sciences) mistakenly believe that anthropologists claim that genetic (physical) differences between the sexes do not matter. They think we claim that differences in male and female behaviors are determined by culture, not genes.

Some anthropologists do claim this, of course, especially those whose theoretical orientation is more humanistic than scientific (see Chapter 4). But most accept that biological differences between females and males “matter”—are relevant for both ideas and behaviors—in all cultures. However, anthropology’s focus on cultural diversity makes us aware that human groups define and make use of these differences in a multitude of ways. In *symbols*, various peoples attach cultural meanings to female–male differences that go well beyond biological/anatomical distinctions. In constructing *social reality*, male–female differences are minimized in some cultures, maximized in others. In *values*, “patriarchy” crudely describes some groups, “sexual equality” others. In

**sexual dimorphism** Physical differences based on genetic differences between females and males.

**cultural construction of gender** The idea that the characteristics a people attribute to males and females are culturally, not biologically, determined.

The general theory of evolutionary psychology (sociobiology) explains human social patterns in terms of biological evolution. As discussed in Chapter 4, it focuses on the costs and benefits of behaviors in genetic fitness. If the fitness benefits of some behavior exceed its costs to individuals, then the behavior is selected for by evolution and therefore tends to survive and spread.

Some evolutionary psychologists say that the two sexes have different strategies of mating and reproduction. These strategies are revealed in widespread cross-cultural patterns. One aspect of female/male differences in reproductive physiology is especially important. The quantity of sperm a male produces is infinite, for practical purposes. Potentially, one male can be the biological father of tens of thousands of children. In contrast, a female is born with only a certain number of eggs, and her body will not make more during her lifetime. After sexual maturity, a woman ovulates about once a month, usually producing one egg per cycle. If a woman is fertile for around 30 years, say between ages 15 and 45, about the maximum number of offspring she can produce is 30. Given lactation and the burdens of infant care, the practical upper limit is closer to 20 children, and, of course, most women have far fewer (in the past as well as today).

In terms of fitness, potentially a man can leave many more genetic offspring in future generations than a woman. Also, women necessarily invest a lot of time and energy in each of their children, so each child matters a lot to their fitness. Because each child a man *biologically* fathers does not need *him*, a man's fitness does not depend nearly as much on whether he invests in his offspring by providing time and energy in care or resources.

In terms of *fitness*, then, it benefits a man to spread his seeds around by having lots of (female) sexual partners. In terms of *fitness*, it benefits a woman to have a man around to care for her and her offspring, so that her children will survive and thrive as adults and then produce children of their own. Evolutionary psychologists claim that men and women have conflicting reproductive strategies: men want to be sexually active with lots of women, whereas a woman wants a man around to ensure that her relatively few offspring do well in life. This affects relationships between wives and husbands: a woman wants her husband to be faithful and caring toward his nuclear family, whereas a man wants to have relations with other women.

At first glance, it would appear that a wife receives few fitness gains from having extramarital affairs. If her husband

deserts or divorces her because of one, she risks losing his and his family's resources, thus harming her children and, therefore, her own fitness. Actually, though, about half of a woman's children will be males and these males will have higher fitness if *they* have sex with many women. So, the best female sexual strategy is to have clandestine sex with those males who are most promiscuous but who invest little in their offspring from multiple partners. That way, assuming the propensity for a man to act "promiscuously" is inherited, the male children she has with promiscuous fathers will have higher fitness. So, women ought to *marry* men who help a lot with children by being good providers, but they also should be *sexually attracted* to men who spread their seed around. Or so some evolutionary psychologists claim.

Why does this matter? Assume, for purposes of argument, that this is all correct. It is *very* important here to note that "correct" does not mean that nothing else is affecting sexual behavior in real societies, but only that evolution built in one kind of sexual strategy for males, a different and partly conflicting strategy for females. So, because of their genetic heredity, males will tend to act in one way, females in a different way. To state the point differently, husbands will prefer one kind of behavior from wives, but it is to the wives' reproductive advantage to behave differently. And vice versa.

Some evolutionary psychologists believe these selective forces help explain the widespread double standard in sexual behavior. In almost all societies, husbands expect faithfulness from wives: one of the worst things for a man's fitness is that he provide care ("invest in") for some other (nonrelative) man's child! But a husband cannot necessarily tell whether the children of his wife are also his genetic children, although a woman can be sure that the children she birthed are hers genetically. In some societies, women also have a comparable right to expect faithfulness from husbands. In most, though, husbandly infidelity is a less serious offense than wifely infidelity. Men want other men's wives to have sex with them, but they want their own wives to be sexually faithful lest they be fooled. Women care much less about their husband's infidelity so long as he cares for her children—after all, if her husband is a "cad," then her sons by him are likely to inherit the tendency for cadhood, and that will improve her fitness through her sons.

It is easy to see how this approach would explain why polygyny is so much more prevalent than polyandry (Chapter 8).

*behavior patterns*, some groups fairly rigidly differentiate between female and male activities and roles, whereas others allow both sexes to participate in similar kinds of

activities according to individual preferences and circumstances. Our fascination with such variations does not imply that we deny biological realities.



It also potentially explains why, among peoples who allow polygynous marriages, as a rule it is the wealthier men who have the most wives: wealthy men use their resources to generate more offspring/fitness by having more wives. (Notice the assumption that wives are a strategy to increase fitness.) Further, anthropologists often report that many/most wives do not mind, or even prefer, being co-wives. Is this because co-wives recognize that their children will have better access to resources if their fathers are wealthy? (Notice that more often than not, among polygynous peoples, it is the women's fathers who arrange their marriages, so the fitness benefits to women's fathers also have to be considered.)

Potentially, evolutionary psychology can also account for why in many cultures it is virtually expected that husbands will have sexual relations with women who are not their wives. Many societies institutionalize extramarital sex in the form of concubines and mistresses, which husbands are allowed so long as they care for their own wife (or wives) and the wife's children. This was a normal pattern for well-off men in East Asia (old China, Korea, and Japan), the Middle East, and parts of South Asia. Here, too, it was mainly wealthier men who had concubines. Women were expected to remain near house and home and sometimes even under lock and key. Their relative seclusion minimized the chances that their husbands would be supporting some other man's offspring. Women should not appear in public alone and should cover their bodies and faces with clothing to avoid sending sexual signals intentionally or unintentionally. These societies were patrilineal and largely patrilocal, so it was the husbands and husbands' families who enforced these restrictions on a woman after she married in. Many females moved to their husband's place soon after puberty, and their marriages commonly were arranged much earlier—even at birth. From a sociobiological perspective, such rules protected men from the fitness loss they would experience should the children of their wives not also be their own.

As you guess, such arguments from evolutionary psychology are controversial. Some say they smack of biological determinism (see Chapter 2). Humanistically inclined anthropologists often say that such theories makes practices and beliefs like polygyny and sexual double standards justifiable or legitimate by claiming they are rooted in evolution and genes. Many humanists claim that when sociobiologists say that sexual double standards are rooted in biology, they are implying that cultures will have a hard

time getting rid of them. After all, practices that are genetically rooted are in our "nature." A postmodernist (see Chapter 4) is likely to argue that this so-called theory of reproductive strategies reflects the power that men have over women in the evolutionary psychologists' own society. For one thing, the theory claims that the difference in reproductive strategies is biologically based rather than culturally constructed, which makes it suspect to most postmodernists. For another, the argument is that the reproductive interests of women and men "conflict," which explains why men develop rules governing the behavior of all those would-be promiscuous women. That a theory that (to postmodernist minds) justifies double standards that favors men comes from a patriarchal culture does not surprise them. Like other cultural knowledge, scientific ideas have social and cultural roots, reflecting the interests of some people over others, postmodernists claim.

But does the evolutionary psychology theory really justify patriarchy? Is an attempt to "explain" also to "justify"? In one sense it is: if a double standard for sexual behavior is inherited from our evolutionary past, then it may be difficult for contemporary humans to change it. But it is not a justification in terms of morality or ethics or a judgment that such standards are positive forces in society. Besides, humans have inherited lots of things from our evolutionary past. However, few of these "things" directly determine our behavior. Genes impart behavioral tendencies, but such tendencies interact with and are often overcome by social learning, life experiences, and technological innovations.

Also, evolutionary psychologists themselves recognize that many customs and behaviors that once were adaptive are no longer adaptive. Food tastes are familiar examples. "Back in the day" the taste of sweetness was a sign that something was good to eat. When salt was scarce, people wanted to consume a lot of it whenever it was available. When fatty meat was in short supply because wild animals have little fat, humans developed the taste for fat that is so harmful to health in rich countries now that we raise our pigs and cattle in feedlots. In affluent regions of today, sugar, salt, and fat still taste good—so good that they are added to processed foods that otherwise do not need them. What's healthful to eat has changed. So have lots of other things.

*Special thanks to an anonymous reviewer for assistance with this discussion.*

One implication of the cultural construction of gender is that no single culture's constructions are based entirely on the biological differences between the sexes.

In other words, there are no cultures that are "natural" with respect to their conceptions of gender. This fact makes it very difficult to determine the impact of

biological (sexual) differences on the behaviors of females or males because everywhere cultural (gender) constructions obscure and complicate the impacts of genes. (Notice, though, that this does not mean that genetic differences are not important. It means only that their effects are hard to determine.)

### The Hua of Papua New Guinea

The Hua of Papua New Guinea are one people whose cultural construction of gender differs markedly from that familiar to most of our readers. Studied by Anna Meigs in the 1970s, the Hua are a patrilineal, horticultural people who live in mountain villages of 100 to 300 people. As we shall see, Hua culture constructs gender on the basis of female–male differences that most other people do not recognize. Because of this cultural construction, Hua believe that later in life a woman can become like a man and a man can become like a woman.

How do Hua culturally construct gender? They believe that bodies contain a life-giving substance (like a vital essence) that they call *nu*. They think of *nu* as a real, physical substance—not a mystical or magical power—that can be transferred from one person to another and gained and lost in various ways. Symbolically, *nu* is associated with growth and maturity. Female bodies contain lots of *nu*, which in Hua belief makes women grow faster and age more slowly than men but also makes them moist. On the other hand, males naturally contain a smaller amount of growth-inducing *nu*, so they need extra to help them grow up. Hua explain many of the differences between men and women by the amount of *nu*: men are stronger and fiercer because they are dry, for example.

*Nu* is both gaseous (breath) and liquid (blood, sweat, semen, female sexual secretions). A transfer of *nu* between individuals is either harmful or helpful, depending on the nature of the relationship between the giver and the recipient. Transfer of *nu* may occur during eating, sexual intercourse, and other kinds of direct and indirect contact. For example, a woman transfers her *nu* to people when she serves food to them. *Nu* from her bodily secretions and under her fingernails adheres to the food and gets ingested by her children or her husband.

A woman also transfers *nu* to a man when she has intercourse with him. Giving *nu* to a man in the act of intercourse is harmful to the man because it pollutes and debilitates him. Intercourse is also damaging to a man because he contributes his own scarce *nu* (in the

form of breath and semen) to a woman during sex. She gains strength and vitality at his expense.

The amount of *nu* can be regulated by the kinds of food eaten. Various events in people’s lives require an increase or decrease of *nu*. Women need extra *nu* during pregnancy, so they eat lots of foods considered rich in *nu*. (Broadly speaking, these are fast-growing foods with high moisture content.) During menstruation, though, women have too much *nu*, so they avoid the same kinds of food.

Young males do not have enough *nu* for full growth and maturation, so during certain periods of boyhood, they are encouraged to eat foods with lots of *nu*. At other times, when they are undergoing the initiation ceremonies that make them into strong men able to fight to defend the village, they are supposed to avoid *nu*-rich foods because such foods will weaken and pollute them. In fact, during male initiation ceremonies, there are strict taboos against eating not only these foods but also foods from gardens tended by women or foods prepared by women. These taboos keep the boys free of the pollution caused by contact with women.

*Nu* makes women polluting to males. The greater the difference in *nu* between a woman and a man, the more dangerous that woman is to that man. But both men and women can and do lose or gain *nu*, depending on their activities, their diet, and their age. After decades of engaging in sexual intercourse with women and eating foods touched by their wives and other women, middle-aged and elderly men have taken lots of *nu* into their bodies. They become invulnerable to further contamination by contact with females and therefore may eat *nu*-rich foods and participate in sexual intercourse with less anxiety than younger men. Gaining *nu* over the years makes them become “like women.” Hua call them *figapa*, which Anna Meigs interprets as a third gender category. *Figapa* are “like women” because their bodies contain lots of substances that the Hua symbolically consider feminine.

For their part, women lose *nu* whenever they menstruate, handle and prepare food, and have babies. Over their life course, women thus are drained of *nu*. This draining of *nu* from female bodies means they become less and less dangerous to males as they grow older. Women who have given birth to more than two children are considered to have lost enough *nu* that they are no longer polluting. They therefore have become “like men.” Hua say they are *kakora*, which is a fourth gender category. People who are *kakora* are eligible to live in the men’s house, partly because they are no longer hazardous to men.

Thus, Hua culture recognizes two bases for gender distinctions. One is a person's genitals, which make one either male or female. The other is the quantity of *nu* in the body, as affected by a person's life course. The latter criterion gives rise to the two additional non-discrete (more-less) gender categories of *figapa* and *kakora*. Although the *figapa*–*kakora* distinction is relevant in only certain ritual contexts, it is significant that people who are genitally male or female are classified with the opposite gender for certain purposes.

Hua clearly illustrate the cultural construction of gender. The objective physical distinctions between the sexes—genitals, beards, breasts, and so on—are recognized and relevant in all known cultures, as we shall soon see. But, as Anna Meigs shows for the Hua, cultures use the (metaphorically) raw material of these differences to construct varying beliefs about the ways in which females and males differ. To Hua, men and women differ not only in the usual physical ways but also in the quantity of *nu* each has. These beliefs in turn affect the attitudes each sex holds about the other and the behavior each sex adopts toward the other. Hua men fear the possibility of feminine pollution and therefore try to minimize their contact with women, their intake of food prepared by women, and their sexual relations with women.

### North American Constructions

The more different some culture's beliefs are from your own, the more obvious it is that those beliefs are a cultural construction rather than biologically determined. Because Hua beliefs pertaining to male–female relationships seem exotic to most Westerners, the fact that gender is culturally constructed among these people is readily apparent. All people's ideas about gender are culturally constructed, however, including yours and mine. To stimulate thought, we briefly present some ideas on the construction of gender in Euro-American culture.

Speaking generally, many North Americans see females as caring toward others, emotional, socially skilled, physically fragile, and family oriented. Males are taken to be more selfish, rational, tolerant of physical discomfort (“tough”), coordinated, and individualistic.

Consider the possible effects of these cultural conceptions on the uneven distribution of occupational roles between women and men in the modern American economy. The predominant pattern is for members of each sex to move into jobs for which they are believed to be best suited, given American cultural conceptions of gender. This happens for several reasons. First,

individual men and women more often seek those jobs that they find appropriate for their sex or that they think they have the best chance of getting or succeeding in; people apply for certain kinds of jobs according to their desirability, based in part on their beliefs about “sex roles.” Second, employers tend to hire people according to their own cultural conceptions of which sex is likely to do well in a particular job; the employment market (the market for labor) itself allocates men and women into certain kinds of jobs. And, third, everyone has a tendency to stereotype other peoples' constructions: even if *you* don't think you are best suited for a traditional female role, you may think that other people think you are. Your perceptions of other peoples' constructions might encourage you to limit your options to what you think their constructions are. Thus, the market for labor responds to job seekers' constructions, employers' constructions, and everyone's perceptions about other peoples' constructions.

Although constructions of gender are changing rapidly, many jobs remain disproportionately female or male. Thus, women predominate in jobs that involve nurturing (e.g., nursing, day care, elementary school teaching, pediatric medicine), routine interactions with the public (e.g., receptionists, clerks, restaurant waiters), repetitive use of fine motor skills (word processing, sewing and stitching), and cleaning and housekeeping. A few of the jobs in which men predominate are those involving outdoor activity (equipment operation, driving, carpentry and construction), high-level decision making (management, administration), and knowledge of mathematical principles (science, engineering, computer programming). (Interested readers should consult the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics to see actual percentages of occupations that are male and female, at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2009.htm>.) How much of the occupational differences between women and men results from the American cultural construction of gender, which defines females as having certain inherent characteristics and males as having a contrasting set? How much of the difference results from perceptions of constructions?

Today, most of us recognize that “a woman can be tough” and that “men have a feminine side.” We know that women make fine CEOs and that men perform well as nurses. There are lots of stay-at-home dads and breadwinner moms. More men are teaching elementary and middle school, although many parents of their female students still keep an eye on them. In the political arena, in 2008 Sarah Palin was a candidate for vice president of the United States. Hillary Clinton was nearly the Democratic nominee for president and is now secretary of





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Although constructions of gender are different now than they were even a decade ago, women still hold far more jobs as receptionists, secretaries, and file clerks than men do.

state. Both Palin and Clinton often acted “tough” and were “fighters” in their campaigns, which helped convince voters they could be competent as commander in chief. In November 2010, the former female CEOs of Hewlett-Packard and eBay are running for California governor and senator. Is it possible that someday our cultural knowledge will be that the sexes *on average* differ in size and strength and that women are the ones to bear and nurse the next generation, but that no other biological difference matters much for career choices?

## Multiple Gender Identities

### *Native American Two-Spirits*

Many peoples tolerate and even institutionalize diversity in gender roles and sexual orientation. Biologically male or female individuals who, for one reason or another, wish to adopt aspects of the role or behavior

of the other sex are allowed to do so with little or no social stigma or formal punishment. In such cultures, a boy who cannot or does not wish to conform to male roles is not forced to follow norms nor is he socially ostracized. He is allowed to act like a woman in certain respects or contexts. Conversely, a girl who shows an affinity for activities culturally defined as male is allowed to participate in manly roles when she becomes an adult. In short, in many cultures, people can adopt the behaviors and roles typical of the other sex in features such as clothing, work, and sexual preference with little or no social or legal punishment from other members of their communities.

These practices or customs are often called gender crossing or transsexualism, for obvious reasons. In many cultures, it is expected that a certain number of people are born who, when they mature into adulthood, will become like the other sex in some ways. Rather than stigmatizing such persons or trying to force them to live up to the group’s standards of femininity or masculinity, they are accommodated and integrated into social life. Their alternative sexual identity is *institutionalized*.

Most North Americans will interpret “institutionalized gender crossing” as a way that cultures accommodate lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. This interpretation is generally correct; however, there is much more to gender crossing than sexual orientation, as we shall see. First, let’s consider briefly how anthropological thinking about gender crossing has changed recently.

Until the 1970s or 1980s, most ethnologists viewed gender crossing in the following way. In any society, some individuals are born who do not fit into existing sexual identities of “male” or “female.” There are some boys who do not want to go to war, hunt, or compete in politics, but instead prefer to play with girls, do domestic work, tan skins, or otherwise act in ways culturally considered feminine. Likewise, some girls display an affinity for actions culturally associated with masculinity, preferring to play boy games, use weapons, dress like males, and so on. In many human societies, such persons eventually learn to outwardly conform to the normal sex roles. If they do not conform, they are considered deviant and punished or stigmatized throughout their lives. In some societies, though, a legitimate role exists that allows them to satisfy their inclinations while serving the group in various ways. Institutionalized gender crossing is a cultural mechanism that provides a legitimate outlet for people who otherwise might be unhappy or cause problems in the social life of the community.

Certainly, this is a relatively favorable image of cultures that allow gender crossing. Anthropologists have often viewed the institutionalization of gender crossing as a lesson “we” can learn from “them.” Some human groups do not insist on rigid conformity to their sexual stereotypes, but allow diversity, in contrast to chauvinistic cultures like the anthropologists’ own. Unlike “us,” “they” normalize individual variation in aspects such as dress style, sexual orientation, work activities, mannerisms, and the like, rather than rigidly insisting on uniformity. And unlike many of “us”—who view men who act like women and women who act like men as morally degenerate, dangerous to society, or genetically abnormal—“they” do not despise or ostracize such individuals, but provide them with legitimate roles in the community’s social life. The usual lessons were: (1) “we” ought to be more like “them” by tolerating variation and accepting people as individuals whom we value and who can contribute in various ways and (2) not all peoples in the world require conformity to their society’s normal sex roles, so there is no reason to think our intolerance is universal and, therefore, inevitable. These two lessons are well worth pondering.

Still, some anthropologists today think this view somewhat disparages gender-crossed individuals because it assumes they cannot live up to the expectations of their “real sex,” so they are allowed to “alter their sex.” Further, the view assumes that, in all cultures, people classify individuals as belonging to one of only two genders (female and male), so that a woman who doesn’t want to be completely a woman must become partly like a man, and vice versa.

Many peoples recognize more than two gender identities by culturally constructing **multiple gender identities**. If it is true that gender is culturally constructed, then there is no necessary reason to assume that all peoples will construct only two genders. Some peoples define a third or even a fourth gender of “man–woman” or “woman–man” (or “not woman–not man,” or “half man–half woman,” as some indigenous terms often translate). These third or fourth gender identities go beyond Euro-American definitions of homoeroticism, transvestism, transgender, or other concepts familiar in the Western cultural tradition.

Multiple gender identities are well documented for many Native American peoples. In his 1998 book, *Changing Ones*, Will Roscoe reports that more than 150 Native American cultures had institutionalized multiple gender identities for males, or females, or both sexes. Males adopted the dress, tasks, family roles,

or other aspects of womanhood. Females took on activities usually associated with manhood such as warfare or hunting. By doing so, they took on alternative third or fourth gender identities. Far from being ridiculed, ostracized, despised, or otherwise socially stigmatized, such individuals in most cases were treated with respect and valued for their contributions to their families or group.

Native American tribes all had their own word for such roles in their language, but gender identities varied so much from people to people that applying a single English word is problematic. The preferred modern term is *Two Spirits*, derived from a Siouxan phrase referring to persons who had both female and male spirits. We use *Two Spirits* here, along with *man–woman*, *woman–man*, or *third or fourth gender identity*, depending on context.

Among the Navajo of the Southwest, for example, families and local communities generally welcomed third-gender persons. An anthropologist in the 1930s quoted a Navajo elder:

If there were no *nadle* [men–women], the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left, the horses, sheep, and Navaho would all go. They are leaders just like President Roosevelt.

(Quoted in Roscoe 1998, 43)

The elder surely exaggerated, but his statement indicates the Navajo’s recognition of the contributions of men–women. They often managed their family’s property, supervised work, and became medicine men or took on other ritual responsibilities. On the other hand, we should assume that Navajo (like other people) vary in their opinions, so there was unlikely to have been unanimous approval or tolerance of *nadle*.

People with female genitals could adopt alternative roles as well, which also were valued in many Native communities. A girl who came to be known as *Woman Chief* was adopted by a Crow family during the nineteenth century. Like boys, she hunted deer and bighorn sheep while growing up. When the man who raised her was killed, she took responsibility for the family, acting as both father and mother. Later in life, she helped save her camp from an attack by the Blackfoot and went on

**multiple gender identities** Definitions of sexual identities beyond the female and male duality, including third and fourth genders such as man–woman or woman–man.

horse-raiding parties. Eventually, Woman Chief took four wives and participated in council deliberations in her band, a role usually reserved for men.

As you might expect, most early Anglo observers of Two Spirits misunderstood these individuals and their roles in society. They overemphasized the sexual orientation of the person, whereas in fact their sexual behavior varied from tribe to tribe and from individual to individual within the same tribe. In most cases, even when Two Spirits were homosexual, sexual behavior was not the aspect of the role that was considered the most important element by the people themselves. Further, Two Spirits rarely engaged in homosexual activity with *one another*. Where homosexuality was an aspect of the role, the people with whom relations occurred were not considered homosexuals at all.

A more accurate portrayal of third and fourth genders defines the roles as multidimensional, thus recognizing that practices varied not only from tribe to tribe, but also from individual to individual within the same tribe. Nonetheless, certain patterns are apparent. Serena Nanda identifies several features of gender variants that were widespread (not universal) among Native American peoples. Four of the main characteristics are:

1. Cross-gender occupation or work activities: a preference for the work of the opposite sex and/or for work set aside for their third or fourth gender identity
2. Transvestism: in most cultures, a dress style different from the style of men and women—most commonly cross-dressing but sometimes a combination of female and male garments
3. Associations with spiritual power or a spiritual sanction: possession of special powers derived from spiritual forces, often combined with a personal experience interpreted by the group as a calling
4. Same-sex relationships: the formation of sexual and emotional bonds with members of the same sex, who were not themselves men–women or women–men

These four widespread characteristics of third- and fourth-gender identities provide a convenient way to organize our discussion, but the variability of the role must always be kept in mind. No single dimension is “typical.”

### Cross-Gender Occupation or Work Roles

Adopting the work roles of the opposite sex was a widespread feature of Two Spirits. This aspect often received special attention in various Native communities. Probably more than any other single dimension, occupation/work best defines the role. A famous

Navajo *nadleehi* who died in the 1930s was unusually skilled in weaving blankets, a typically female task. In many tribes, individuals who performed the tasks of the opposite sex often excelled at the work, in the opinions of their communities. Sioux Two Spirits (called *winkte*) dressed like women and lived in their own tepees at the edges of camps. The quill and beadworks of a *winkte* were often highly valued because of their fine quality. Among the matrilineal, matrilocal Zuni of the American Southwest, a *lhamana* (man–woman) was looked upon favorably by the women of his family because he stayed with the household of his birth rather than leave upon marriage. Matilda Cox Stevenson, a nineteenth-century ethnographer, wrote that Zuni *lhamana* would do almost double the work of a woman because they were not burdened by childbirth or the heaviest duties of child care. In spite of such examples, to say that all gender variants exhibited “sex role reversal” in work performance is simplistic; the most famous Zuni man–woman was We’wha, who participated in both female and male tasks.

Commonly, a child who showed an inclination for the work of the opposite sex was considered by others to be suited for an alternative gender role. For example, girls who acted as though they wanted to go hunting or use weapons were seen as potential women–men. A Mohave adult told a 1930s ethnographer that adults “may insist on giving the child the toys and garments of its true sex, but the child will throw them away” (Roscoe 1998, 139). A child could not control such behavior, in the Mohave view, for the kinds of dreams a child had affected whether the child would become a man, a woman, a man–woman, or a woman–man. Among the Zuni, as children grow up, they experience several rites of passage that initiate them into ceremonial groups and instruct them in the ceremonial and work duties appropriate for their sex. While a child, one Zuni man–woman underwent the first male initiation ceremony but not the second, making him an “unfinished male” (Roscoe 1991, 144), who could participate in some male activities but not others, such as warfare and hunting.

### Transvestism

Wearing the clothing of the opposite sex was especially common and culturally significant among the tribes of the Great Plains, including the Arapaho, Arikara, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Crow, Gros Ventre, Hidatsa, Iowa, Kansa, Mandan, Omaha, Osage, Oto, Pawnee, Ponca, and speakers of the Siouan language. Although common, transvestism was not found in all cultures with gender crossing. Sometimes men–women dressed like men, sometimes like





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This old photo of the Zuni Two Spirit named We-wha shows him dressed as a woman, although he altered both his attire and work roles.

women, and sometimes their choice of clothing depended on the situation. Among the Navajo, some *nadleehi* (men–women) wore women’s clothing; others did not or only sometimes did so. Woman Chief, the adopted Crow woman, did not wear men’s clothes, although she adopted many other aspects of the male role.

After whites began settling the West, most regarded men–women (whom many simplistically categorized as “sodomites”) as disgusting or sinful. Because it was a visible manifestation of the Two Spirit role, transvestism was especially abhorrent to Anglo government officials, missionaries, educators, and settlers. Due to formal punishments and white ridicule, this symbol of alternative gender identity had largely disappeared by the early twentieth century.

### Associations with Spiritual Powers

Usually, communities perceived Two Spirits as having some sort of unusual powers or abilities derived from spiritual sources. The Cheyenne of the Great Plains

used a term that translates “half man–half woman.” These people served as masters of ceremony for the important Scalp Dance that followed a successful raid by a war party. They also possessed powerful love medicines, so their services were sought by young men and women who wanted to attract heterosexual partners. Lakota believed that *winkte* could predict future events and could bestow lucky names on children. Osh-Tisch (whose name translates as “Finds Them and Kills Them”), of the Crow tribe, had a vision as a youth and became a powerful medicine person. One Navajo man–woman memorized numerous curing chants and learned to construct dozens of the intricate sandpaintings used in curing rituals (see Chapter 15). He was widely credited with near miraculous healing powers.

### “Same-Sex” Relationships

The sexual orientation of Two Spirits varied from people to people (and from person to person within a single tribe). Understandably, reliable information on the sexual orientation of third- and fourth-gendered persons is rare. Some seem to have refrained from sex altogether. But the most common pattern was for men–women to be sexually active with men and sometimes women, but not with other men–women. These relations (most Anglo-Americans or Canadians would culturally categorize them as “homosexual relations”) in most cases were an expected aspect of the role. Thus, a (genitally) male Two Spirits would engage in sex with men of his group, without stigma or punishment for either party. The man would not be considered homosexual because he had not had relations with *another man*, but with a *man–woman*. In some tribes, a man would take a man–woman as a second “wife”—again apparently without stigma.

Even less is known about the sexual practices of women–men, and often early observers just stated that they were women who avoided marriage, or refused to marry. It appears, though, that they most commonly had relations with females. The complications of characterizing a person’s sexual orientation are shown by a Mohave woman–man who had three wives (sequentially). All three eventually left her, and later in life, the woman–man became very active sexually with men.

After contact with Euro-Americans, Two Spirit identities were suppressed in most regions where Native Americans still lived, especially after the confinement of so many Natives to reservations in the 1800s. The majority of whites—settlers, traders, government agents, missionaries, and others—found the existence of a

*legitimate* role such as man–woman or woman–man abhorrent. Because most viewed the custom as sinful, as harmful to Indian character, or as an obstacle to Native assimilation into Anglo society, they often imposed legal or social punishments for third and fourth genders. For example, in the 1920s, large numbers of Indian children were taken away from their families and communities—by force when necessary—and placed in on- or off-reservation government-run boarding schools. In these Indian Schools (as they are known today), the explicit goal was to socialize and educate Indian children into Anglo culture. By separating Native children from their families and traditions, the theory was, they could be more quickly and thoroughly assimilated into white society. Of course, young people who showed signs of assuming alternative gender identities were punished.

Through such educational and legal mechanisms, multiple gender identities were suppressed. Even some tribes that had once accepted third and fourth genders came to reject such persons. For instance, in the 1940s, some Winnebago told an ethnographer that “the [Two Spirit] was at one time a highly honored and respected person, but that the Winnebago had become ashamed of the custom because the white people thought it was amusing or evil” (quoted in Roscoe 1991, 201).

### Hijra of Hindu India

With more than a billion people and dozens of languages and ethnicities, India is one of the world’s most diverse countries. Hinduism, the predominant religion, believes in the existence of multiple gods, many of whom are androgynous (having both female and male characteristics). Many Hindu sects are devoted to the worship of specific deities, such as Rama, Vishnu, and Shiva.

In the Hindu parts of India, there is a category of persons called *hijra*. They are people born with male genitals but who have chosen to undergo an operation that removes their testicles and penises. The operation is a rite of passage that transforms them into “neither man nor woman,” in the phrase of ethnographer Serena Nanda. *Hijra* thus are members of a culturally constructed third gender.

*Hijra* form communities in urban areas of India, especially in the north. In part, these are religious communities, for they worship Bahuchara Mata, one of the avatars of the Hindu Mother Goddess. *Hijra* also identify with Krishna and Shiva, two other deities with anomalous genders. Because of their status as a third

gender and their identification with these gods, other Hindus view *hijra* as spiritually powerful, able to bless people and events.

In the neighborhoods where they live, these spiritual powers lead Hindu families to call on *hijra* to perform various services. They dance at temple festivals and perform at life crisis ceremonies, such as childbirth and weddings. After a child is born, *hijra* dance and sing to bless the baby. After a wedding ceremony, *hijra* are called in to pray, sing, and dance to ensure that the couple will be prosperous and bear sons. The families pay them for these ritual services. *Hijra* also are potentially dangerous because of their ability to issue powerful curses. *Hijra* do not discourage this belief, for it helps them if they have problems collecting their fees.

The majority of *hijra* are born with male genitals. The rite of passage that emasculates them is translated as “rebirth,” for it is viewed as transforming the person from an “ordinary, impotent male” (Nanda 1999, 26) into the *hijra* identity. Emasculation is culturally interpreted as a religious obligation of a would-be *hijra*, for sacrificing one’s genitals shows dedication and sincerity of intent. It is witnessed by other *hijra* and makes it difficult for “fake *hijras*” (Nanda 1999, 37) to join the community just so they can take advantage of the opportunity to receive payment for ritual services.

After the surgery, which is surrounded by lengthy ceremonies and taboos, feminine pronouns (“she,” “her”) are usually applied to the person. Most of the time, *hijra* dress as females and assume female gestures, postures, gaits, and hairstyles, even when not working in ceremonies.

Becoming a *hijra* provides security—both social and economic—for persons whose lives might otherwise be difficult. *Hijra* residents of a town or city form households with people like themselves, although many maintain relationships with the families they were born into. Many people refer to one another using fictive kinship terms (Chapter 8) like “sister” and “granny.” There is a well-developed social system, including a hierarchy, but most *hijra* eventually rise to the top of the hierarchy. The health and old-age needs generally are managed.

Economically, *hijra* occupy a legitimate niche in Hindu society, which provides them with some economic security. The leaders of a *hijra* community that lives in a particular neighborhood constantly investigate whether Hindu families are about to give birth or have a wedding. When a family is identified, the group marks their distinctive sign on the house with chalk as a signal that no other *hijra* house should show up for the birth or wedding ceremony. *Hijra* perform in groups of

three to five or more persons—singing, dancing, drumming, and clowning, often with sexually suggestive themes and movements. Payment is in money and items like rice, candy, and clothing. Typically, *hijra* are dissatisfied with the amounts and may threaten to curse or shame the families. In addition to ritual performances, some *hijra* make their living by acting as prostitutes and live in “houses” of a different kind. Others go out begging for alms.

It is difficult to know whether most male and female Hindus accept *hijra* as a legitimate and nonstigmatized third-gender category, in the same way that many Native Americans accepted Two Spirits. Serena Nanda, who worked extensively with *hijra*, seems to think their gender identity is viewed with ambivalence by other Hindus. Certainly, Hindus hold diverse opinions about them. Nonetheless, the wider society allows them to live in their midst and provides payment for their ceremonial performances.

### Same Sex Marriage?

In North American society generally, popular ideas about alternative gender identities and sexual preference changed dramatically in the late twentieth century. Polls show that most U.S. citizens favor giving spousal benefits such as medical care and life insurance to same-sex domestic partners. As of summer 2010, same sex civil unions (not marriage) were legitimized by the state governments of Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and New Jersey. The legislature of Hawaii was considering a similar bill.

However, the majority of Americans oppose same-sex marriage. In 1996, former President Bill Clinton signed the federal law known as the Defense of Marriage Act, which denied federal legal recognition of same sex marriages. As a consequence, one partner of a same-sex couple cannot receive benefits that a legal spouse receives, such as Social Security, deceased veterans benefits, and Medicaid.

In the November 2004 national elections in the United States, 11 states had ballot initiatives that defined marriage exclusively as a relationship between a man and a woman. The initiatives passed in all states by very wide margins. Between 2003 and 2010, five American states legalized same-sex marriage: Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, and New Hampshire. However, in all states, the legalization was by vote of the state legislatures or a state Supreme Court decision. Same-sex marriage has never been legalized by popular vote in any state. In fact, California voters explicitly rejected it in a 2008 ballot initiative. The Maine state legislature

approved same-sex marriage, but Maine voters later overturned it. Six European nations now recognize same-sex marriage as does Canada, Iceland, and South Africa.

Many large corporations now provide spousal benefits such as health insurance and parental leave for domestic partners of either sex, partly reflecting the modern realities of the labor market and partly reflecting changes in society’s attitudes about sexual preference. Despite such changes in attitudes, however, most Americans still regard practices such as transgender, transvestism, bisexuality, and homoeroticism as deviant or worse. Most conservative religious people view these practices as sinful. Denominations have split over issues of gay and lesbian ordination. By June 2010, 140 Lutheran congregations voted to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America over the organization’s decision to allow same-sex partners to serve as clergy. Even some Protestant denominations, like the fairly liberal Episcopal Church, divide over ordination of gays and lesbians. Recently, though, Episcopalians ordained a gay bishop.

Cultures such as the Native American peoples and the Hijra show that attitudes of fear, hatred, and intolerance of transsexuals and homosexuals are not universal. Perhaps the knowledge that lots of cultures accept alternative genders is relevant for our attitudes about diversity in sexual orientation and other gender-related issues in twenty-first-century societies. Knowledge of such cultures must, however, be balanced by noting that many other peoples exist whose attitudes toward homoeroticism and alternative gender roles are highly negative.



## The Gendered Division of Labor

The **gendered** (or **sexual**) **division of labor** refers to the patterned ways productive and other economic tasks are allocated to men and women. Each sex has access to the products and/or services produced by the other, making the tasks of males and females, to some extent, complementary. This is one aspect of a peoples’ **gender** (or **sex**) **roles**—the rights, duties, and expectations

**gendered (sexual) division of labor** The kinds of productive activities (tasks) assigned to women versus men in a culture.

**gender (sex) roles** The rights and duties individuals have because of their perceived identities as males, females, or another gender category.



one acquires by virtue of one's membership in a gender category.

We must correct one misconception about this topic immediately: that it is only natural for men to be the breadwinners for their family. Hundreds of field studies provide all the data needed to discredit this idea. Breadwinning—that is, producing the supply of food and other material needs and wants of domestic groups—is definitely not an activity of men exclusively, or even largely. As we have already seen, in many societies, men produce most of the food, but in others women's contribution to daily subsistence equals or exceeds that of men.

This finding contradicts the opinion of those who think that widespread patriarchy is rooted in the “fact” that men's work is more important to physical survival and material well-being than women's work. Those who hold this view argue that women are usually economically dependent on men, which in turn makes women socially subordinate to men. But where patriarchy exists, it is not because the things men do are somehow more important to family and group survival than the things women do. This ethnocentric idea probably comes from the way most modern industrial economies worked in the mid-twentieth century: by and large, men earned the money that allowed their families to purchase the goods they needed to survive. It is falsely concluded that the same economic dependence of wives on husbands characterized other peoples.

Besides, it is impossible to say whether male or female tasks, taken as wholes, are more or less important. Bearing and nursing children do seem pretty significant. Often, if a task is performed by males, it is *symbolically* considered more important, but whether it is *objectively* more important is ambiguous.

These are the anthropologist's usual warnings about confusing the beliefs and practices of one's own experience with those of all humans. Most people's ideas about what is and is not “natural” for humans to think and do are products of a specific culture at a particular time. Unless we become educated about the cultural diversity of humanity, we consistently—and usually mistakenly—conclude that the ideas and practices of our own society are universal or even inherent in human nature.

So, Man the Breadwinner and Woman the Homemaker do not accurately describe the sexual division of labor in other cultures. Humankind is too diverse for that. Despite cultural variation, however, there are some cross-cultural regularities and patterns in the

sexual division of labor. What are these patterns, and can they be explained?

## Understanding Major Patterns

Table 11.1 summarizes a vast amount of comparative work on the gendered division of labor. The specific tasks toward the left of the table are more likely to be performed by males; those to the right are more likely to be done by females. The nearer a task is to the left, the more likely it is to be performed by males and vice versa.

A few comments are needed to clarify the table. First, it does not portray the division of labor in any specific society. Rather, it represents a composite of information drawn from hundreds of societies in various parts of the world. For example, the tasks listed as “Predominantly Females” should be interpreted as those done by women in most societies; however, in some specific societies, one or another of the tasks are performed mainly by men. Tasks listed as “Exclusively Males” are those carried out by men in all or nearly all societies, with few exceptions.

Also, the table includes only those activities that produce some kind of material product. Omitted from the table are other activities that are predominantly or exclusively male, such as holding political office and fighting in wars. Also absent are some activities, such as caring for infants, that are predominantly or exclusively women's work in all cultures. Of course, in one sense most activities are “productive” (of social order, group defense, or children, for example), but here our discussion is limited to activities usually considered “economic tasks.”

Table 11.1 reveals two patterns. First, all human groups divide *some* kinds of labor by gender in similar ways. That is, some tasks are done mainly or nearly exclusively by one gender in most societies. For instance, hunting, clearing land, preparing the soil, working with hard materials, and cutting wood are exclusively or predominantly men's work in the great majority of societies. Gathering wild plants, processing plant foods, and cooking are mainly the work of females in almost all cultures. In short, although the table shows that groups vary in the kinds of tasks allocated to women and men, there are *widespread* (although not *universal*) patterns; consistently, some tasks are more likely to be done by men, others by women. The first thing to explain is: Why are some tasks done mostly by women, whereas others are done mainly or entirely by men?

TABLE-11-1 Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labor

General Category of Activity	Tasks That Are Performed by				
	Exclusively Males	Predominantly Males	Either or Both Genders	Predominantly Females	
Extracting Food and Other Products	Hunting Trapping	Fishing	Gathering small land animals	Gathering shellfish, mollusks	Gathering wild plant foods
		Clearing land Preparing soil	Planting crops Tending crops Harvesting crops		
	Woodworking Mining Lumbering	Tending large animals	Milking animals	Caring for small animals	
				Gathering fuel	Fetching water
Manufacturing Processing, and Preparing Goods for Consumption	Butchering				Processing, preparing plant foods Cooking
	Boat building	House building	Preparing skins		
	Working with stone, horn, bone, shell	Making rope, cordage, nets	Making leather products	Making clothing Matmaking Loom weaving	
	Smelting ore Metalworking			Making pottery	

Source: Adapted from Murdock and Provost (1973).

The second pattern is revealed in the tasks in the column headed “Either or Both Sexes.” These tasks are about equally likely to be performed by men or women, depending on the particular society. Members of either gender may do them, or both may work cooperatively on them. For example, whether men or women plant, tend and harvest crops, milk animals, or work with skins or leather varies from people to people, with no clear pattern apparent. These tasks are so culturally variable that we cannot make generalizations; whether they are done by women, men, or both depends largely on local circumstances. The second thing to explain is: What determines the cultural variability in the sexual division of labor? Why are women more heavily involved in agriculture (planting, tending, and harvesting crops) in some societies than in others, for example?

This section focuses on hypotheses that deal with the first question. We put off discussion of the second question until the next section.

What explains why some tasks are nearly always done by men, whereas others are performed by women in most cultures? Biological/physical differences between the sexes—such as sexual dimorphism—provide one possible explanation. Perhaps tasks are assigned in such a way that

the members of each sex do what they are physically able to do best.

This possibility seems like biological determinism. If understood properly, though, it is not. Physical differences between men and women are only *relevant* in explaining the sexual division, not *determinative*. To say that physical differences are relevant is to say the following: because of biological differences, men can perform certain kinds of tasks more effectively than women, and vice versa, and these differences are reflected in the widespread cross-cultural similarities in the sexual division of labor.

Consider an example. Anthropologists used to say that one task was everywhere done by men: hunting. Hunting seems to require certain biological capabilities—such as speed, strength, and endurance—that give men an advantage over women. Hunting also was thought to be incompatible with certain responsibilities universally borne by women for biological reasons: pregnancy, lactation (breastfeeding), and child care. Pregnant women would have a hard time chasing game, and lactating mothers would have to quit the hunt several times a day to nurse their infants. Because men could hunt more effectively than women, in foraging populations men hunted. In



<b>Fertility Maintenance</b>	Strenuous, prolonged physical exercise by women leads to lowered body fat and hormonal changes that reduce female fertility, so most strenuous tasks are done by males.
<b>Reproductive Roles</b>	Populations need relatively few adult males to sustain numbers, so societies protect females by assigning hazardous tasks to males.
<b>Physical Strength</b>	Most men are stronger than most women, so tasks requiring greater strength generally are performed by males.
<b>Child Care Compatibility</b>	Women are universally bearers and primary caregivers of young children, so females tend to perform those tasks that can be combined most effectively with child care.

contrast, gathering required less strength and endurance. Because men had to spend so much of their time hunting, which women couldn't do as efficiently, gathering is largely women's work.

These arguments are partly valid, but female and male biological differences do not make it physically mandatory that males are the hunters and females are the gatherers in foraging populations. For one thing, not all kinds of hunting—and not all tasks connected to hunting—require superior strength, speed, and endurance. For another, there are questions about whether males typically have more “endurance” than females. Finally, there is no necessary biological reason a woman could not give up hunting only during her pregnancy and lactation and leave her older children in camp under the care of someone else.

In fact, it is just not true that hunting is *universally* a male activity. When BaMbuti Pygmies of the Zaire rain forest hunt animals with nets, the women help by driving game into the nets held by men. In another part of the world, Agnes Estioko-Griffin describes hunting by women among the Agta, a mountain tribe of the Philippines who live on the island of Luzon. Agta men do most of the hunting, but women often accompany them in teamwork efforts, and women frequently hunt together without the company of men. Interestingly, sometimes women take their infants with them on the hunt, carrying the children on their backs. People like the Agta and BaMbuti show that the “man the hunter” image is oversimplified.

But such cases do not make the image entirely wrong. The great majority of peoples in which hunting is a significant means of acquiring food are foragers or horticulturalists. In most foraging cultures, women do most wild plant gathering. Men also contribute plant foods among most foragers, which makes images of “woman the gatherer” also oversimplified. As for horticultural peoples, the *pattern* is for women to do most

of the planting, weeding, and harvesting of cultivated plants, whereas men hunt to provide meat. These patterns are not *universal* but they are *widespread* enough that many anthropologists believe there must be some physical differences between men and women that are relevant in explaining them.

What specific female–male biological differences are likely to be most relevant in explaining the similarities in the sexual division of labor? Four main arguments have been proposed, briefly summarized in the Concept Review: (1) the possibility that regular heavy exercise depresses female fertility, (2) the fact that women and men have different roles in reproducing the population, (3) the relative overall strength of the two sexes, and (4) the biological fact that only women give birth to and nurse infants and young children. We discuss each factor, although the first two do not seem very plausible in the view of the authors.

### Fertility Maintenance

One potentially relevant physical characteristic is that heavy exercise can reduce a woman's fertility. Modern female athletes—especially long-distance runners—often do not menstruate or ovulate monthly. This is because of a combination of a low body fat ratio and hormonal changes in women who engage in prolonged physical exercise. Some anthropologists suggest that work activities requiring heavy exertion would reduce women's fertility. For example, hunting often requires wielding weapons such as bows and spears that are powered by muscles alone, locating and tracking prey, and running down animals once they are shot. Lumbering and clearing land for planting also involve physical exertion such as swinging heavy axes for hours at a time. Conceivably, female fertility would be so decreased by such strenuous activities that the population would not be sustained over the course of many generations.





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These Tuareg women from Niger are processing millet, an African grain. Processing and preparing plant foods after the harvest are mainly women's work in the majority of cultures.

However, hunting among most foragers and horticulturalists is not as strenuous as portrayed, nor are many other activities that are exclusively or largely done by males. In fact, women commonly do many tasks as physically demanding as those done by men, such as hauling water, gathering firewood for fuel, and planting and harvesting crops. Although fertility maintenance could be relevant among a few peoples, it is unlikely to be a widespread factor and certainly does not account for the widespread patterns in the sexual division of labor.

### *Reproductive Roles*

Another possibility arises from the fact that fewer men than women are biologically necessary to maintain population size. A man produces enough sperm to father many thousands of children (theoretically), whereas a woman can bear a child only every year or so. (See A Closer Look for evolutionary psychology's ideas about how this might affect societies.) Because only a few

sexually active men can impregnate a large number of women, the size of the population seemingly depends more on the number of women than the number of men. Also, in all known societies, women are far more involved than men in the care of infants and young children. For these reasons, fewer males than females are needed to sustain a population. For the sexual division of labor, this difference in reproductive roles might imply that males are more expendable, which helps explain why so many hazardous roles (like hunting and fighting battles) are male roles: the group can afford to sacrifice some of its males but must protect its females as much as possible. If men "have" to perform such dangerous roles, then many other tasks are left to women by default.

Males are expendable only "theoretically," however, and if "all else is equal." In those societies—and there are a great many of them—in which warfare is a serious threat, large numbers of males are needed to protect the entire group. In fact, among many peoples, group

survival itself depends on the ability to mobilize many warriors and to make political/military alliances with friendly neighbors. Only in their reproductive role are males “expendable”; in other respects, large numbers of males are essential for group survival. *If* there is a biological explanation for males performing more hazardous activities, it is because they are better equipped physically to do so, not because a group finds many of its males to be expendable.

### Relative Strength

Another biological factor is the average difference in physical strength between men and women, which allows men to perform tasks requiring great strength more efficiently. In Table 11.1, superior average male strength is *relevant*—once again, no anthropologist claims it is all-important—in many tasks under the heading “Exclusively Males” and in some of the tasks labeled “Predominantly Males,” such as clearing land and preparing soil. On the other hand, strength has no obvious relationship to other exclusively or predominantly male tasks, such as trapping, butchering, and working with fibers. Note again that some female tasks also require significant strength, like gathering fuel and fetching water and even food processing with pounders. Relative strength does influence patterns in the sexual division of labor, but other factors also matter.

### Compatibility with Child Care

A fourth biologically based difference is that women are the bearers, nursers, and primary caregivers of infants and young children. This reproductive fact means that women are most likely to perform those tasks that can be combined with pregnancy and child care. Back in 1970, Judith Brown argued that such tasks have four characteristics:

1. They are fairly routine and repetitive, so they do not require much concentration.
2. They can be interrupted and resumed without significantly lowering their efficient performance.
3. They do not place the children who accompany their mothers to the site of the task in potential danger.
4. They do not require women and children to travel very far away from home.

The gathering of various products and the domestic work listed in Table 11.1 are highly compatible with child care. In addition, among horticultural peoples, garden tasks such as planting, weeding, and tending crops, and harvesting usually are done by women; these activities, too, generally seem highly compatible with



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The average strength of the sexes influences the gendered division of labor. This Pygmy woman carrying a heavy load of firewood illustrates that women as well as men often perform heavy work.

caring for children. Notice that child care compatibility is most likely an important factor among peoples with high fertility. Where most couples have few children, this factor becomes less relevant as a basis for allocating productive work.

In sum, biological factors do help explain cross-cultural patterns in the division of labor by gender. Female–male differences in strength and child care roles have the most widespread relevance, although the other two factors might matter among specific peoples. Notice, though, that even if all four factors in combination totally explained the widespread patterns shown in Table 11.1 (which they do not), none of them can explain the *differences*. In fact, no biological difference between males and females alone can explain the cross-cultural diversity in the sexual division of labor. Biological differences in strength, reproductive physiology, and ability to care for infants are roughly constant in all human populations. But



Whether or not a task is compatible with caring for young children seems to be an important influence on the sexual division of labor. This woman from the Malagasy Republic is looking after her baby and harvesting rice at the same time.



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a condition that is constant in all groups cannot, by itself, account for things that vary between the groups. Constants cannot explain variability and diversity. We need other hypotheses to account for the cross-cultural variability in the gendered division of labor.

### Understanding Variability

Here we discuss one of the most important variations. There is a fairly consistent pattern in the degree of women's versus men's involvement in certain agricultural tasks, specifically in those tasks labeled "Either or Both Sexes" in the middle column of Table 11.1. Recall the distinction between horticultural and intensive agriculture in Chapter 6. In most horticultural groups, much—and in some societies nearly all—of the everyday garden work is done by women. For example, in traditional cultures in parts of the Pacific, the Amazon basin, tropical Africa, and North America, women do most of the planting, weeding, tending, and harvesting of crops whereas men participate in farming by clearing new land and preparing the plots or fields for planting. In contrast, among peoples who rely more heavily on intensive agriculture, women's actual work in the fields and direct contribution to the food supply are less important. To phrase the relationship in a few words: women are more likely to be involved *directly* in food production in horticultural than in intensive agricultural communities.

There seem to be several reasons for this general pattern. First, in the New World, horticultural Native Americans had few or no domesticated animals, so men's contribution to the food supply focused on hunting. Most routine garden work fell to women because such work is generally compatible with pregnancy and child care. In contrast, most intensive agriculturalists relied on livestock for meat, dairy products, hides, wool, and other products derived from animals. Men spent relatively little time hunting and so had more time for farming.

Also, prior to the twentieth century, in Europe and Asia nearly all intensive agriculturalists used the animal-powered plow to turn the earth prior to planting. Some researchers have suggested that most women are not strong enough to perform the heavy work of plowing efficiently. (You might remember, though, that draft animals provide most of the muscle power for plow agriculture, which makes this suggestion difficult to evaluate. Also note that men are stronger than women only "on average.")

There is another reason women are less involved in direct cultivation in intensive agricultural societies. In Europe and Asia ("Eurasia"), the horticultural and intensive agricultural adaptations tend to involve the farming of different kinds of crops. Roughly half of horticultural societies grow *root crops* like yams, sweet potatoes, manioc (cassava), or taro. In contrast, about

90 percent of intensive agriculturalists rely on *cereal crops* like rice, wheat, corn, barley, and millet.

This difference affects women's involvement in actual farm work. Root crops can be stored in the ground for long periods after they first become ready to eat, so they typically are harvested continuously during the growing season (think of familiar root crops like carrots or potatoes, which gardeners pull or dig up as needed). Either daily or a few times weekly, a woman goes to the garden and returns with root crops for herself, her children, and her husband. In contrast, cereals (because they are the seeds of plants) tend to ripen at about the same time each year, usually near the end of the growing season. They have to be harvested in a short period of time, dried and processed, and stored for the rest of the year.

How does crop type affect the work of men and women? Cereal crops generally require a lot of labor to process (e.g., drying and grinding) before cooking. Plant processing labor is women's work in most cultures. Further, people who rely on wheat, rice, barley, or other cereal grains usually face periods of intense labor requirements: at the beginning of the growing season and at harvest time, there is a need for laborers who can do a lot of hot, heavy work in a short period that is best not interrupted by other tasks. Such work is generally done by men (see the preceding section). In contrast, root-growing horticultural peoples tend to spread cultivation tasks out more evenly over the entire year, making gardening a day-in, day-out, repetitive task that requires less strength and that is more compatible with child care.

A third reason is warfare. Where war was prevalent, men in horticultural communities defended the local village, neighborhood, or kin group from enemies. In regions such as highland New Guinea and parts of the Amazon, group survival depended on the ability to defend land and resources from attack. Community welfare often was improved by taking over the land of enemy neighbors, so offensive as well as defensive warfare was common. Men were not actually fighting their enemies most of the time, of course, but maintaining community defenses and guarding against surprise raids did require significant amounts of (predominantly male) time.

For most peoples, making alliances with other groups improved the odds of success in warfare. Forming and maintaining alliances required a lot of politicking, mutual visiting, and exchanges, requiring substantial male time and energy. Also, male solidarity ("male bonding") was advantageous, so in many groups where

warfare was prevalent, there were elaborate male-only rituals or social events that strengthened ties between men and helped socialize boys into manhood and the warrior role (see the discussion of the Awa in Chapter 10 for an example). All these pressures related to defensive and offensive warfare led men to concentrate much of their time and resources in fighting, preparing to fight, or maintaining the political relationships needed for success in organized fights. Routine garden tasks were left to women, partly by default.

In sum, comparative work shows that women are less involved in direct food production among intensive agricultural than among horticultural peoples. Three of the most important factors that influence female involvement in cultivation tasks are:

1. Among horticultural peoples, men spend more time hunting than they do in intensive agricultural adaptations, so men have less time for cultivating crops.
2. Compared to horticultural communities, intensive agriculturalists tend to grow cereal crops, making it more likely that men concentrate more on farm work and women more on domestic work, including processing foods before cooking.
3. Horticultural peoples tend to be subjected to pressure from hostile neighbors, so men are busier fighting, guarding, politicking, exchanging, and creating bonds and relationships among themselves.

In brief, as agricultural systems become more intensive, other factors change that usually lead to reduced women's involvement in direct food production.

It is important to emphasize that these relationships are *generalized*, meaning that they may not hold for any particular people. Horticultural peoples "tend to" be more affected by warfare pressures, intensive agriculturalists are "more likely to" grow cereals than roots, and so forth. Obviously, there are many exceptions to the general patterns.

Consider the Kofyar of Nigeria, for example. They construct terraces, spread goat manure over their fields, use compost, and practice other methods of increasing yields that lead anthropologists who observe them to call their farming "intensive." Yet quantitative studies in the 1990s reveal that Kofyar women work about as much as men in agriculture. The Kofyar and many other peoples do not have the relationship between cultivation intensity and male labor that comparative research says they "ought to have" or "predicts they will have."

The Kofyar and other exceptions to the general pattern illustrate two other points. First, the existence of



a general relationship established by comparative research does not tell us what any particular group of people are doing or thinking. The culture of any people is a product of a complex interaction among their history, adaptation, beliefs, and other factors. In any particular group, factors *unique* to that group may be more important than factors that are *generally* important. So, the fact that Kofyar women work the land about as much as men does not “disprove” the general point that women’s labor becomes less important as agriculture becomes more intensive.

Second, just because there are exceptions does not invalidate a generalization provided, of course, that the general pattern is well established. If we are interested in the factors that influence the cultural variations in the sexual division of labor, then we must do comparative work to look for general patterns. The fact that particular cultures do not fit the pattern does not invalidate the generalization—at least not until the number of exceptions becomes large enough to make us suspicious of the existence of the general pattern.

The preceding discussion is an example of the materialist theoretical approach discussed in Chapter 4. How a people acquire food (by horticulture or more intensive methods) influences the kinds of tasks women and men do (given differences in physical strength and reproductive roles). So, the material conditions of life interact with biological differences between women and men to produce the overall pattern of the division of labor along gender lines. That, at least, is the materialist argument.



## Gender Stratification

A fourth main issue in the anthropological study of gender is **gender stratification**, or the degree to which human groups allocate material and social rewards to women and men *based on their gender*. Other sources of unequal rewards include class, caste, family origins, and race (covered in other chapters). Here, we discuss only rewards based on whether one is a male or a female. We ignore such complications as third or fourth gender identities.

Gender stratification is sometimes referred to as “the status of women.” Whatever we call it, gender stratification is difficult to define because it includes many components that interact in complex ways. Some dimensions that are useful indicators for comparing the degree of gender stratification cross-culturally are listed in Table 11.2.

Of course, gender stratification is more complicated than this (or any) table can summarize. But the table does show some of the main features that constitute the overall pattern of gender stratification in particular cultures. It also is helpful in comparing the degree of gender stratification across cultures. Obviously, gender stratification is *multidimensional*, which makes it difficult to categorize gender stratification as “high,” “moderate,” “low,” or “nonexistent.” Why is it so difficult?

For one thing, some components are not consistent with other components. Studies of family life often report that women have a great deal of control in making decisions about child rearing and about the allocation of domestic resources, even though they have little independence outside the domestic context. For instance, in two Andalusian towns of southern Spain, David Gilmore’s fieldwork showed that wives have great autonomy in managing household affairs. He believes this is because many women are able to live near their own mothers, so that wives and their mothers frequently “gang up” on a husband. Even in male-dominated societies like traditional Korea, Japan, and China, the eldest female in a household usually managed household affairs with a fair degree of autonomy. Yet in these countries, and in many other societies, women hardly participated in public affairs, had barely any property of their own, had little voice about their marriages, and were clearly subordinate to their fathers, husbands, and husband’s fathers—socially and even legally.

Another factor complicating gender stratification is that, in most cultures, a woman’s status changes over the course of her life. For example, in traditional East Asia and South Asia, most families were patrilocally extended (see Chapter 8), so when women married, they left their own family and moved into or near the house of their husband’s parents. A young wife was subjected to the authority of her husband’s mother and was duty-bound to work extremely hard. But, as a woman settled into the household, had a son, and aged, her status improved and she gradually took over control of the household from her mother-in-law. Eventually, she became the everyday manager of the

**gender stratification** The degree to which males and females are unequal in dimensions such as status, power or influence, access to valued resources, eligibility for social positions, and ability to make decisions about their own lives.

**TABLE-11-2** Important Components of Gender Stratification

Dimension of Gender Stratification	Specific Questions for Societies
Kinds of social roles men and women perform	Are some roles limited to males and females? If so, which roles and how are they rewarded?
Value placed on contributions to groups	Are men's contributions viewed as more important—symbolically and/or practically?
Female deference to males	Do women defer socially to husbands or male relatives? How much, and in what contexts?
Access to positions of power and influence	Do women hold offices in the political arena? Who controls household and domestic tasks?
Control over personal lives	Do women make marital, sexual, childbearing, work, and other important decisions for themselves?
General beliefs about the sexes	Are men and women viewed as equally able intellectually and psychologically?

household and was an authority figure over her own daughters-in-law after her sons married. The same pattern of women's status improving with age appears in numerous other cultures.

Finally, in more complex societies like modern nations, distinctions of rank or class (considered in Chapter 13) or of ethnic affiliation (see Chapter 17) often outweigh male–female distinctions. That is, wealth or perceived membership in a racial or ethnic category are other bases of inequality that may be difficult to disentangle from gender stratification.

So, we should avoid thinking of gender stratification as a unitary phenomenon—as a single thing. Like other social relationships, male–female relationships are complex. This is not surprising. Concepts like “gender stratification” are used by contemporary social scientists. The people whose lives anthropologists study may not have this cultural concept at all. Nor are women's and men's lives in any community so simple that anthropologists (or anyone else) can categorize them unambiguously by statements like “Women have low status in culture X.” (This point—that simple categorizations are misleading—is one you might remember when a friend bemoans how some region, or country, or religion “suppresses women.”)

### **Is Gender Stratification Universal?**

In spite of complexities, there are cross-cultural variations in gender stratification. Even humanistic anthropologists who usually mistrust comparisons and

objective measurements recognize that there is much less gender stratification among the Native American Hopi, Zuni, and Iroquois than among the Yanomamö or Tukano of the Amazon basin. Gender stratification is a meaningful concept to use for answering certain questions such as: Are there societies in which women and men are equal? Are there matriarchal societies?

The answer to the second question is a qualified *no*. The qualification is due to disagreement over the meaning of the term *matriarchy*. Logically, matriarchy could be defined as the mirror image of patriarchy: for a people to be matriarchal, women should enjoy all the unequal rights and receive the same kinds of rewards that men have among peoples most would agree are *patriarchal*.

However, the term is not always used this way. Anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday worked among an Indonesian people, the Minangkabau, who by her definition are matriarchal. She writes: “Defining a female-oriented social order as the mirror image of a male form is like saying that women's contribution to society and culture deserves a special label only if women rule and act like men” (Sanday 2002, xi). Sanday argues that this outmoded definition led early twentieth century anthropologists to search the world for “primitive matriarchies,” without success. Their failure to discover matriarchy resulted from the fact that one cannot “find something that has been defined out of existence from the start” (Sanday 2002, xi). She prefers a conception of matriarchy that emphasizes maternal meanings where “maternal symbols are linked to

social practices influencing the lives of both sexes and where women play a central role in these practices” (Sanday 2002, xxi).

So, the popular definition of *matriarchy* (“female dominance”) is not the only way to conceptualize the term. If we choose to think of matriarchy as female rule, then despite the fictional stories and the occasional old adventure movie in which the hero gets captured by “amazons,” not a single instance of clear female domination over men has ever been found by ethnographers. Clearly, there have been and are individual women who hold great power, control great wealth, and are held in high esteem. Certainly, there are queens, female chiefs, and individual matriarchs of families and kin groups. But if we define matriarchy as a social system in which women have the rights and receive the material, social, and symbolic rewards that only men receive in a host of societies, then such a social system has not been documented.

The first question—whether there are cultures in which men and women are equal—has an even more uncertain and complex answer. Even anthropologists who have devoted their careers to studying gender cannot agree. Some scholars believe that women are never considered fully equal to men. They interpret the ethnographic record as showing that gender hierarchy—inequalities based on gender—exists among all peoples.

Those who believe that male dominance/female subordination is universal point to two fairly well-established generalizations. One applies to the realm of political institutions. In political life, gender hierarchy always exists. In no known society are the primary political authority roles restricted to females. But, in many societies, all women are denied the right to succeed to political offices, making office holding a male prerogative. Among most peoples, even kin-group leadership roles are monopolized by men. Male elders of a lineage or clan decide how the group’s land and other resources are to be used and allocated, how the group’s wealth objects are to be disposed of, whether the group is to engage in a battle to avenge a wrong, and so on. (As we shall soon see, however, women often do have significant influence over these matters, especially in matrilineal societies.)

The other realm of life with gender hierarchy is religion. In many societies, women are excluded from holding major religious leadership roles. To be sure, there are societies—lots of them, in fact—in which *particular rituals* are performed by and for women, as in female initiations. But there are many societies in which females are forbidden to participate in the most

important *public* rituals. Even among matrilineal peoples like the Hopi and Zuni of the American Southwest, it is men who wear the costumes in public dances that benefit the whole community.

According to some scholars, then, the activities of males are universally regarded as more important than those of females. Women as a social category are everywhere culturally devalued relative to men as a social category. Complete gender equality does not exist.

However, there is another way to interpret the ethnographic record. Many scholars note that most fieldworkers—and hence most of the ethnographic information available to shed light on the issue of gender hierarchy—have been biased in two ways. The first is the *androcentric* (male) bias. Until the 1970s, most fieldworkers were males, most of whom were not very interested in local women’s lives. At any rate, simply because they were themselves men, fieldworkers had little access to women’s points of view, so they often unwittingly took local men’s values, attitudes, and opinions as representative of the entire group. Female points of view were largely unreported, so reports were not objective and/or incomplete.

The second possible source of fieldwork bias is the tendency to *essentialize* other peoples. Basically this means that, first, we simplify the complexities of their lives in our own minds and writings, and, second, we have an ethnocentric tendency to impose outside concepts and standards (e.g., “inequality”) on Others. For example, look again at the list of “important components” of gender inequality in Table 11.2. Whose list is this? “Ours,” of course. If we claim that some people have gender stratification based on Our criteria, then we are de-emphasizing Their criteria. In fact, we might come to one conclusion using Ours, but this conclusion might vary from Theirs. As you realize, this objection is especially likely among humanistically inclined anthropologists, who tend to emphasize “the Native’s point of view.”

In short, some scholars—especially humanistic ones—think that many fieldworkers have been biased. Because of this bias, the ethnographic record is not objective. Those ethnographers and comparative researchers who say that there are no societies with total gender equality or even matriarchy have been misled—or are misleading themselves.

In contrast, some anthropologists have found cases of what they consider sexual equality. Those who believe that female–male equality exists in some cultures can point to particular people who they think document their belief. Here we consider two such peoples.



Iroquois women's control over cultivated foods and their distribution gave them relatively high status.



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The Iroquois, a matrilineal and matrilocal people of northeastern North America, are the most famous case of women achieving equality (or only “near equality?”) with men. Iroquois women produced the corn and other cultivated foods, put them in storage in the residential longhouses, and largely controlled how they were distributed from the storehouses. Iroquois men were away from their apartments in the longhouse much of the time, engaged in warfare or cooperative hunting expeditions. After the introduction of the fur trade into northeastern North America in the seventeenth century, men often were away searching for beaver pelts or raiding their neighbors for pelts. The matrilineally related women of a longhouse influenced their unmarried husbands' behavior by withholding provisions from their hunting trips and war parties. Only men had the right to hold the most powerful political offices because only males could be elected to the great council of chiefs. But it was the older women of the various matrilineages who selected their groups' representatives to the council. These women also had the right to remove and replace men who did not adequately represent the group's interests. Also, women had a voice in the deliberations of the council itself. They could veto declarations of war and introduce peacemaking resolutions.

Across the Pacific from the Iroquois are a people called the Vanatinai. Living in a small island off the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, the Vanatinai are a matrilineal people. Maria Lepowsky, who worked among Vanatinai in the late 1970s, reports considerable gender equality among them. Women own and inherit

gardens and other property, including wealth in pigs and valuables made of shell. Women choose whom they will marry and their husbands render brideservice, but divorce is easy and many people marry several times. Polygyny is possible, but the consent of the first wife is required. There is much overlap in the division of labor: both men and women garden, fish, and care for pigs. Men do a lot of child care also and gender distinctions are not symbolically marked by initiation rituals (Chapter 10) as in many cultures. Symbolically, Vanatinai view men as “life takers” (although warfare is not very intense), and women as “life givers.” Warfare earns men some prestige, but women also are seen as dangerous and powerful from their knowledge of witchcraft. Women play important roles in most public rituals, know spells, and can communicate with the ancestors and other spirits. Perhaps most indicative of equality is the possibility that a woman can achieve the status of *gia* (“giver”), the most prestigious and influential position. They do so by actively engaging in reciprocal exchanges, both among their own people and on overseas trading expeditions in which they give and receive shell valuables. Women may even organize these expeditions. Lepowsky, unfortunately, does not provide relative numbers of female and male *gia*.

So, is gender hierarchy in favor of males a cultural universal or not? Certainly, some ethnographers have been and are biased—but does this bias account for all reports of female subordination? Certainly, the Iroquois, the Hopi (see Chapter 9), Vanatinai, Minangkabau, and many other peoples demonstrate that women in some

cultures have achieved considerable control over their own lives and over public decision making—but do such cases represent *full equality* of males and females? Indeed, would we know “total equality” if we saw it in a society? What would it look like? Would men and women have to carry out the same kinds of economic tasks before we can legitimately claim they are completely equal? Is monogamy necessary, or can a society be polygynous and still qualify? How should family life be organized before we can say that husbands in culture X do not dominate their wives? Shall we require that women occupy 50 percent of all leadership roles before we say they have equal rights? (If so, neither Iroquois nor Vanatinai would have gender equality.)

Many questions must be answered before we can say whether gender hierarchy is universal—the most important of which is whether we would know complete gender equality if we were to encounter it!

Why is the question important? Many anthropologists think that the more cultures we encounter with gender equality, the greater the chances that modern societies can achieve equality. At the very least, lots of examples of equality would show that patriarchy is not inevitable because so many peoples are not patriarchal. Feminist psychologists, sociologists, historians, biologists, and other scholars have examined ethnographic descriptions of various Other Cultures, looking for equality or even matriarchy. Their reasoning also is that, if anthropologists have discovered numerous cultures in which women have achieved equality, then women will be more likely to achieve equality in the future. Their hope is that there are many such cultures. Their worry is that there are few or none.

However, the ethnographic record on gender equality—though not silent—is filled with ambiguity and uncertainty. It is ambiguous both because gender stratification is so multidimensional, making “total” equality difficult to recognize, and because of the problem of whose standards and criteria should be applied to actual cultures.

At any rate, how much does it matter for the cause of sexual equality *today* if women are “universally” or “nearly universally” subordinate? What matters most is that women and men are a good deal more equal in some societies than in others, which allows us to study the conditions under which future equality is likely to be possible. To argue that because women have always or usually been subordinate, they will forever be subordinate is analogous to pre-twentieth-century arguments that humans will never be able to fly. Just because no human group has achieved some state in the past does not mean

that none will achieve it in the future. It does not mean that we should give up trying to achieve it today and for the future. And it certainly does not mean that women alive in the twenty-first century have achieved about all the equality they are likely to achieve.

A more answerable question is: What influences the degree of gender stratification in a society?

## *Influences on Gender Stratification*

As the preceding discussion implies, no one has shown that a small number of factors are the primary determinants of gender stratification. Here, we discuss only a few generalizations that point to the kinds of influences that are most widespread and important.

### *Women's Contributions to Material Welfare*

Some materialists argue that women's role in production strongly influences their property rights, their role in public affairs, their degree of personal freedom, and other dimensions of their overall status. One idea is that, where women produce a high proportion of the food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities of existence, men will recognize their contributions and reward women with influence, property, prestige, dignity, and other benefits. In other words, the gendered division of labor and the proportion of valued goods women produce are strong influences on gender stratification.

Such ideas seem to apply to some foraging and horticultural peoples, among whom women's gathering or gardening contributes much of the food consumed by their domestic groups. Women's productive labor gives them a status closer to equality with men than they have in other forms of adaptation in which their subsistence contributions are not as great. For example, among the BaMbuti and Aka, two foraging Pygmy groups of the central African rainforest, women's labor is critical for success in net hunting, and ethnographic studies on both these Pygmy peoples report male-female equality or near equality. Among the Ju/'hoansi, too, considerable equality exists between women and men. Both the Iroquois and Vanatinai are horticulturalists, which fits, yet and numerous other peoples of the Amazon basin and Melanesia also practice horticulture and women there are not equal.

But everyone's status is “closer to equality” in most hunter-gatherer and many horticultural populations (see Chapters 7 and 13). So, perhaps the relative lack of gender stratification in these adaptations results not from women's importance as food providers but from some

other factor or influence “leveling out” inequalities of all kinds. And, again, despite egalitarian values, among Ju’hoansi, Marjorie Shostak says that in her view men have “the edge” in status.

### *Women’s Control over Key Resources*

A more complex materialist proposal is that women’s contribution to production, by itself, is not enough to “earn” them relative equality. It is *necessary* for women to contribute heavily to material welfare to gain resources, rights, and respect, but this alone is not *sufficient*. (To see why, consider enslaved persons.) One specific hypothesis is that women must also own productive resources (land, tools) or have considerable control over the distribution of the products of their labor, or both. If women own productive resources and have a great deal of say over what happens to the goods they produce, then they can have some influence on the activities of men. Overall, this gives them more equality. Peggy Reeves Sanday found some support for this hypothesis in a cross-cultural study done in the 1970s.

This hypothesis seems to account reasonably well for some specific cases. For instance, Iroquois women controlled the production and distribution of important resources. They used this control to nominate their kinsmen to chiefly positions and to influence the public decision making from which they were formally excluded. Likewise, Hopi women (see Chapter 12) owned land and had considerable control over the distribution of its products. Women had relatively high status in both these societies, as they did among many other Native American peoples.

Along the same lines, in many West African and Caribbean societies, women are more active than men in market trade in foodstuffs, handicrafts, textiles, and other goods produced by themselves. Sometimes market-trading women are able to transform their independent control over exchangeable resources into more equitable relationships with men. Wives commonly maintain a separate income from that of their husbands, which they are free to spend on themselves and their children. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, women are active in market trade and in craft production, which gives them access to income and economic security independent of their husbands and other men. Many women purchase houses in urban areas and use the rent to improve their own and their children’s economic well-being and social autonomy. According to Sandra Barnes (1990, 275):

Property frees the owner from subordinating herself to the authority of another person in domestic

matters. It places her in a position of authority over others and in a position to form social relationships in the wider community that are politically significant. Property owning legitimates her entry into the public domain.

The economic independence that some Yoruba women are able to acquire translates into increased participation in neighborhood associations and other public affairs and allows them much freedom from male authority. A wider generalization would be that control over resources increases women’s independence from men and allows women to form associations with other women that have the effect of mutual support networks.

Thus, many ethnographic and comparative studies suggest that controlling resources is one way for women to get respect and independence from husbands, brothers, and other men. This ability to acquire some measure of control over family resources helps to account for why many late-twentieth-century North American wives demanded and received more help from their husbands in housework and child care. In recent decades, married women in increasing numbers have acquired wage- and salary-earning jobs. Between 1970 and 2006, in the United States, the percentage of all married women who were employed doubled. Even the presence of young children does not keep most American women from entering the workforce: between 1975 and 2000, the percentage of married women with children under age 6 who were working for a wage rose from 39 percent to 65 percent. Since 2000, this percentage has leveled off, to a high of 64 percent in 2008. Among the reasons for increases in married women’s employment are the inadequacy of one person’s (formerly, the husband’s) income to support the family at an acceptable living standard, structural changes to a more service-oriented (less goods-producing) economy, the increasing value women place on personal fulfillment through career advancement (partly because of the feminist movement), and dramatic increases in the numbers of women who have college degrees.

As a result of entering the workforce as wage and salary earners, many American women have gained considerable economic independence from their husbands and other men. Women also are earning higher percentages of household income: between 1975 and 2007, women’s contribution to household income rose from 26 percent to 36 percent. Husbands have, therefore, lost economic leverage in the household relative to their wives. Increasingly, wives have psychological





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Where women commonly earn income for themselves by marketing products, as in Jamaica, their overall status tends to be relatively high.

ammunition against their husbands' domestic incompetence or laziness—they've put in a full day's work on the job just like their husbands. The legal system has also helped by increasingly considering family violence more than just a private family matter as well as by prosecuting or garnishing the wages of "deadbeat dads."

In the twenty-first century, increasing numbers of North American couples are "role reversed," to use the phrase of sociologists Theodore Cohen and John Durst. Husbands-fathers stay at home with young children while wives-mothers are the breadwinners. Some believe this pattern reverses the natural order of male-female family roles and thus is both immoral and harmful to children, who look up to their parents as role models. Others hold that the feminist movement has helped liberate men as well as women from old cultural attitudes: as economic or familial circumstances warrant, or as couples prefer, parents can reverse, switch, or alternate caretaking and breadwinning roles. Has feminism given both sexes more freedom of choice?

With most women now out in the world of work, and with the families of so many married women now virtually dependent on their income to pay the bills, more women are demanding equal pay for equal work, equal treatment

and opportunity in the workplace, equal legal rights, and equal respect. As in other societies, in North America, women's success in obtaining control over important resources empowers them relative to men.

### *Descent and Postmarital Residence*

The form of descent and postmarital residence also influences the degree of gender stratification. Women in matrilineal and matrilocal societies have greater equality in many areas of life. What is it, specifically, about matrilineality and matrilocal that gives relatively high status to females? It is not usually that "women rule" in these societies, in a political or legal sense.

As the matrilineal peoples discussed earlier illustrate, one reason there tends to be a high degree of gender equality is that women have a lot of control over life-sustaining resources. Where land, wealth, and other property passes mainly from mothers to daughters, wives have more independence from husbands and some matrilocal peoples view husbands as working for their wives and their wives' families. Commonly—but not universally—in matrilineal, matrilocal societies, husbands are rather loosely attached to their wives' households, and divorce and remarriage rates are relatively high. It may be easier for dissatisfied husbands to leave

Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong are sometimes called East Asia's "Four Little Dragons." (The big dragon, of course, is China.) In the 1970s, the little dragons developed rapidly by exporting clothing, consumer electronics, toys, and automotive accessories to North America and Europe. Hong Kong and Singapore have been financial centers for decades. South Korea is now the ninth largest economy in the world, producing ships, motor vehicles, TVs, DVDs, and other high-tech equipment for the global marketplace.

Like the other little dragons, Taiwan is about as modern as any place on our planet. Its employment structure is about the same as North America and Europe: only 5 percent of its people work in agriculture, 37 percent are employed in industry, and 58 percent making a living in services. Taiwan has three cities with populations greater than 1 million; the largest is the capital, Taipei, with nearly 3 million people. Annual income per person in Taiwan is around \$30,000. Of its 23 million people, 96 percent can read and write. Its people are mostly healthy and long-lived. There are 26 million cell phones. Taiwan, and especially Taipei, is developed, urban, connected, cosmopolitan—global.

Its weddings look global, too. Or, rather, they look global if by *global* you mean "modeled after those of the West," which is exactly what *global* means to many people. Taiwanese young people meet and date, and if they fall in love and marry, their wedding ceremonies are familiar to the eyes of Westerners—at least, to Western secularists. Most weddings include white gowns, tuxedos, flowers, and lots of photos.

What is not familiar is that most couples go to an expensive photo salon *before* their wedding banquet and before the

ceremony itself to have pictures taken. Ordinarily, these pictures are displayed at the wedding ceremony itself. And, according to Bonnie Adrian, who studied weddings in Taiwan in the 1990s, in the photos the bride is hardly recognizable as herself. At great expense, she visits a professional makeover stylist in a salon. The stylist shapes the bride's eyebrows with a razor, often removing them entirely only to reapply new ones later with an eyebrow pencil. Next she applies foundation makeup to cover any blemishes; usually this is a light color because fair skin is desirable. Then the stylist attacks the eyes, applying shadow, liner, and false lashes. The goal is to produce a round-eyed look. The lips are next. The foundation makeup has already made the facial features indistinct, so the bride's natural lip color and shape are barely visible. New lip shapes are applied with a brush, depending on the look the stylist wishes to impart, and the lipstick color is added. Finally, the nails are fixed and the hair styled. Typically, all this takes three hours or longer.

What about the groom? He will have his hair cut and styled so that nothing looks out of place, and he may wear a bit of makeup to ensure that his facial features show up properly under the photographic lights. But overall, he is recognizably himself. In the wedding and photos, at least, his appearance is secondary.

Next, the couple visits a photographer who specializes in pre-wedding photos and takes hundreds or thousands of pictures. By the time the photographer has finished, usually a whole day has passed—and several thousand dollars have changed hands. The prints are huge, and on the day of the wedding banquet, they are prominently displayed so that all can admire the beauty of the bride.

and remarry than to deal with lots of conflicts with their wives and her relatives (including her brothers).

Other elements of matrilineality and matrilocality also benefit women. In a cross-cultural study, Martin Whyte found that women enjoy more authority in domestic matters, have more sexual freedom, and have more worth placed on their lives in these societies. Two factors contribute to their equality. First, because husbands live with the families of their wives, sisters remain with or close to one another throughout their lives. A typical wife thus has her mother, sisters, and other female relatives around to support her in domestic quarrels. Second, in many matrilineal and matrilocal societies, domestic authority over a married woman is divided between her husband and her brother. Alice Schlegel suggests that this arrangement increases her freedom because each man acts as a check on the other's attempts to dominate her.

This situation contrasts markedly with patrilineal and patrilocal societies, such as old China, Korea, Japan, the Middle East, and most of India and Pakistan. In these societies, when a woman married into a family, she was given household tasks to perform for most of her waking hours. Only when she herself bore sons and heirs to her husband's family did her status improve, and only after she herself became a mother-in-law to her sons' wives could she relax a bit. In East Asia, the Confucian social and moral philosophy, which held that women must be submissive to men, affected the way wives and daughters-in-law were treated. Even in modern times, many women feel that marriage results in a loss of freedom and that the heavy duties of family life are burdensome, which in Taiwan affects even wedding practices (see the Globalization box). In the Islamic parts of southern Asia and in the Middle East, the teachings of the Koran generally supported a woman's

One interpretation of all this “framing the bride” (as Adrian titles her 2003 book) is that Taiwanese wedding customs have taken on a Western flavor. Consciously or not, it looks like Taiwanese couples have chosen the Western model. Is this yet another example of “cultural imperialism”—the makeover of indigenous customs based on the foundation of the West?

Adrian believes this interpretation is simplistic. In old Taiwan, women viewed marriage not as the fulfillment of romantic dreams, but as the beginning of a life of hard work for her husband’s family and for the welfare of the children she would soon bear. This attitude carries over into contemporary Taiwan. Today women and men in love have plenty of opportunities to be intimate before they marry. So, they often postpone marriage until they feel ready to have children and undertake the responsibilities of parenthood. When a modern Taiwanese woman marries, she feels she sacrifices a lot of freedom in the interest of her husband and their offspring. The photo, usually hung in the bedroom, will remind her and him of how beautiful and free she was before the trials of family responsibility wore her down.

Weddings, banquets, and photographs also reflect implicit competition—what Americans used to call “keeping up with the Joneses.” The more photographs and the more work the photographer must do to make them perfect, the greater the expense, and most of this expense is paid for by the groom and his family. The groom would be embarrassed if the photos were not up to standards, and his wife might remind him of his failure to live up to cultural expectations in future quarrels. At the obligatory wedding banquet, the amount and quality of food must also be up to normative expectations—and so must the quality of the wedding photos. The groom’s

family would suffer a humiliating loss of face if they did not honor their son’s marriage and welcome their new daughter-in-law with an ostentatious banquet and expensive photographs.

These kinds of photographs made before the wedding itself in Taiwan do not document the events of the marriage. They are not records of the ceremony. Rather, they are commemorations of the bride; Adrian (2003, 235) says, “they construct brides,” meaning that they build an image of the woman before her marriage so that, after the marriage, her new family can see an idealized image of the woman she once was.

What are the wider lessons of bridal photos in contemporary Taiwan? Consciously or not, Taiwanese take something from the realm of global culture and use it for their own, culturally meaningful purposes. To say it differently, they localize the global by shaping the photos to fit their own traditions and reconfiguring what comes in from the outside world to mesh with their own cultural attitudes and beliefs and social practices. Humanity does not need to become all alike just because we interact with one another in new global settings.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you know any other examples of “localizing the global”? Can you think of things or customs that have come into your nation from another country and have become localized?
2. What are the purposes and functions of photos of ceremonies in your own society? How do they relate to other aspects of your way of life?

SOURCES: Adrian (2003), CIA (2010), Vogel (1991)

subordinate status in the home as well as in public. But also important were the social facts that wives became members of the households of their husbands’ parents, and the lines of authority over them were clearly and legally redrawn upon their marriage. Socially, a wife had few viable alternatives to submitting to her husband’s family and relatively few sources of support when she was treated poorly. In contrast, in most matrilineal and matrilineal cultures, women do have alternatives to suffering the dominance of their husbands, and they receive support from their own relatives.

## Gender Stratification in Industrial Societies

We conclude by bringing together some of the information and ideas covered in this chapter and briefly

suggesting how they might be relevant to women living in industrialized, modernized nations.

Anthropological research on gender stratification provides women with a hope and a warning. Part of the hope derives from the fact that women’s roles and rights, and the restrictions placed on them, vary from place to place and from time to time. Although it is very difficult, probably impossible, to decide whether women and men are “totally equal” in any culture, we certainly know that sexual equality varies—and varies significantly. So, there is reason to think that modern societies can move further toward eliminating barriers to female opportunity and achievement. Patriarchy does not seem to be part of the human genome.

Anthropological work on gender offers another hope. Some of our discussion of gender stratification suggests that any change that improves women’s independent



access to material resources and to social support will have positive impacts on their status in other realms of life. If married women have their own source of income independent of their husbands, then they are better able to become empowered within their families and to escape relationships with men who are physically or psychologically abusive. If, as in matrilineal and matrilocal societies, women are able to maintain relationships of “sisterhood” (i.e., support from other women) and/or of extended family ties (i.e., aid from their own relatives), then they can mobilize these supportive relationships in times of hardship. If women have legal recourse to sue discriminating employers and would-be employers, then their opportunities and compensation on the job will be improved by the threat of monetary damages.

And going back to the very first point in this chapter: the knowledge that ideas and beliefs about gender are culturally constructed rather than biologically given should—if *taken seriously and understood properly*—lead women and men alike to realize that at least some of the sexual differences they believe exist are differences of our own culture’s making. It is a biological *reality* (with minor qualifications) that women have

the physical tools to bear and nurse children. But does this biological reality make women generally more nurturing than men? Or is this belief just a cultural construction?

The warning? Anthropological researchers have not yet discovered the key that unlocks the door leading to “total equality” (whatever that might look like) between the sexes. Comparative anthropological work—like most work dealing with human behavior and beliefs—is suggestive, but it is not conclusive. Thus far, we cannot identify the one or two or three things that women can do that will lead to equal treatment in the workplace, in the household, in the bedroom, and in the political arena. No one or two or three male-dominated institutions could be changed to radically improve the position of women in various realms of their lives. For example, outlawing sexual discrimination in the workplace and making comparable pay for comparable work legally mandatory might not translate into greater female–male equality in other contexts such as family life or politics. Even a female CEO or a nation’s president or prime minister can be abused by her husband. Therefore, feminists—of both sexes—need to continue to work on a broad front to achieve their objectives.

## Summary

### 1 Describe how male-female physical differences affect gender roles and relationships.

Physical differences between females and males are recognized and relevant to social behavior in all known cultures, but these differences matter in different ways and to different degrees. Two of the major female–male differences that are most relevant are sexual dimorphism and reproductive physiology, which affect who performs economic tasks and childcare responsibilities. In modern times, physical differences are less relevant than in preindustrial eras.

**2 Elaborate on the phrase “cultural construction of gender” and discuss its importance.** A person’s sex is determined biologically (by genes), but gender is a cultural construct. The cultural construction of gender means that cultures vary in how they perceive the physical differences between the sexes, in the significance they attribute to those differences, and in the way those differences are made relevant for self-identity, task and role allocation, access to property and power, and so forth. The Hua of Papua New Guinea illustrate the cultural construction of gender.

### 3 Analyze the relevance of the fact that many peoples recognize multiple gender identities for understanding gender.

Human groups differ in their tolerance of individual variations in gender identities. Many peoples allow gender crossing, in which males are allowed to enact female roles, and vice versa. Others recognize multiple sexual identities, in which there are not only two, but three or four genders, roughly corresponding to man–woman or woman–man. With their acceptance of Two Spirits, Native American peoples seem especially tolerant of gender crossing and to allow for multiple gender identities. The Hijra are a socially recognized third gender in India, further suggesting that alternative genders are legitimate roles in many human societies.

### 4 Discuss the factors that influence the widespread patterns and the cross-cultural diversity in the gendered division of labor.

Despite cross-cultural variations, widespread patterns exist in the gendered division of labor. Four biological factors that influence the broad cross-cultural similarities are (1) the depression of fertility that seems to occur when a woman engages in heavy exercise; (2) the possibility

that women are more necessary than men to maintain population size; (3) superior male strength; and (4) the degree of compatibility of a particular task with the care of infants and young children. No female/male biological difference can account for cultural diversity in the gendered division of labor. Generally, female labor is more important in subsistence tasks in horticultural populations than among intensive agriculturalists. The reasons for this difference are the types of crops grown (root crops versus cereal grains), the amount of time needed for food processing, and the greater prevalence of warfare in horticultural groups.

**5 Analyze why it is so difficult to determine whether any societies have complete gender equality.** The nature of gender stratification and the reasons why it varies are controversial, due to problems of definition and the possible biases outsiders bring to their work. Anthropologists have yet to discover any

peoples who are matriarchal, as the term is commonly used. People like the Iroquois and Vanatinai have been viewed as examples of equality between the genders. But even specialists in gender studies cannot agree whether gender hierarchy is universal or whether there are societies with complete equality between men and women. This is mainly because gender stratification is multidimensional and because “complete equality” would be difficult to recognize.

**6 Describe the three most important influences on gender stratification from a comparative perspective.** Many forces affect gender stratification in human societies. Among some of the most important widespread influences are women’s relative contributions to subsistence, women’s ability to control key resources, and the pattern of descent and postmarital residence. These influences are relevant for gender equality in the twenty-first-century.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 12 THE ORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL LIFE



In modern societies such as England, uniformed police are an important part of the legal system.

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## **Forms of Political Organization**

*Bands*  
*Tribes*  
*Chiefdoms*  
*States*

## **Social Control and Law**

*Social Control*  
*Law*

## **Legal Systems**

*Self-Help Systems*  
*Court Systems*



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Explain** what is meant by political organization.
- 2 **List** the four main types of political organization and how they structurally differ from one another.
- 3 **Explain** what is meant by social control.
- 4 **Discuss** legal systems and how they differ from other forms of social control.
- 5 **Discuss** the two major forms of legal systems and the variants within the two forms.
- 6 **Explain** the relationship between the legal system found in a society and the political organization of that society.

Every society has some form of political system—those institutions that organize and direct the collective actions of the population. In small societies, political leadership and organization may be informal and even ad hoc. Only when a specific need for leadership arises does some individual assume an overt leadership role. In general, the larger the population, the more formalized the leadership and the more complex the political organization.

Likewise, as mentioned in Chapter 2, all societies demand some minimal degree of conformity from their members. Therefore, all develop mechanisms of social control by which the behaviors of individuals are constrained and directed into acceptable channels. There are always behavioral patterns that are approved or acceptable and patterns that are disapproved or unacceptable. By means of social control, a society encourages normatively proper behavior and discourages unacceptable actions; the objective is to maintain harmony and cooperation. The most serious deviations from acceptable behavior, which threaten the cohesiveness of the group, fall under that aspect of social control known as law, also discussed in this chapter. In the least organized societies, law and political organizations exist independently. As political organization becomes increasingly formalized and structured, governmental institutions take over legal institutions, until legal institutions become part of the formal political structure.



## Forms of Political Organization

When we speak of the political organization of a particular society, we frequently are left with the

impression that political boundaries and cultural boundaries are the same. But the boundaries of a *polity*, or a politically organized group, may or may not correspond with the boundaries of a particular way of life. For example, the Comanche of the Great Plains shared a common language, customs, and ethnic identity, yet politically, they were never organized above the local group. Thus, the term *Comanche* refers to a people with a common language and culture who never united to carry out common political objectives.

At the other extreme, we find highly centralized polities that incorporate several culturally and socially distinct peoples. The United States is unusual in this regard only in the degree of cultural heterogeneity in the population. France, though predominantly “French,” also includes Bretons and Basques as well as numerous recent immigrants from Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. India has several hundred different ethnic groups. Russia, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines also integrate highly diversified populations into a single polity. In fact, every large and most small countries in the world today politically encompass several ethnic groups (see Chapter 7).

In this discussion of political organization, we are taking an evolutionary perspective. By this, we mean that the known political systems of the world are going to be grouped based on the degree of increasing organizational complexity. On this basis, political systems may be divided into four basic forms: bands (simple and composite), tribes, chiefdoms, and states. However, it is important to note that political systems actually exist along a continuum of increasing complexity. As a result, the political systems of many societies do not clearly fall into one category or another.

## Bands

As the least complex form, **bands** were probably the earliest human political structure. As more complex political systems developed, band-level societies were unable to compete for resources. Thus, bands survived until the modern period only in regions of the world with limited natural resources. Most known band-level societies were found in the deserts and grasslands of Australia, Africa, and the Americas. A few others live or lived in the tropical forests of Africa, Asia, and South America and in the boreal forest and tundra regions of North America and Asia.

Bands consist of a number of families living together and cooperating in economic activities throughout the year. Band-level organization most frequently was found among peoples with foraging economies, which usually dictated low population densities and seasonal mobility. As a result, only a relatively small number of people could stay together throughout the year. Bands ranged in size from only a dozen to several hundred individuals. The adaptive significance of the band's size and seasonal mobility is described in Chapter 6. In this chapter, we are concerned with leadership statuses and the political organization of bands.

The smallest bands, called **simple bands**, usually were no larger than an extended family and were structured as such. Leadership was informal, with the oldest or one of the older male members of the family serving as leader. Decision making was reached through consensus and involved both adult males and adult

females; simple bands operated as families. Because all members of the band were related either through descent or by marriage, they were exogamous units, and members of the band had to seek spouses from other bands. Thus, although an autonomous economic and political unit, every band was, by social necessity, allied through intermarriage with other bands, usually territorially adjacent ones. Simple bands usually had names, although the names may have been informal and may have simply referred to some prominent geographical feature associated with the band's usual territory.

Resource availability influenced the formation of such small groups. Simple bands often were associated with the hunting of nonmigratory game animals, such as deer, guanaco, moose, or small mammals, which occupy a limited territory on a year-round basis and are found either singly or in small herds. The foraging activities of simple bands usually did not generate any significant surpluses of food, which necessitated the year-round hunting of game animals. Effective hunting required only a few male hunters who had intimate knowledge of the seasonal shifts in range of these animals within their territory. The game resources of such areas could be exploited most effectively by a small and highly mobile population. In addition, such bands depended on the seasonal collection of wild roots, berries, nuts, and other edible plants as well as on limited fishing and shellfish collection.

**Composite bands** consisted of a larger aggregation of families, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. In contrast to simple bands, composite bands encompassed unrelated extended families. Although leadership in composite bands was informal, it was more defined. Such leaders frequently have been called **big men**. Big men did not hold formal offices, and leadership was based on influence rather than authority over band members. **Influence** is merely the ability to convince people that they should act as you suggest. **Authority** is the recognized right of an individual to command another person to act in a particular way. Thus, a big-man leader could not, by virtue of his position, make demands or impose rules on the members of the band, and his decisions were not binding on others. Because big-man status did not involve a formal office, no prescribed process existed for attaining leadership status. A man might emerge as the leader through a variety of personal accomplishments or qualities such as his proven ability in hunting or warfare, the supernatural powers he possessed, or merely his charisma. There was no set tenure in the position, which was

**band** A small foraging group with flexible composition that migrates seasonally.

**simple bands** Autonomous or independent political units, often consisting of little more than an extended family, with informal leadership vested in one of the older family members.

**composite bands** Autonomous (independent) political units consisting of several extended families that live together for most or all of the year.

**big men** Political leaders who do not occupy formal offices and whose leadership is based on influence, not authority.

**influence** The ability to convince people they should act as you suggest.

**authority** The recognized right of an individual to command another to act in a particular way; legitimate power.



Form	Characteristics	Associated Equalities and Inequalities
<b>Bands</b>	Local, economically self-sufficient residence group	Egalitarian
(a) Simple	Single extended family, usually numbering 25 to 50 people Family head with leadership based on influence	
(b) Composite	Local, economically self-sufficient residence group Several extended families, usually numbering from 50 to several hundred individuals Big-man leadership based on influence	Egalitarian
<b>Tribes</b>	Several economically self-sufficient residence groups Usually numbering between 1,000 and 20,000 people A few formal leadership positions with limited authority, with access based on inheritance and/or achievements Group cohesion maintained by sodalities	Primarily egalitarian with some societies showing the traits of ranking
<b>Chiefdoms</b>	Several economically interdependent residence groups Usually numbering from a few thousand up to about 30,000 Centralized leadership, with a hereditary chief, with full formal authority	Ranked societies
<b>States</b>	Usually numbering from the tens of thousands up to several million Centralized leadership, with formal full authority, supported by a bureaucracy	Stratified societies

filled by a man until he was informally replaced by some other leader.

Like simple bands, many composite bands were nomadic groups that moved within a relatively well-defined range. Because of their greater size, composite bands were not as cohesive as simple bands and were politically more volatile. Disputes between families could result in some members joining another band or even the band splitting into two or more bands.

Composite bands formed because economic pressures facilitated or necessitated the cooperation of a larger number of individuals than found in a single extended family. As in the case of simple bands, the behavior of the principal game animals was an important influence. Composite bands were associated with the seasonal hunting of migratory animals that form large herds, such as bison and caribou. Migratory herd animals usually appeared only seasonally in the range of a particular composite band as the herd moved between its summer and winter ranges. Because bison and caribou migrated in herds that sometimes numbered in the tens of thousands, there was no difficulty in locating the herds on the open grasslands and tundra. Unlike the hunters of nonmigratory animals, who secured game steadily throughout the year, hunters of migratory animals frequently took most of their game only twice a year, as the herds passed through their territories during seasonal migrations.

Successful hunting of large herds of animals requires maneuvering the herd into situations where large numbers could be slaughtered. Herds might be run over a cliff, into a holding pen, or into a lake where hunters in boats could kill them. Regardless of the method used, all these strategies required a larger group of hunters than was available in a simple band. Thus, composite bands were formed to bring together a sufficiently large number of hunters to control the movements of large herds of animals.

The Comanche of the southern Great Plains of the United States illustrate the nature of composite bands. These horse-raising, bison-hunting people were politically autonomous until the Red River War of 1875. During the early and middle years of the nineteenth century, the Comanche numbered about 6,000 to 7,000, divided between 5 and 13 main bands. Comanche bands had only vaguely defined territories, and two or more bands frequently occupied the same general area or had overlapping ranges. Membership in Comanche bands was fluid: both individuals and families could and did shift from one band to another, or a number of families might join together to establish a new band. Some anthropologists have theorized that only five major bands existed, with a varying number of secondary bands appearing and disappearing from time to time.



A band consisted of a number of families, each headed by an older male member who was “peace chief” or “headman.” One of these family heads also served as the peace chief for the entire band. There was no formalized method of selecting either the family heads or the head of the band. As the Comanche say, “No one made him such; he just got that way.” A Comanche peace chief usually was a man known for his kindness, wisdom, and ability to lead by influencing other men. Although a war record was important, peace chiefs were not chosen from among the most aggressive or ambitious men. Such men usually remained war chiefs—great warriors who periodically recruited men to raid neighbors—but frequently had little influence outside war and raiding.

A band peace chief was responsible for the well-being of the band. Through a consensus of the family heads, he directed the seasonal movement of the band and the bison hunts. He did have men who voluntarily assisted him. In the morning, the peace chief usually sent out two men to scout the area around the camp for the presence of enemy raiding parties. He also sent a crier through the camp periodically to announce plans for the movement of the camp, an upcoming hunt, or some other cooperative activities. During the bison hunts, the peace chief called on a number of men from the camp to police the hunt and restrain overly eager hunters from scattering the herd and thus spoiling the hunt for others.

In an extraordinarily individualistic and egalitarian society, Comanche band leaders had to strive for and maintain consensus. If a dispute arose and a consensus could not be reached, individuals and families were free either to shift residence to another band or even to form a new band under another leader.

Comanche bands were economically and politically autonomous units. Only seldom did two or more bands come together for any unified action, and never did leaders of the bands come together to discuss issues. At the same time, there was a strong consciousness of common identity—of being Comanche. Comanche’s

freely traveled between bands to visit, marry, and even shift residence. There was an informally reached general consensus on whether relations with a particular neighboring group were friendly or hostile. Thus, on the band level of political organization, populations are fragmented into numerous independent political units that operate only at the local-group level. These various communities share a common cultural identity and usually attempt to maintain harmonious relations with one another, but they lack any political structure capable of organizing all the various communities into a single unit for collective actions.

## Tribes

**Tribes** differ from bands in that they have formally organized institutions that unite the scattered residential communities, give the society greater cohesiveness, and make possible a more united response to external threats. These institutions are called **sodalities**. Sodalities take various forms: they may be based on large kin groups, such as clans and lineages; on nonkinship units, such as age sets; or on voluntary associations, such as warrior societies. Regardless of their exact nature, sodalities unify geographically dispersed communities into political units. Although tribal-level societies usually are egalitarian, with leadership dependent in part on the persuasive abilities of individuals, there are formalized political offices with institutionalized authority. Although tribes vary greatly in structure, here we examine only one tribal-level society.

The Cheyenne of the Great Plains numbered between 3,000 and 3,500 during the early 1800s. The Cheyenne, like the neighboring Comanche, were horse-mounted bison hunters. They were divided into 10 main nomadic villages, which averaged between 300 and 350 persons. Village membership was not based on kinship, although the members of a particular village usually were related either by blood or by marriage. Village membership was relatively stable, and marriages between villagers were common. Although a particular village usually frequented a certain range, there was no sense of village territoriality. Periodically and seasonally, family camps and subvillage camps broke off from the main village.

The only time the entire tribe came together was in early summer, when all the widely scattered villages gathered into a single camp at a predetermined location. This crescent-shaped encampment stretched for several miles from end to end, with the open portion facing east. Within the tribal encampment, every village had a designated location; while camped together, they

**tribe** An autonomous political unit encompassing a number of distinct, geographically dispersed communities held together by sodalities.

**sodalities** Formal institutions that cut across communities and serve to unite geographically scattered groups; may be based on kin groups (clans or lineages) or on non-kin-based groups (age grades or warrior societies).

performed the great tribal ceremonies (e.g., the Arrow Renewal, the Sun Dance, and the Animal Dance). At least one and possibly two of these rituals were performed, depending on the particular ritual needs of the tribe at that time. After the performance of the ritual, the tribe as a unit staged the great summer bison hunt. After the hunt, the tribe again scattered into smaller village camps.

Politically, the tribe was controlled by the Council of Forty-Four and the warrior societies. The Council of Forty-Four, which had both political and religious duties, was headed by the Sweet Medicine chief, who was the keeper of the most sacred of the Cheyenne religious bundles. Second to him in importance were four other sacred chiefs, each representing specific supernatural beings. Under these five sacred chiefs were 39 ordinary chiefs.

Chiefs served in their positions for 10 years and could not be removed for any reason. Serving as a chief placed a burden on the individuals. Chiefs usually were selected from among the older men, all of whom had war records. When an individual was chosen as a chief, he was to act like a chief, not an aggressive warrior. A chief was to be generous, kindly, even tempered, and aloof from everyday disputes. In short, he was expected to display ideal human behavior at all times. He was to take care of the poor, settle disputes between individuals, and be responsible for the ritual performances that protected the tribe.

The major sodalities were the warrior societies, of which there were five. These were formal voluntary associations of men, each with its own style of dress, dances, songs, and set of four leaders. As young warriors, men were recruited by the different societies until all had joined one or another. The phrase *warrior societies* is slightly misleading. The heads of the various societies were what some call the *tribal war chiefs*. Although this group planned and led attacks on their enemies, the different societies did not fight or operate as military units in battles. In battles, men fought as individuals, and members of several societies may have been present in a particular raiding party.

Subordinate to the council of chiefs, the warrior societies cooperated as a group only in policing the camps. During the summer tribal encampment, the Council of Forty-Four appointed one of the societies as camp police. Later, when the village scattered into separate camps, the members of the council who lived in the village appointed one of the warrior societies to police the camp. After being appointed, the warrior society usually carried out its function with little

direction from the chiefs. Its members scouted the area around the camp to check for the presence of any enemy raiding parties and intervened in any serious disputes between village members.

There are two points to be emphasized about the political organization of tribal societies. First, although there were some formalized political and religious offices that bequeathed some limited authority and prerogatives, on the whole, tribal societies were basically egalitarian (see Chapter 13). Few positions were hereditary, and most leaders were selected on the basis of personal qualities and individual merit.

Second, little economic specialization existed, either individual or regional, among tribes. Except for cooperation in communal hunts, families produced their own food and manufactured their own clothes and other material goods. From an economic perspective, each band or village was capable of sustaining itself without support from other communities; therefore, it was not economic necessity, convenience, or efficiency that led to the supracommunity political organization of tribes. Although sodalities unite tribes at a higher level of cohesiveness than bands, the mere existence of sodalities is not sufficient to generate or maintain the cohesiveness of a tribe. It is likely that external threats, either real or perceived, necessitated the cooperation in warfare of a large group of people and were the major factor that united geographically dispersed communities. Thus, warfare—the existence and activities of hostile human neighbors—was an important force in creating the political integration of separate communities.

## Chiefdoms

Like tribes, **chiefdoms** were multicommunity political units. Unlike tribes, chiefdoms had a formalized and centralized political system. A chiefdom was governed by a single chief, who usually served as both political and religious head of the polity. The chief had authority over members of the chiefdom, and the position often was hereditary within a single kin group, which based its rights chiefly on supernatural powers. Thus, a chiefdom was not an egalitarian society but a ranked or stratified society (see Chapter 13) with access to resources based on inherited status. With authority and power

**chiefdoms** Centralized political systems with authority vested in formal, usually hereditary, offices or titles.

conferred by supernatural beings, governing was not by consensus but by decree.

Most chiefdoms were associated with horticultural societies in which craft or regional specialization in production had emerged. There was a need for regularized exchanges of goods either between geographically dispersed communities or, at times, within a single community. This economic exchange was managed through redistribution, with the chief occupying the central position in the flow of goods (see Chapter 7).

In earlier historic periods, chiefdoms probably were found throughout much of the Old World. During more recent periods, such political systems were primarily concentrated in Oceania (Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia) and in the Americas (the circum-Caribbean and coastal portions of South America and the northwestern coast of North America).

The Polynesian-speaking people of Tahiti, an island in the southeastern Pacific, illustrate many characteristics typical of a chiefdom. This relatively large, mountainous, volcanic island had a population of about 100,000 at the time of European discovery. Tahiti was divided among about 20 rival chiefs. Although most of these chiefdoms were about the size of the average tribe and significantly smaller than the largest tribes, their political organization differed significantly.

The economy of Tahiti was based largely on farming. Taro, breadfruit, coconuts, and yams were the main crops, pigs and chickens were also raised, and fish and other seafoods supplemented the food supply. Food production was sufficient not only to meet the needs of the population but also to produce surpluses for export to other islands. Although sufficient food was produced in all regions, there were significant regional differences in the types of food produced because Tahiti varied ecologically.

Tahitian society had at least three and possibly four distinct classes, depending on how finely one wants to divide the units. *Arii*, or chiefs, and their close relatives formed the ruling elite. The *ariii* were divided into two groups: the *ariii rahi*, or sacred chiefs, and the *ariii rii*, or small chiefs. Under these chiefs were the *raatira*, or subchiefs, and the *manahune*, or commoners. The sacred chiefs were viewed as descended from the gods, whereas the commoners were merely created by the gods for their use. The subchiefs were the offspring of intermarriage between the sacred chiefs and commoners, whereas the small chiefs were the products of still later intermarriages between sacred chiefs and subchiefs. Once these four classes were established, class endogamy became the rule.



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A Samoan chief is pictured here in traditional dress.

The sacred chiefs, viewed as gods on Earth, evoked both reverence and fear. Whatever the highest-ranking sacred chiefs touched became *tabu*, or sacred, and could not be used for fear of supernatural punishment. Such a chief had to be carried on the back of a servant, lest the ground touched by his feet became *tabu*. He could not enter the house of another individual for the same reason. The lifestyle of the chief's family differed from that of others: they had larger and more elaborate houses, the largest canoes, insignia of their rank, and particular clothing.

Unlike in band and tribal societies, resources in chiefdoms were individually owned. Land was owned mainly by the chiefs and subchiefs, but ultimate authority rested with the sacred chiefs within the polity. Although sacred chiefs could not withhold the title to lands from the families of subchiefs, they could banish an individual subchief. Crafts were specialized, and craftspeople were attached to particular sacred chiefs and produced goods



for them. Thus, the sacred chiefs directly controlled craft production and communal fishing. The chiefs could make demands on the property of the subchiefs and commoners. If someone refused, the chief could have the recalcitrant banished or make him or her a sacrificial victim. Theoretically, the sacred chief was the head judicial figure in the polity, but some believe that the chief seldom intervened in disputes between individuals; the chief usually used these powers only against people who challenged his authority.

The sacred chief in each polity was the focal point for redistributive exchanges. The chief periodically demanded surplus production from all his subjects for a public redistribution. Such events were associated with a number of occasions: a rite of passage for a member of the chief's family, the organizing of a military attack, religious ceremonies, or the start of the breadfruit harvest. During such ceremonies, the chief distributed the goods collected to all his subjects.

## States

Although they had a centralized political system, chiefdoms were still kinship-based structures. Even in Tahiti, the sacred chief's authority rested in large part on his control over families of subchiefs, each of whom had his own inalienable rights to lands—and thus families—of commoners. As a result, the number of people who could be effectively integrated into a chiefdom was limited. In Polynesia, most chiefdoms ranged from only a few thousand to 30,000 persons. Polities with larger populations require a political structure based on institutions other than kinship.

**States**, like chiefdoms, have a centralized political structure. States are distinguished from chiefdoms by the presence of a bureaucracy. A chiefdom is basically a two-level system: (1) the chiefs (which in Tahiti included the subchiefs), who have varying levels of authority and power, and (2) the commoners, or the great mass of the populace. A state has three levels: (1) the ruling elite, (2) a bureaucracy, and (3) the populace.

In states, as in chiefdoms, highest authority and power reside in the ruling elite, the formal political head or heads of the polity. States vary greatly in the types of political leaders present and in the basis for the leaders' authority and power. Leaders in the earliest states frequently were considered to be the descendants of gods, and thus themselves gods on Earth. The Inca of Peru and the pharaohs of Egypt were leaders who ruled as gods. Other political leaders, although not claiming to be gods, have legitimated their positions

with claims of having been chosen by God. Early European kings legitimated their claims to leadership on such a basis; and as English coins still proclaim, the queen rules *Dei gratia*—by the “grace of God.” Other states have evolved political leadership that uses strictly secular ideas to justify its authority. In countries where leaders are elected by a vote of the populace, rule is legitimated by the internalized acceptance of such ascendancy to office. Even leaders of strictly secular kingdoms, dictatorships, and oligarchies can, if in power for a sufficient time, have their rule accepted by the populace as “legitimate.” We have more to say about legitimation in Chapter 13.

Although they differ greatly in political leadership, states all share one characteristic: a bureaucracy that carries out the day-to-day governing of the polity. In simple terms, a *bureaucrat* is a person to whom a political leader delegates certain authority and powers. The bureaucrat thus acts on behalf of the political leader. Lacking any inherent authority or powers personally, bureaucrats depend on the continued support of political leaders. Using bureaucrats as intermediaries, political leaders could expand the size of their polities both geographically and demographically, while strengthening their political control over the population. Bureaucrats could engineer such expansion without threat of revolution and political fragmentation because they lacked any personal claims to independent political legitimacy.

In addition to differences in their political structure, state-level polities differ from bands, tribes, and chiefdoms in two other important ways. First, they can and usually do have multiethnic populations, including members of a number of ethnic groups who not only have distinct cultural traditions but frequently speak different languages as well. One of these ethnic groups is usually the politically dominant group. Second, with few exceptions, states have market economies (see Chapter 7) and depend in varying degrees on external trade with neighboring groups.

### *Inca Empire*

The Inca Empire of ancient Peru was typical of a state-level organization. From the capital of Cuzco, the ruler, or *Sapa Inca*, controlled a multiethnic empire of between 6 and 12 million subjects who spoke dozens of different

**state** A centralized, multilevel political unit characterized by the presence of a bureaucracy that acts on behalf of the ruling elite.

languages and extended over 2,500 miles from modern-day Ecuador to central Chile. Dissected by some of the highest mountain ranges and most inhospitable deserts in the world, the Inca Empire existed without a writing system for communication, a monetary system for exchange, or wheeled vehicles for transporting goods. In spite of this limited technology and hostile terrain, the central government was able to organize human labor for massive public works projects, ranging from buildings and terraced fields to a 9,500-mile highway network that stretched the length and breadth of the country.

The *Sapa Inca* was also able to mobilize and supply armies numbering in the tens of thousands for extended periods of time. The Inca Empire was a state created through the military conquest and incorporation of smaller neighboring states. However, it was the administrative abilities of its leaders—more than their military might—that gave the empire its political cohesiveness.

The *Sapa Inca* was believed to be the direct descendant of the Sun God. Thus, the *Sapa Inca* was a divine being, with absolute authority and control over all the people and resources of the empire. Succession was not clearly defined. Any son of the *Sapa Inca* had a legitimate claim to his father's position. To avoid conflict, the *Sapa Inca* usually chose one of his sons as his successor before his death, but the death of the *Sapa Inca* usually resulted in conflicts between potential heirs.

The empire was administratively divided into four geographical regions, each with its own head. The regions were divided into provinces with governors and regional capitals. The provinces were, in turn, organized on the basis of what some have called a “decimal administration” of hierarchically nested administrative units based on population size. The largest, with a population of 10,000 households, was called a *huno*, which was divided into units of 5,000, 1,000, 500, 100, 50, and finally 10 households. Each unit had an official head responsible to the person above him. Periodically, a census was conducted and adjustments made. This was the ideal administrative model; the actual structure varied somewhat from province to province due to local demographic and ethnic factors.

Regional heads were members of the Incan royal family. In some provinces, relatives of the *Sapa Inca* also filled the position of governor. However, in most cases provincial governors and other provincial officials were drawn from local elite families, and these families even held hereditary rights to these offices. Beneath these officials and their families was the great mass of people, the commoners.

Land was divided into plots used by individual families and households, and land used for the support of public functions. Every household in the empire was given sufficient land to meet its economic needs. Households and local communities were basically self-sufficient. Food and other goods produced on their land and within the family belonged to the family.

The government of the empire was supported by a labor tax, not a tax on production. Every household was required to supply labor for state purposes. Some assignments were for a number of days per year, others were yearlong, and still others lifelong. The major function of provincial officials was to assign tasks, organize work parties, and oversee the work.

The majority of commoners paid their labor tax by working part of the year farming public fields, tending herds of state-owned animals, weaving cloth, making pottery, repairing public buildings, working on public roads, or performing some other local task. In every province, food, clothes, and other utilitarian goods produced by state tax labor were stored in public buildings. State-owned food, clothes, and other goods were used to support the army, visiting government officials, and commoners who had been assigned long-term labor tasks that made it impossible for them to be self-supporting. In return for their services, all provincial officials in charge of 100 households or more were allowed to use tax laborers to farm their fields, tend their herds, build their houses, and make their clothes and other goods.

In the 1530s, the Spanish conquered the Inca Empire and murdered the last *Sapa Inca*. However, the provincial governmental structure and the “decimal administrative” system were incorporated into the government of colonial Peru.

The emergence of states increased the complexity of political units. Bureaucracies not only allowed for specialization in governmental functions but also made possible the effective integration of large land areas and populations into political units. For example, chiefdoms seldom exceeded 30,000 persons, whereas modern states have populations in the millions.



## Social Control and Law

All societies have clearly defined rules that govern the relationships between members. Not all individuals in any society will conform to these rules. There will always be some who behave in a socially unacceptable manner. Thus, among all peoples, there exist formal

The Inca were able to construct cities such as Machu Picchu despite mountainous terrain.



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and informal ways to correct the behavior of individuals. In general, we call these mechanisms social control. One form of social control is the law.

### Social Control

**Social control** refers to the diverse ways in which the behaviors of the members of a society are constrained into socially approved channels. All cultures have certain behavioral norms that most people learn and begin to conform to during enculturation. But all societies have individuals who, to one degree or another, deviate from those norms. Violations of norms usually result in sanctions or punishments for the offender, which serve both to correct the behavior of particular people and to show others the penalties for such deviance. The severity of sanctions and the process by which sanctions are imposed differ greatly, depending on the seriousness culturally attached to the violated norm, the perceived severity of the violation, and the overall political and legal system of the people.

Children who get into mischief usually are corrected by their parents. In our own society, parents may impose sanctions ranging from scolding to spanking to withdrawing privileges. Correcting children trains individuals in proper behavior at an early age.

The community also applies informal sanctions against children and adults who are not behaving properly. Gossip, or fear of gossip, serves as an important

method of social control in most societies. Most people fear the contempt or ridicule of their peers, so they try to conform to acceptable behavioral norms. People attempt to hide behavior that would be the subject of gossip, scandal, and ridicule. Individuals whose known behavior consistently violates social norms may even find themselves ostracized by friends and relatives (the severest of informal punishments). Informal economic penalties also may be imposed. A family may withdraw economic support in attempts to modify the errant behavior of a member.

A wide variety of supernatural sanctions may assist in controlling individual behavior; in some cases, these supernatural sanctions are automatically imposed on particular types of behavior. Whether the commission of these acts becomes public knowledge or not, and thus regardless of whether other punishments are inflicted on the individual, the commission still endangers one's immortal soul. Supernatural sanctions can be more specifically directed. In many societies, including some Christian ones, an individual may place a curse on another person by calling on a supernatural being. Fear of sorcery or witchcraft (see Chapter 14)

**social control** Mechanisms by which behavior is constrained and directed into acceptable channels, thus maintaining conformity.



frequently serves as another important form of social control. Most victims are people who offended a witch or sorcerer in some way, often through a breach of social norms.

## Law

**Law** is the highest level of social control, and legal punishments usually are reserved for the most serious breaches of norms. The question of how law can be distinguished from other forms of social control is not easy to answer. In societies that have court systems, the distinction is formalized, but in societies with no such formalized legal systems, the distinction is not so clear-cut. E. Adamson Hoebel (1954, 28) defined law in the following way: “A social norm is legal if its neglect or infraction is regularly met, in threat or in fact, by the application of physical force by an individual or group possessing the socially recognized privilege of so acting.” Law so defined was and is present in virtually every society.

In a legal action, some individual or group must have publicly recognized authority to settle a case or punish a violation. In societies with courts, the authority is obvious; however, in societies that lack courts, the authority becomes less clear. What emerges frequently is an ad hoc authority, that is, because of the peculiarities of the case, a particular individual or group becomes recognized by the community as the authority responsible for its resolution. In some cases, the victim may be the recognized authority. In the victim’s absence (as in the case of murder), the victim’s family, clan, or kin group may be placed in the role of authority. Such ad hoc authority is discussed later in some of the examples.

Implicit in all legal actions is the intention of universal application, which means that in identical cases, the sanction imposed is the same. Although one might argue that no two legal cases have been or will ever be identical, the notion of universal application requires that the law be consistent and thus predictable; the arbitrary imposition of sanctions is not law.

**law** A kind of social control characterized by the presence of authority, intention of universal application, obligation, and sanction.

**self-help legal systems** Informal legal systems in societies without centralized political systems, in which authorities who settle disputes are defined by the circumstances of the case.

Hoebel limited legal sanctions to physical sanctions; however, other scholars have argued that this definition is too narrow. A legal sanction does not have to be some form of corporal punishment, nor does it have to involve the loss of property. Based on his work with the Kapauku of New Guinea, Leopold Pospisil contended that the impact of psychological sanctions can be more severe than that of actual physical punishment. For this reason he stated, “We can define a legal sanction as either the negative behavior of withdrawing some rewards or favors that otherwise (if the law had not been violated) would have been granted, or the positive behavior of inflicting some painful experience, be it physical or psychological” (Pospisil 1958, 268).



## Legal Systems

On the basis of procedural characteristics, two main levels of complexity and formality can be defined: self-help legal systems and court legal systems.

### Self-Help Systems

**Self-help legal systems**, also called *ad hoc systems*, are informal and exist in the absence of any centralized or formalized legal institutions capable of settling disputes. Such systems are associated with band-level societies and most tribal-level societies. In such systems, there is only civil law. All legal actions concern only the principal parties and/or their families. The reason for terming the legal procedure in these societies *self-help* will become clear.

Self-help legal systems may be divided into two main forms: familial and mediator. In *familial* systems, all actions and decisions are initiated and executed by the families or larger kin groups involved. *Mediator* systems add the formal presence of a neutral third party—the mediator—who attempts to negotiate and resolve the dispute peacefully.

In familial systems, legal actions are handled by the families involved. A legal offense only indirectly concerns the community as a whole. When an individual or a family determines that its rights have been violated, the imposition of the proper sanction falls to the plaintiffs; in other words, the offended party assumes the role of authority. Such a system has some problems in implementation, but not as many as one might anticipate. This is not a system of “might makes right.” Certainly cases arise in such societies in which the weak are victimized by the strong. In cases of legal redress,

It is important to first understand the fundamental differences between corporations and national governments. The basic function of a government is to promote the collective well-being and economic interest of its citizens. The interest of a corporation on the other hand is far more limited. Corporations exist only to produce profits for their owner, usually an every-changing, anonymous group of stockholders or investors. To encourage corporate leadership to produce every greater profit, performance bonuses are frequently given to corporate executives. Thus, both owners as well as management have direct vested interest in corporate profits. Friction has always existed between governments and corporations. Ideally, governments attempt to regulate corporate activities so as to increase the economic and social benefits to their citizens. Corporations, on the other hand, attempt to minimize governmental constraints or regulations on their activities so as to maximize profits. As long as corporations were basically local corporations, companies whose operations were confined to a single country, there was no question as to the power of the government to regulate corporate behavior. If a corporation or group of corporations acted in a manner that the citizenry opposed, then the government, particularly in democracies, would respond to public pressure and pass laws regulating corporate behavior. As a result, the United States and most other countries have a large body of corporate regulatory laws, minimum wage laws, worker safety laws, environmental laws, and product safety laws, to name only some.

With globalization, the relationship between corporations and government is changing. In 1948, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks were established. These talks, initially involving the United States and a few other industrial countries, were concerned with negotiating reductions in tariffs with the eventual objective of achieving “free trade” throughout the world. Free trade is a central element in global economy. Free trade means that goods, commodities, and services may be moved and marketed across international borders without regulations or restraints. In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) became the successor to GATT. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the WTO monitors and enforces existing binding agreements between the 142 member countries, and it is working to develop still other agreements. However, unlike GATT, which was limited to the elimination of import tariffs and quotas, WTO has much broader powers. WTO has the same legal status as the United Nations and serves as a global commerce agency. The stated objective of the WTO is to ultimately create a fully integrated global economic system in which not only do goods, commodities, and services flow without any interference or control by local national governments, but also the property

rights of corporations—both tangible and intellectual—are fully protected.

To this end, once the government of a country adopts one of these agreements, the WTO has the power to enforce the agreement. Under these agreements, any existing law in any of the member countries may potentially be considered an obstacle to free trade, and thus illegal. The authority to determine whether the law of a particular country is “protectionist,” and thus a barrier to free trade and illegal, rests solely with panels of appointed bureaucrats of the WTO. Any member country can challenge any law of any other member country if that law presents a barrier to trade or investment. The proceedings of the WTO tribunals are conducted in secret, and only governments, not the public, have a direct voice in these proceedings. If the WTO tribunal finds against a country, that country has one of only three options: (1) change the law, (2) pay compensation, or (3) have trade sanctions imposed. There is no appeal of a WTO decision.

In essence, member countries had surrendered an important part of their political sovereignty to the WTO. For example the European Union (EU), for public health concerns, ban the sale of beef containing artificial hormones. The United States challenged this ban, and the WTO ruled against the EU, saying that a country cannot ban the import of a food as a precautionary health measure. The EU has to present scientific proof that artificial hormones are unsafe. What this means is that while EU farmers cannot raise or sell beef containing artificial hormones, they have to compete with such beef imported from the United States. Countries have the right to regulate their production of goods, commodities, and services within their borders but cannot impose these regulatory standards on goods imported from other countries, since to do so would be a restraint on trade.

Free trade has had tremendous effect on the corporate structure of the world. The regulatory laws of a country apply only to those goods, commodities and services produced or delivered within its own jurisdiction. At the same time, it cannot—with certain exceptions—block or limit the importation of competing goods, commodities, or services from other countries. If other countries have less demanding regulations, and thus lower costs, competing local corporations are at a decided economic disadvantage. The result has been the emergence of multinational corporations. (These corporations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 16.) The only manner in which local companies in the United States and other highly regulated economies could effectively compete in free trade economic markets was to outsource or move the most costly portions of their operations, usually labor and environment costs, to less regulated countries. In many cases, American manufacturers closed some or all of their domestic

*(continued)*

plants and contracted with foreign suppliers to supply some or all of their goods. In other cases, American corporations closed their local factories and opened new factories overseas. This shift was not just limited to manufacturers; service corporations have outsourced or moved portions of their operations. At the same time, these corporations have expanded their global marketing of their products and absorbed many of their smaller local competitors. One effect has been to negate economic cost of the more stringent labor and environmental regulator laws of the older industrialized countries. The other has been the creation of mega corporations.

Free trade has allowed corporations to grow in size and economic power far beyond the wildest dreams of their founders. In 1999, the combined sales of the 200 largest global corporations were equal to 27.5 percent of the combined gross domestic products (GDPs) of all the countries of the world. If one compares corporate sales and GDPs, of the 100 largest economies, 51 would be corporations and 49 would be countries. In the corporate world, globalization has been the avenue by which the big have gotten bigger. In the global economy, the control of economic power has or is rapidly passing from governments to corporations. The CEOs and boards of directors of the world's largest corporations now have more economic power than the political leaders and governments of all but a handful of the world's countries.

The global economic "recession" that started in 2007 illustrates both this shift in power and the problem of the lack of governmental regulation. Global trade is not limited to just the buying and selling of goods, services and

commodities, but includes speculation in stocks, bonds, derivatives and credit default swaps as well. In fact some of the largest multinational corporations are financial services corporations with branch offices throughout the world. Two things are certain about the recession: (1) it started with the collapse of real estate prices in the United States and (2) it was the result of the lack of regulation of the financial market. Arguing that U.S. banks were at a disadvantage in competing with European banks, Congress repealed the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999 which ended the distinction between commercial banks and investment banks or firms. A bank could now be involved in the buying and selling of exchangeable financial instruments such as stocks, bonds, banknotes, derivatives, and credit default swaps. Since each transaction resulted in a fee, the buying and selling of such securities soon became the most profitable part of the banking business. With interest rates low following 9/11, banks increased the number of adjustable rate subprime mortgage loans—loans to families who otherwise could not afford the loan. These loans were packaged into mortgage-backed securities and sold to other investors throughout the world, giving banks money to make still other loans. The availability of these low-cost loans resulted in a rapid increase in the real estate market. Recognizing that many of these loans would default when interest rates were adjusted upwards, many investors in these securities took out "credit default swaps" with banks, insurance companies, and private investors—insuring themselves against any losses in case of a loan default. Speculators were even able to purchase credit default swaps on securities

however, there is a community consensus in support of the victim and usually a recognized means by which even the weakest members of the community can gather support adequate to impose appropriate sanctions on the strongest.

The Comanche exemplify how a familial legal system operated and how victims weaker than their opponents could nonetheless obtain redress. One of the most frequent Comanche offenses was "wife stealing." Most older Comanche men were polygynous, and some of their wives were significantly younger than their husbands. Among young Comanche men, it was considered prestigious, though illegal, to steal the wife of another man. Under Comanche law, the injured husband could demand either his wife back or some property, usually horses, in compensation. The husband had the responsibility of imposing these sanctions. In such actions, the community played no direct role, but a husband could not ignore the loss of a wife. If he did

ignore it, the community would ridicule him, and his prestige would decline. Thus, not only did the community support the husband in pressing his claim, but they informally pressured him to act.

In imposing these sanctions, the husband was allowed to use whatever physical force was needed, short of killing the offender. In cases in which the men involved were physically about equal, the two met to negotiate and discuss the husband's demands. Behind these negotiations was the potential threat that the husband might physically assault the defendant.

In cases where the husband presented little or no physical threat to the defendant, institutionalized means existed whereby the husband could gain physical backing. Although it lowered his prestige in the community, he could call on his relatives for support; with his male relatives present and prepared to support his demands physically, the husband could then negotiate with the defendant. The defendant always had to stand alone.



they did not own. American International Group (AIG) with offices in Europe and Asia, the largest issuer of credit default swaps, rapidly became one of the largest of the global corporations. In 2006–2007, real estate prices in the United States peaked and started to decline resulting first in mortgage loan defaults. This quickly spread to other aspects of the U.S. and global economy and the whole speculative bubble created by an unregulated global financial market began to collapse. Recognizing that these corporations were “too big to fail”—meaning that the economic consequences would be catastrophic—quick action by U.S. and European governments and central banks averted a total collapse in the world financial industry and a global economic depression. However, it came at a tremendous cost, particularly to U.S. taxpayers. Directly and indirectly, this bailout has already cost the U.S. government several trillion dollars.

The global financial markets also face another threat from “offshore banking.” These banks—local in the Channel Islands, the Caribbean, and several other small countries—not only operate with minimal regulation, but also have little, if any, taxes. Thus, they have become tax havens where multinational corporations and wealthier individuals hide income from their home countries. The Cayman Islands are one of the largest: although having a population of only about 50,000, some 93,000 companies have “offices” there, together with 600 banks, including 43 of the 50 largest multinational banks in the world. An ever-increasing portion of the global financial market is “managed” through these offshore banks. In November 2008, it was reported that the “Caribbean Banking Centers,”

of which the Cayman Islands are the largest, owned more than \$200 billion in U.S. Treasury securities, making them the third largest “foreign” holder behind China and Japan.

In the free trade global market economy, multinational corporations operate in what has become a regulatory vacuum, resulting in the diminished ability of national governments to control their own domestic economies. International organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, regulate the policies of national governments, not private corporations. As a result, the global economy is increasingly controlled and manipulated by a relatively small number of heads of multinational corporations for their own benefit. As we witnessed starting in 2007, lack of regulation can have disastrous results.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. If the economic power of these multinational corporations and the individuals who control them continues to go unchecked, what could be the end result?
2. Are the national economies of the countries of the world—and thus the well-being of their citizens—going to be subordinated to the financial interests of the multinational corporations?
3. Are the heads of these corporations going to become the new *de facto* “political” leaders of the world?
4. Does globalization make some form of world government inevitable?



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Gossip is one of the primary means of social control. Two men in Istanbul talk it over.

Even if he had asked his kinsmen for support, they would not have responded for fear of community ridicule.

In cases where the husband was an orphan or lacked kinsmen, he could call on any other man he wanted to prosecute his case. He usually asked for the assistance of one of the powerful war leaders in the band. Such a request was so prestigious that a war leader could not refuse. At the same time, such a request was demeaning to the man asking for help and greatly lowered his prestige. As a result, it usually required a great deal of social pressure to force a man to ask for assistance. Once the request was made, the issue was between the defendant and the war leader alone. On approaching the defendant, the war leader would call out, “You have stolen my wife,” and then proceed to exact whatever demands the husband had requested. For his action, the war leader received nothing in payment other than the admiration of the community; the husband received the settlement. Although this process was used most commonly in wife-stealing cases, it could be used for other issues as well. Thus, Comanche legal institutions

gave any individual the means to marshal overwhelming physical force to protect his rights.

A more formalized type of legal procedure is found in the mediator system. In this system, disputes are still between individuals and families, and the offended party or the person's family has the position of authority. However, a third party is called on, usually by the offending individual or his or her family, to attempt to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution. The mediator has no authority to impose a settlement. The aggrieved party and/or family must agree to accept the compensation negotiated.

The Nuer, a pastoral tribal society of Sudan, provide an example of how mediator systems operate. The Nuer live in small villages of related families. Although villages are tied together through lineages and clans, there is no effective leadership above the village level. The only formalized leaders who transcend the local units are *leopard-skin chiefs*, who wear a leopard-skin cloak to indicate their positions. These men have no secular authority to enforce their judgments but only limited ritual powers to bless and curse.

The most important function of leopard-skin chiefs is mediating feuds between local groups. The Nuer are an egalitarian, warrior-oriented people. Disputes between individuals frequently result in physical violence, and men occasionally are killed. The killing requires that the kinsmen exact retribution. Any close patrilineal kinsman of the murderer may be killed in retaliation, but at least initially the kinsmen of the victim attempt to kill the murderer himself. Immediately after committing a murder, the killer flees to the house of a leopard-skin chief. This dwelling is a sanctuary, and as long as the man stays in the chief's house, he is safe. The victim's kinsmen usually keep the house under surveillance to try to kill the murderer if he ventures out.

The leopard-skin chief keeps the murderer in his house until a settlement is arranged. The chief will wait until tempers have cooled, which usually requires several weeks, before he begins to negotiate the case. First, he goes to the family of the murderer to see if they are willing to pay cattle to the victim's family in compensation. Seldom do they refuse because one of them might be killed in retaliation. After the murderer's family has agreed to pay, the chief proceeds to the family of the victim, offering so many cattle in compensation. Initially, the victim's family invariably refuses, saying that they want blood, that cattle cannot compensate them for the death of their beloved kinsman. The leopard-skin chief persists, usually gaining the support of more distant relatives of the victim, who also

pressure the family to settle. The leopard-skin chief may even threaten to place a curse on the family if they continue to refuse to settle for a payment rather than blood. The family finally agrees and accepts cattle, usually about 40, as compensation. Even though the matter is formally settled, the killer and his close patrilineal kinsmen will avoid the family of the victim for some years so as not to provoke spontaneous retaliation.

Up to this point, we have examined legal systems that operate without a formalized or centralized political structure capable of resolving disputes. In many of these societies, law, not subordination to a common set of formal political institutions, defines boundaries. To see what we mean, consider the Nuer. The Nuer distinguish among a *ter*, a feud within a tribe that is a legal action subject to arbitration; a *kur*, a fight between members of two tribes that cannot be arbitrated; and a *pec*, a war with non-Nuer people. Nuer believe that disputes within a tribe should be resolved by legal means (that is, peacefully), whereas disputes between individuals who are not members of the same tribe should be resolved by extralegal means, including organized warfare. Legal processes serve to repair and maintain social relations between families; thus, law serves both to maintain the cohesiveness and to define the boundaries of the society.

The Jívaro, a horticultural and foraging people of eastern Ecuador, illustrate how law defines social boundaries. By the 1950s, the Jívaro had been reduced to slightly more than 2,000 persons settled in more than 200 scattered family households. Such households usually consist of a husband, his wife or wives, their children, and possibly a son-in-law or other relatives. Households are grouped into "neighborhoods," which consist of a number of households living within a few miles of one another; the membership of a neighborhood is fluid. Poor hunting, a dispute with other households, or other factors might result in a family's moving away. Neither corporate kin groups nor formalized leadership positions exist. Except for household heads, only a few men are called *unta*, or "big," but their informal leadership role is limited and transitory.

Politically, the Jívaro are organized at a band level. Although they have only limited political institutions, the Jívaro have a strong sense of common cultural identity and territorial boundaries. Living in adjacent or nearby territories are four other "Jívaroan" groups, who speak mutually intelligible dialects, share the same basic customs, and at times trade with Jívaro households. Despite their minimal political integration, there

is little question about which households are Jívaro and which belong to the other four groups.

With this political organization, the methods used to settle disputes define the effective boundaries of the society. Disputes between Jívaros are resolved by legal means, whereas disputes with members of other societies are resolved through extralegal means. Like the Nuer, the Jívaro make a sharp distinction between a feud and a war. A **feud** is the legal means by which a sanction is imposed on another family for the murder of a kinsman. As a legal procedure, a feud proceeds in a manner quite different from a war.

As in most societies, murder is the most serious offense. According to Jívaro beliefs, few deaths are attributable to natural causes; most are the result of physical violence, sorcery, or avenging spirits. Deaths caused by physical violence and witchcraft are considered murders, which have to be avenged by the kinsmen of the deceased. In most cases of physical violence, the murderer is readily identifiable. In cases of poisoning and witchcraft, divination is used to determine the guilty party.

Determination of the guilty party and whether they are Jívaro or non-Jívaro affect how the victim's kinfolk avenge the death. If the guilty party is Jívaro, the kinsmen of the victim attack the household of the murderer with the goal of killing the man himself. If they are not successful in finding him, they may kill a male relative of his, even a young boy. They normally will not harm women or little children, except when the victim was a woman or a child. Even if they have the opportunity to kill more, only one individual will be killed. This is a legal action, and Jívaro law allows only a life for a life.

If the guilty party is determined to be a non-Jívaro, the relatives of the murdered person attack the household of the guilty party, trying to kill as many people as possible. They attempt to massacre the entire family, with no regard for either sex or age. In some cases, they attack nearby households as well, attempting to kill even more members of the group. This is a war, not a legal action.

The Jívaro, the Nuer, and other peoples who lack a centralized and formal political structure nonetheless have definite means of maintaining social control. To those of us who have formal governmental institutions that are supposed to handle our grievances and right the wrongs done to us, self-help systems look rather anarchic. However, rules govern such systems.

## Court Systems

A number of factors distinguish a **court legal system** from a self-help legal system. First, authority resides

not with the victim and his or her family but with a formalized institution, the court. The court has the authority and the power to hear disputes and to unilaterally decide cases and impose sanctions. Authority in legal matters is a component of political authority; thus, fully developed court systems can exist only in societies that have centralized formal political leadership—that is, chiefdoms or states. Second, most court systems operate with formal public hearings, presided over by a judge or judges, with formally defined defendants and plaintiffs. Grievances are stated, evidence is collected and analyzed, and, in cases of conflicting evidence, oaths or ordeals may be used to determine truthfulness. Finally, only in court systems does one find substantive law clearly divided into criminal law and civil law.

Court systems in turn may be divided into three categories: (1) **incipient courts**, (2) **courts of mediation**, and (3) **courts of regulation**. All court systems mediate disputes as well as regulate behavior; however, as societies become increasingly complex, the primary focus of the court shifts from mediating disputes to regulating behavior. This shift results in a qualitative difference not only in courts but in the nature of the law itself. Associated with this shift is an increasing codification of the laws. Laws and their associated sanctions become standardized and rigid, and civil laws are steadily transformed into criminal laws. Court systems begin to emerge with the concept of “crime against society”—the need to control individual acts that might endanger the society as a whole, as opposed to acts that threaten

**feud** A method of dispute settlement in self-help legal systems involving multiple but balanced killings between members of two or more kin groups.

**court legal systems** Systems in which authority for settling disputes and punishing crimes is formally vested in a single individual or group.

**incipient courts** Court systems in which judicial authorities meet, frequently informally, in private to discuss issues and determine solutions to be imposed. Evidence is not formally collected, and the parties involved in these cases are not formally consulted.

**courts of mediation** Court systems in which the judges attempt to reach compromise solutions, based on the cultural norms and values of the parties involved, that will restore the social cohesion of the community.

**courts of regulation** Court systems that use codified laws, with formally prescribed rights, duties, and sanctions.



only individuals. Herein lies the distinction between criminal law and civil law.

### *Incipient Court Systems*

True court systems can be found only in societies that have centralized political systems—chiefdoms or states. However, some tribal societies have what might best be termed *incipient courts*. Although a tribal-level society, the Cheyenne, as described earlier in this chapter, demonstrate the development of an incipient court system. At times, both the Council of Forty-Four and the warrior societies assumed the role of de facto judges and courts. The Cheyenne recognized that certain individual actions threatened the well-being of the group and thus had to be controlled. Some of these actions were purely secular, whereas others were religious. Designated warrior societies were formally empowered by the council to enforce secular laws and regulations. For example, in preparation for a communal bison hunt, camp members would be told to refrain from independent hunting for some days. If the policing warrior society discovered someone hunting illegally, the men present became the de facto judges and court and immediately imposed sanctions on the offender, often beating him with whips, shooting his horses, and slashing his tepee with knives.

Other secular criminal violations were handled just as swiftly. The Council of Forty-Four was responsible for the religious, or sacred, well-being of the tribe; thus, any action that endangered the supernatural well-being of the Cheyenne was their concern. The murder of a Cheyenne by another Cheyenne was the most heinous of crimes. Such a crime was said to bloody the sacred arrows, the most sacred of Cheyenne tribal medicine bundles. The arrows were symbolic of Cheyenne success in hunting (their main economic activity) and warfare. Murder within the tribe polluted the arrows and thus made the Cheyenne vulnerable to their enemies and less successful in their hunting. When a Cheyenne died at the hands of another Cheyenne, the Council of Forty-Four became a de facto court. Although there was no formal hearing, the council met and discussed the case: Was it murder? If so, then the sacred arrows had to be “renewed,” or ritually purified. They also decided on the sanction to be imposed—usually exile

for a period of years. With the Cheyenne there could be no capital punishment without again polluting the sacred arrows. (See A Closer Look for a further discussion of the Cheyenne.)

### *Courts of Mediation*

The key difference between court systems is not how the legal hearings are conducted but the manner in which breaches of the law are determined and suitable sanctions imposed. In courts of mediation, few laws are codified, and the judges follow few formalized guidelines as to what constitutes a legal violation or the sanction that should be imposed. This is not to say that judges act arbitrarily in these matters, but that they have tremendous latitude in their actions. What they apply is a **reasonable-person model**. Using prevalent norms and values, they ask the question: How should a reasonable individual have acted under these circumstances? To determine this, they must examine an individual’s actions within the social context in which the dispute occurred: What were the past and present relationships between the parties involved? What circumstances led up to the event? Thus, judges attempt to examine each case as a unique occurrence. Although some sanctions are imposed as punishments, other sanctions are designed to restore as fully as possible a working, if not harmonious, relationship between the parties involved.

One difficulty in attempting to describe courts of mediation is our limited knowledge of such systems. Polities that had courts of this nature were some time ago brought under European colonial rule. Their courts were soon modified by and subordinated to European colonial courts, which were more regulatory in nature. The example we use is the Barotse judicial system, as described by Max Gluckman. The Barotse made up a multiethnic state in southern Africa that at the time of Gluckman’s study in the 1940s had been under British rule for 40 years. The British had removed more serious offenses from the jurisdiction of this court. Despite these factors, the basic Barotse legal concepts aptly illustrate a mediation type of court system.

The Barotse state had two capitals—a northern capital, where the king resided, and a subordinate southern capital, ruled by a princess. All villages in the state were attached to one or the other of these capitals. The capitals were identical in structure; each had a palace and a council house. Courts of law were held in the council house.

The titular head of the court was the ruler; in practice, the ruler seldom was present at trials. In the center

**reasonable-person model** A model used in legal reasoning that basically asks how a reasonable individual should have acted under these circumstances.

at the back of the house was the dais, or raised platform, where the ruler was seated if present. There were three ranked groupings of judges. The highest-ranking group of judges was the *indunas*, or councilors, who sat to the right of the dais. The second-highest-ranking group was the *likombwa*, or stewards, who sat to the left. These two groups were divided into senior members, who sat in the front, and junior members, who sat behind. The third group consisted of princes and the husbands of the princesses, who represented their wives. This group sat at a right angle to the *likombwa*.

A case was introduced by a plaintiff, who was allowed to state his or her grievance at length with no interruption; the defendant was then allowed the same privilege. The statements of witnesses for both sides followed. There were no attorneys for either side; the judges questioned and cross-examined the witnesses. After all the testimony had been heard, the judges began to give their opinions, starting with the most junior *indunas*, followed by the others in order of increasing seniority. The last judge to speak was the senior *induna*, who passed judgment on the case, subject to the ruler's approval.

In judging a case, the Barotse judges used a reasonable-person model. The reasonableness of behavior was related to the social and kinship relationships of the individuals involved. Also, a breach of the law usually did not happen in isolation, and many individuals could be at fault; so one case frequently led to a number of related cases. In passing judgment and imposing sanctions, the judges considered numerous factors. One of the most important was the kinship relationship between the parties. The judges attempted to restore the relationship and reconcile the parties—but not without blaming those who had committed wrongs and not without imposing sanctions. The judges' opinions frequently took the form of sermons on proper behavior. As Gluckman (1973, 22) notes:

Implicit in the reasonable man is the upright man, and moral issues in these relationships are barely differentiated from legal issues. This is so even though ... [they] distinguish "legal" rules, which the ... [court] has power to enforce or protect, from "moral" rules which it has not power to enforce or protect. But the judges are reluctant to support the person who is right in law, but wrong in justice, and may seek to achieve justice by indirect ... action.

Courts of mediation have great potential for meeting the basic social purpose of the law, which is the maintenance of group cohesiveness. There is one serious

drawback: such a system is workable only in a culturally homogeneous political unit, that is, it works only if the judges and the parties involved share the same basic norms and values.

### *Courts of Regulation*

In the second millennium B.C.E., the Code of Hammurabi, the earliest known set of written laws, was created in Babylon. The code covered a variety of laws. One section dealt with physicians. It set the prices to be charged for various types of operations, based on the ability of individuals to pay. It also decreed, among other things, that if a surgeon operated on an individual using a bronze knife and the patient died or lost his eyesight, the surgeon's hand was to be cut off. The laws defined in the Code of Hammurabi reflect the emergence of regulatory laws. The role of the court was no longer to merely arbitrate disputes and strive for reconciliation but to define the rights and duties of members of an increasingly heterogeneous community.

Courts of regulation were a natural outgrowth of state-level polities, which evolved socially and economically distinct classes and encompassed numerous culturally distinct peoples. As relationships between individuals in the population became depersonalized, the law, too, became increasingly depersonalized. This change in the nature of law was compounded by the political incorporation of diverse peoples who frequently had conflicting cultural norms and values. The use of a reasonable-person model is workable only as long as there is a general consensus on what is "reasonable." In increasingly complex and stratified societies, the possibility of such consensus declined. Mediation of disputes works well in small, kinship-based societies, where all parties recognize the need for reconciliation through compromise. In sharply divided societies, the need for mediation is not as great because reconciliation in itself is not seen as a gain. Compromise is viewed only in terms of what is lost. Laws were thus created to bring order and stability to the interactions between individuals who were not social equals. With law divorced from social norms and values, justice was no longer simply a moral or ethical issue, but came to be viewed in terms of consistency, or precedent.

The separation of law from social norms and values also opened the door for the "politicization" of the laws. Laws were created to serve political ends, as various groups vied with one another for the creation of laws that would protect, express, or further their own

The killing of one Cheyenne by another was not only a “sin” that “polluted” the murderer and endangered the well-being of the tribe but also a crime against the society. This pollution of the sacred arrows caused the game animals the Cheyenne depended on for their subsistence to shun their hunting territory. A killing required the ritual purification of the sacred arrows. Not every killing was considered a criminal act, however. On hearing of a killing within the band, the members of the Council of Forty-Four assembled. Exactly how and what they discussed in such cases we shall never know; but the council members had to decide when a killing was to be treated as a murder. Was suicide murder? Was abortion murder? Was a killing ever justifiable? Was drunkenness a mitigating circumstance? If the council determined that a murder had taken place, the chiefs ordered the immediate banishment of the murderer. Such banishment usually included not only the murderer but also the murderer’s family and sometimes friends who went along voluntarily. This banishment usually lasted between 5 and 10 years. During the period of exile, the banished individual usually lived with a friendly group of Arapahos or Dakotas.

The act of suicide was not typically considered murder. Several cases are known of Cheyenne women committing suicide for what were considered trivial reasons. Such cases were not considered murder, and as far as can be determined, the sacred arrows were not renewed. In other instances, however, suicide was treated as murder. For example, one mother became infuriated when her daughter eloped with a young man of whom she did not approve. The mother found the girl and beat her with a whip while dragging her home. Inside the tepee, the girl seized a gun and shot herself. In another case, a young girl divorced her husband and returned to her parents’ home. At some later time, her mother found the girl participating in a young persons’ dance and beat her; the girl subsequently hanged herself. In both cases, the chiefs ruled that the girls were driven to suicide by their mothers, who were thus considered the murderers. In both cases, the sacred arrows were renewed, and the mothers were banished.

Was a killing ever justifiable? In one case, a man attempted to rape his daughter, who resisted and used a knife to kill her father. The sacred arrows were renewed, but the chiefs did not order the girl banished, nor did the people treat her as a murderer. In another case, a man named Winnebago took the wife of another man, who retaliated by taking one of Winnebago’s wives. Winnebago was enraged and killed the second man; he was then banished. After his return from banishment, Winnebago argued with and killed a second man, so he was banished again. While living among the Arapaho, Winnebago became involved in a dispute with a Cheyenne

named Rising Fire, who knew of Winnebago’s murders and therefore shot Winnebago out of fear. Although the facts are unclear, it appears that Rising Fire was not exiled for this killing. Thus, under some circumstances, such as incestuous rape and the fear of a known murderer, the chiefs thought that killing was justifiable. In such instances, the sacred arrows had to be renewed, but the killer was not exiled.

Was drunkenness a mitigating circumstance? During a drunken brawl, Cries-Yia-Eya killed Chief Eagle. In another case, during a drunken party, Porcupine Bear stabbed Little Creek and then called on his relatives to stab Little Creek as well. They did so, killing Little Creek. Cries-Yia-Eya and Porcupine Bear and his guilty relatives were banished by the chiefs; drunkenness was not a defense for murder.

The chiefs were faced with a second issue regarding Little Creek’s killers. After their banishment, Porcupine Bear and his relatives continued to stay close to the band camp. When the tribe organized a revenge attack on the Kiowas, Porcupine Bear and his relatives kept their distance but followed along with the other Cheyenne. In the attack on the Kiowas, Porcupine Bear and his six relatives distinguished themselves by bravely attacking first and killing about 30 Kiowas. What about war honors for acts of bravery accomplished during banishment? The council ruled that exiles could not receive recognition for their military acts, no matter how courageous they might be. In a sense, during their period of banishment, they were not Cheyenne.

Was abortion murder? In one case, a fetus was found near a Cheyenne camp. An investigation by a warrior society discovered that a young girl had concealed her pregnancy. The young girl was banished, but only until after the sacred arrows had been renewed. Thus, the chiefs considered abortion a less serious type of murder that required a shorter period of banishment.

The chiefs had to answer many other questions concerning murder and banishment. In about 1855, one of the chiefs, a member of the Council of Forty-Four, killed another Cheyenne. The sacred arrows were renewed, and the chief was banished; but what was to be done about his position on the council? The council ruled that the man could not be removed from office and that he remained a chief even though he could not participate in the council.

From the discussion of these cases emerges some of the reasoning behind Cheyenne legal decisions. The chiefs considered a range of factors in reaching their final determinations. Murder included not merely the cold-blooded killing of one Cheyenne by another but also abortion and acts that compelled another to commit suicide. At the same time, the chiefs thought that, in particular instances, killing was justifiable but intoxication was not a mitigating factor.

SOURCE: Llewellyn and Hoebel (1941)



Form	Characteristics	Associated Political System(s)
<b>Self-Help</b>		
(a) Familial	Legal concepts based on accepted social norms and behaviors of the society Ad hoc sanctioning authority limited to victim and/or victim's family, with implicit support of other community members	Band
(b) Mediator	Legal concepts based on accepted social norms and behaviors of the society Ad hoc sanctioning authority limited to victim and/or victim's family, with implicit support of other community members Use of a third-party mediator, with limited if any authority, to negotiate a settlement	Composite bands and most tribal peoples
<b>Courts</b>		
(a) Mediation	Legal concepts based on the reasonable-person model Formal judges who have the authority to hear cases and impose sanctions	Some tribal peoples have rudimentary court systems; however, true court systems appear with chiefdoms and smaller states.
(a) Mediation	Laws and sanctions are formally codified Formal judges who have the authority to hear cases and impose sanctions	States

goals, interests, and values. This situation is particularly evident in multiethnic and religious and economically diverse state-level systems such as that of the United States. Given the cultural pluralism, religious diversity, and economic inequality of the United States, it would be impossible to create a code of laws that could equally protect the interests of all classes and that would be consistent with the norms and values of all groups. As a result, many people find themselves subject to laws and sanctions, some of which they judge either immoral or unethical; at times, people find that laws violate their own cultural values. We see this with groups who think that abortion is murder and thus should be made illegal, and with groups who oppose capital punishment on the grounds that the state does not have the right to kill individuals. During the Vietnam War, we saw it with draft resisters who argued that the state did not have the right to order men to fight in a war they considered immoral. Less obvious is the manner in which numerous ethnic minorities, notably Native Americans, subordinate their cultural norms and values to comply with the legal system. With the emergence of states and courts of regulation, law ceased to be an expression of the social norms and values of the society and frequently impose upon the population new standards of behavior which many feel are unjust if not immoral.



In courts of regulation, the authority of judges is usually limited.

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## Summary

**1 Explain what is meant by political organization.** Collective action—in economic and social activities as well as relations with other groups of people—is a prerequisite for the survival of a group of people. To be effective, group activities must have leadership and organization, which are the basis for political structure. All societies have some form of political organization.

**2 List the four main types of political organization and how they structurally differ from one another.** The four major categories of political organization are bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Found among foraging societies, the band is the simplest and least formal level of political organization. The two forms of band organization are simple bands and composite bands. In simple bands, the highest level of political organization is the extended family, with the highest level of political leadership being the heads of the various families. These simple bands are economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous. Because a simple band has as its core a group of related individuals, band members are forced to seek spouses from outside the band; they are exogamous units. Thus, kinship ties through marriage serve as the primary link between bands. Composite bands are larger than simple bands and include a number of unrelated families. Leadership in composite bands is vested in “big men,” or informal leaders, who have influence but not authority. The key element in tribal societies is the sodality, transcend local residence groups and bind the geographically scattered members of the society into a cohesive unit. Sodalities may be either kinship-based, as in the case of clans, or nonkinship-based, as in the case of warrior societies or age grades. Leadership in such groups is more structured, with formal political offices. Chiefdoms have formal, hereditary leadership with centralized political control and authority. The associated redistributive economic exchange system focused on the chief economically integrates the various communities within the political unit. The state is the most complex level of political organization. States have centralized power and control, but the key characteristic of a state is a bureaucracy—individuals acting on behalf of the political elite, thus enabling the centralized power figures to maintain control of a greater number of individuals.

**3 Explain what is meant by social control.** Individual differences, conflict, and competition within the group must be controlled and channeled in such a manner that the internal cohesiveness and cooperation of the individual members of the group are maintained—thus the need for social control. Social control consists of the various formal and informal methods used to control and channel the behavior of individual members of a society into approved behavior.

**4 Discuss legal systems and how they differ from other forms of social control.** Law and legal systems are merely the highest level of social control. Law is defined as having three attributes: (1) authority, (2) intention of universal application, and (3) sanction. By this definition, all societies have law.

**5 Discuss the two major forms of legal systems and the variants within the two forms.** There are two major forms of legal systems: self-help systems and court systems. In self-help systems, the responsibility and authority for determining a breach of the law and imposing the proper sanction fall to the victim or victim’s family (or both). In court systems, formal judges determine where a law has been violated and impose sanctions against the violator.

**6 Explain the relationship between the legal system found in a society and the political organization of that society.** In societies with no centralized political systems, bands, and some tribes, legal systems are self-help. As discussed, this system is not as arbitrary as we might think. In the case of murder or killing, the result may be a feud between families, but a feud—sharply distinguished from a war—is part of the legal process. Violations of the law in societies with centralized political systems, chiefdoms, states, and some tribes is handled by courts. Court systems usually can be categorized as either courts of mediation or courts of regulation. In relatively homogeneous societies, most court systems take as their primary objective the mediation of disputes between individuals and the restoration of harmonious social relationships. In more heterogeneous groups, courts usually become more regulatory in nature, with formally defined laws and sanctions.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other material

includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 13 SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND STRATIFICATION



In the twenty-first century there are large inequalities in access to wealth, prestige, and power both within and between nations. In this facility in Dubai, a Middle Eastern country, a person can cool off by skiing indoors.

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## **Equalities and Inequalities**

### **Diversity: Three Systems**

*Egalitarian Societies*

*Ranked Societies*

*Stratified Societies*

### **Castes in Traditional India**

### **Classes in Industrial Societies: The United States**

## **Maintaining Inequality**

*Ideologies*

*American Secular Ideologies*

### **Theories of Inequality**

*Functionalist Theory*

*Conflict Theory*

*Who Benefits?*

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Explain** the systems of equality and inequality called egalitarian, ranked, and stratified.
- 2 **Discuss** the primary differences between castes and classes.
- 3 **Explain** why and how ideologies are important in maintaining inequalities in stratified societies.
- 4 **Describe** and analyze the functional and conflict theories of stratification.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights....” As you know by now, whether in fact all “men” are believed to have been created equal depends on which society you happened to be born into. Whether you have certain “unalienable rights,” and the nature of these rights, also varies from people to people. In this chapter, we consider another dimension of cultural diversity—the allocation of culturally valued rewards. Appropriately, this topic has been called “who gets what and why?” Gender and race are two other bases for allocating rewards and have been covered in other chapters (Chapters 2 and 11).



## Equalities and Inequalities

**Inequality** refers to the degree to which culturally valued material and social rewards are given disproportionately to individuals, families, and other kinds of groups. To the extent that inequality exists in a group or whole society, its members receive varying levels of benefits.

Before discussing cross-cultural variations, we consider the nature of rewards. Rewards are culturally variable, of course. However, in comparing societies, anthropologists commonly distinguish three categories. All are culturally valued to greater or lesser degrees in various societies.

The most tangible is *wealth*—ownership of or access to valued material goods and to the natural and human resources needed to produce those goods. As a material reward, money offers all kinds of advantages, as discussed in Chapter 7. Peoples who have no kind of money may value consumables like shelter and beads and resources that can be used to produce the consumables.

The second kind of reward is *power*—the ability to make others do what you want based on coercion or legitimate authority (see Chapter 12). Wealth and power go together among some peoples, both mutually reinforcing the other. But not always: *estoteric* (secret) knowledge often enhances the power of men and women who have little wealth, as with sorcery and witchcraft, covered in the next chapter. On the Micronesian island of Pohnpei, elderly people are believed to possess secret knowledge they often do not disclose until just before their death, if at all.

The final type of reward is *prestige*—the respect, admiration, and overt approval other group members grant to individuals they consider meritorious. Prestige (*honor, status*) is a social reward, based on judgments about an individual’s personal worthiness or the contributions the individual makes to others in the group. Norms, values, worldviews, and other cultural knowledge affect prestige. For instance, many North Americans admire “self-made” persons who have succeeded in life by their own talents and efforts. However, such individuals would be looked down on as self-centered and ungenerous in many other cultures.

The distribution of each kind of reward varies among societies. Some societies allow ambitious individuals to acquire wealth, power, and prestige, whereas others make it difficult for anyone to accumulate possessions, gain control over others, or put themselves above their peers socially. It is important to understand that what people think about the distribution of rewards does not necessarily correlate with the actual distribution, especially with wealth.

**inequality** Degree to which individuals, groups, and categories differ in their access to rewards.

Form	Main Characteristics
<b>Egalitarian</b>	Rough equality across families in access to possessions and wealth objects; wide access to and sharing of productive resources; influence and prestige based on age and personal qualities and achievements
<b>Ranked</b>	Limited number of formal social roles or positions (offices, titles) that grant authority; access to prestigious titles and offices determined largely by hereditary, family/kinship ties; rights to resources allocated by those of higher rank
<b>Stratified</b>	Sharply unequal distribution of material resources and wealth; large inequalities in access to power and social rewards (prestige)
<b>Caste</b>	Named, endogamous, ranked groups with membership normatively based on birth; occupation and activities constrained by caste membership; interaction between members of different castes governed by social rules (segregation, pollution)
<b>Class</b>	Vague definition and imprecise membership determined by a combination of birth and achievement; class membership broadly determined by occupation and wealth level, as affected by inheritance



## Diversity: Three Systems

To introduce the ways societies differ in inequality, anthropologists often use an influential classification developed by Morton Fried way back in 1967. Fried identified three basic types of societies based on their level and kinds of inequality: **egalitarian**, **ranked**, and **stratified**. The differences among the three forms are summarized in the Concept Review. We need to clarify three points about Fried’s classification.

First, the categories do not refer to access to rewards based on gender or age. When we call a society *egalitarian*, for example, we do not mean that females and males receive equal or nearly equal rewards, that elderly people and young people are socially equal, or that unskilled and lazy people are valued just as much as skilled and diligent people. Even in egalitarian societies, social distinctions are

based on gender, age, and personal qualities. Essentially, *egalitarian* means there are few differences in the rewards received by families or other kinds of kin groups within a society. *Egalitarian* especially refers to peoples among whom wealth, power, and prestige are not inherited along family lines. At the other end of the continuum, in *stratified* societies, there are major differences in rewards between families or kin groups, in addition to other distinctions such as gender, age, and personal qualities.

Second, Fried’s three categories are merely points along a continuum of inequality. It is impossible to pigeonhole all human societies into one of these types because most fit somewhere in between the three categories. The terms *egalitarian*, *ranked*, and *stratified* are mainly short descriptions of the kinds and range of variation in inequality found among the world’s peoples.

Third, egalitarian–ranked–stratified is the temporal order in which the three forms developed. Until about 10,000 years ago, most people lived in egalitarian societies. Ranked societies developed in a few areas about then, and a few thousand years later, stratification developed in some early chiefdoms and in the great civilizations (see Chapters 6 and 12). Archaeologists have devised some clever means to find out about inequality in prehistoric societies, and there is wide agreement that most of the world’s peoples were essentially egalitarian until the development of agriculture. After that, over the next 4,000 to 5,000 years, stratified societies spread throughout much of the world, as some peoples and nations conquered and ruled over others.

**egalitarian society** Form of society in which there is little inequality in access to culturally valued rewards.

**ranked society** Society that has a limited number of high-ranking social positions that grant authority; groups are ranked relative to one another, with the highest rank bringing the highest rewards in prestige, power, and sometimes wealth.

**stratified society** Society with marked and largely or partly heritable differences in access to wealth, power, and prestige; inequality is based mainly on unequal access to productive and valued resources.



## Egalitarian Societies

In egalitarian societies, aside from distinctions based on sex and age, minor differences exist among individuals and families in rewards. People who work hard, who have attractive personalities, or know valuable skills may be rewarded with respect and prestige from other members of their group. Egalitarian groups have various cultural mechanisms to prevent any individual from becoming too “big.” And, even people who are respected have few, if any, more possessions or power than others.

Mobile hunting and gathering peoples, such as the Inuit, Ju/’hoansi, Hadza, BaMbuti, and Aka, are egalitarian. James Woodburn identified three reasons rewards are comparatively evenly distributed among such foragers.

1. Most obviously, the band or camp must move frequently for effective adaptation (see Chapter 6). Mobility makes it difficult to transport possessions and hence to accumulate possessions or other forms of wealth.
2. The cultural value foragers place on reciprocal sharing (see Chapter 7) prevents individual persons or family groups from becoming wealthier than their bandmates. Because sharing food and most durable possessions is normatively expected, hoarding and accumulation are seen as negative. So, even if someone tried to accumulate, he or she would find it difficult to do so because other people demand their share, and failure to adhere to the norms of sharing and to live up to egalitarian values is socially punished by public ridicule or worse.
3. Mobile foraging families are not tied to specific territories but have the right to visit and exploit the resources of many areas, often due to extended family ties (see Chapters 8 and 9). If anyone tries to be the boss or exercise control over behavior, other people have the option to leave and live elsewhere.

In sum, if people move around in their environments a lot, are required to share food and other possessions, and have a range of options about where to live and whom to live with, then inequality in wealth and power does not have much chance of developing. If inequality should develop, it does not have much chance of persisting for very long.

Not all foragers are or were egalitarian, however. The Native Americans of the Northwest Coast, for instance, lived in ranked societies because, in their

rich environment, the three conditions just listed did not exist. Northwest Coast people were more sedentary, accumulated wealth in order to distribute it to validate and acquire rank, and formed kin groups that were associated with particular territories (see Chapter 6).

Most traditional horticultural peoples also are egalitarian, although others are ranked. In most of the hundreds of occupied islands of Melanesia there are tribal peoples (Chapter 12) who live from growing tree and root crops, keeping pigs, and fishing if they lived along coasts. In most Melanesian societies, men compete for prestige by organizing large feasts on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, or just to distribute foods and valuables to draw people into debt. If a man is unusually successful in organizing large feasts he rises up to become a *big man*—someone whose name is widely known, to whom many men owe goods or favors, and who usually has several wives to help with gardens and pig-keeping. Melanesian peoples vary in the degree to which big men have more wealth than other men. In some, there are noticeable differences in possessions, but in others big men distribute so much of their wealth to others that they live pretty much like everyone else.

Melanesian peoples with big men are considered egalitarian by most anthropologists, despite the fact that some men were notably “bigger” than others. Perhaps it is most useful to say that Melanesian peoples are at the far upper end of egalitarian societies. They again illustrate the cautions we discussed earlier: The typologies anthropologists use to depict human cultural variability must be applied carefully so that they enlighten rather than obscure the lives of actual peoples.

## Ranked Societies

As the big men of Melanesia show, leadership exists in egalitarian societies. However, any particular Melanesian tribe or even village may have many big men, some bigger than others. And the number of big men varies over time, depending on how many men have done well in any decade or generation. This is because *big man* is not an office into which someone is recruited, but an informal status that some men achieve based on their ambitions and accomplishments.

In contrast, in ranked societies, there are a limited number of high-ranking social positions, usually titles or some kind of formal offices that grant authority. People who hold the title can issue commands and expect to have them obeyed. The titles also confer high honor on the people who hold them. In most



Like most mobile hunter-gatherers, the Ju/'hoansi are an egalitarian people.

cases, the privilege of holding a title or occupying an office is largely or entirely hereditary within certain families, lineages, clans, or other kin groups. If you are born into a group that does not have the hereditary right to the title or office, normatively (but not always in fact) you cannot succeed to the office regardless of your talents or ambitions.

In one common type of ranked society, each kin group is ranked relative to others. Further, within each kin group, each member is ranked relative to all others, usually on the principle of genealogical seniority (elders being superior in rank to younger people). The highest-ranking individuals of the highest-ranking kin group hold the most valued positions that bring the highest rewards in prestige, power, and, in some societies, wealth. This way of ranking individuals and kin groups is well documented for several ancient Polynesian chiefdoms.

An excellent example of such a ranked society is Tikopia, a tiny Polynesian island whose kinship system we described in Chapter 9. When studied by Raymond Firth in the 1920s, Tikopia's 1,200 persons were divided into four patrilineages, each with its own chief

who exercised authority over his clanmates. Each clan in turn was divided into several patrilineages. Every patrilineage had a head, believed to be the oldest living male descendant of the man who founded the lineage about four to six generations ago. Alongside this ranking of individuals within a single lineage, the various lineages of a single clan were ranked relative to one another. One lineage of each clan, supposedly the original, "senior" lineage from which the "junior" lineages had budded off generations ago, was considered the noble lineage. Members of other lineages of the clan deferred socially to members of the noble lineage, according to Tikopian standards of etiquette. In addition, the noble lineage of each clan selected one of its members as chief of the whole clan. Clan chiefs had authority to punish troublemakers and the duty to perform rituals connected to agriculture and other common concerns.

Chiefs and other members of the noble Tikopia lineages had little more wealth than anyone else, however. The nobility received tribute from other lineages of their clan, but they gave away most of it in the many public activities that they organized and financed

through redistribution (see Chapter 7). The chief and nobility of each clan had no way to deny access to land and ocean resources to members of other lineages because each lineage was considered to have inalienable rights to certain pieces of land. High-ranking Tikopians, then, received high status and token tribute from other islanders, but they did not use this tribute to make themselves notably wealthier than lower-ranking people. They were honored and could issue commands in certain contexts, but their wealth was not great. It is mainly in this respect that ranked societies contrast with stratified societies.

### Stratified Societies

Within a society or nation, a *social stratum* consists of families who have about the same access to rewards. Stratified societies have two distinguishing characteristics:

1. There are marked and enduring inequalities between strata in access to all three kinds of rewards: wealth, power, and prestige. The inequality may endure through generations because the positions that bring rewards are themselves hereditary or because being born into a certain stratum gives individuals better or worse opportunities in life.
2. Inequalities are based primarily on unequal access to productive resources such as the land and tools people need to make their living or the education and training needed to succeed. In some stratified societies, a minority of people control access to the resources other people need to survive at culturally acceptable levels.

Stratified societies vary in their cultural beliefs about the possibilities of social mobility—that is, about movement up and down the social ladder. In some, such as North America and other contemporary democracies, upward or downward mobility is possible through education, special skills, hard work, good luck, or other circumstances. In others, as in European societies before the Industrial Revolution, one's position is considered fixed, often because of beliefs that existing inequalities are hereditary and/or ordained by supernatural beings.

Cross-culturally, we distinguish two major kinds of strata: **classes** and **castes**. Two general differences between class and caste systems stand out. First, by definition, castes are *endogamous* groups: They have cultural norms or laws that require individuals to marry within their caste. As discussed in Chapter 8, rules that

mandate marriage within one's own group have the effect of maintaining the distinctiveness of the group relative to other groups. This is because normatively there is no possibility of upward mobility through intercaste marriage. One's caste membership is theoretically hereditary: One is born into the caste of one's parents, one marries someone in the same caste, and one's children are likewise born into and remain members of one's own caste. In contrast, class societies allow people to marry someone of a different class; in fact, intermarriage between classes is a common avenue of social mobility.

Second, caste systems have enforced norms or laws regulating social relationships among members of different castes. For example, norms or laws may prohibit direct physical contact between castes or may forbid members of different castes from eating from the same bowl or drinking from the same wells. In some societies, high caste members believe they will be spiritually polluted if they touch members of other castes. Indeed, they often must perform rituals to cleanse themselves after accidental contacts.

Both of these general differences mean that castes have more permanent membership and more rigid social boundaries than classes. This does not mean that it is easy to tell whether some particular stratified society “has” castes or classes. Some societies have elements of both. For instance, some scholars have suggested that black–white relations in the American South were more castelike than classlike until the mid-twentieth century. There was no possibility of upward mobility into the white “caste” for blacks because no one could overcome the cultural stigma of dark skin color. Interracial marriage was legally prohibited or culturally taboo, so that the two races were virtually endogamous. Explicit laws against certain kinds of “intercaste” contacts and interactions—known as *segregation laws*—forced blacks to live apart from whites, forbade them to enter certain white business establishments and public restrooms, prohibited drinking from the same water fountains, made them send their

**class** System of stratification in which membership in a stratum can theoretically be altered and intermarriage between strata is allowed.

**caste** Stratification system in which membership in a stratum is in theory hereditary, strata are endogamous, and contact or relationships among members of different strata are governed by explicit laws, norms, or prohibitions.



children to all-black schools, and so forth. Most whites did not believe blacks were “polluting” in the spiritual sense of the word, but many whites did believe blacks were “unclean” in another sense and tried hard to avoid contact with them.

Usually the term *stratification* refers to differences in wealth, influence, and status within a single society. There are great inequalities among societies also, such as between nations and even between whole continents in the modern world. Whether future globalization will reduce economic inequalities among nations—and, if so, whether it will be sooner rather than later—is hotly debated. The effect of globalization on inequality *within* nations is also unclear. Many believe inequality is increasing in both the “developed” and the “developing” worlds. In the former, many working-class people are losing unionized, factory jobs, while the owners of the factories (including stockholders) make higher profits and grow wealthier by relocating their operations overseas. In the latter, some people are better able to obtain new jobs in globalized factories and leap ahead of other citizens who are unable to take advantage of the new opportunities. (The Globalization box discusses such issues.)



## Castes in Traditional India

The best-known caste system is that of India. India’s caste system is complex and varies from region to region, so we present only a general picture. Traditionally, the people of India recognized five main social categories, four of which are *varnas*. (A *varna* is not itself a caste.) Each category is ranked relative to the others in honor and degree of ritual purity, and each is broadly associated with certain kinds of occupations.

The highest *varna* is the Brahmins, or priests and scholars; next is the *varna* of nobles and warriors, the Kshatriyas; third are the Vaishyas, or merchants and artisans; and ranked lowest are the Shudras, or farmers, craftspeople, and certain other laborers. Although the *varna* are associated with certain occupations, not everyone in a given *varna* follows that occupation. A fifth category—outside and ranked below the four *varnas*—is the untouchables, to whom falls work considered polluting to the *varna*.

The *varnas* (which arose in the second millennium B.C.E. when the Aryans invaded and conquered what is now northern India) are large, inclusive categories into which specific castes are placed. The villages in

which most people live are divided into much smaller and specific groupings called *jati* (castes, as the term is usually used). For example, in a particular village, the Shudra *varna* might be represented by several *jati* with names such as weaver, potter, and tailor. There are thousands of these castes in India, distributed among the many thousands of villages, with each village containing a variable number of castes.

To understand Indian castes, we must describe the basic worldview associated with Hinduism, the traditional religion of most of India. (Hinduism is incredibly diverse, so here we present only a simplified depiction of it.) Hindu religion holds that spiritual souls are reborn into different physical bodies at various stages of their existence—this is the doctrine of *reincarnation*. Souls seek an end to the cycle of earthly birth, death, and rebirth, but to achieve this end, each soul must be reborn many times in many bodies, both animal and human. Souls attempt to move from lower forms of life to higher ones: from animals to humans (of various ranked castes) to gods.

The body (be it human or animal) into which a soul is born depends on how closely that soul adhered to proper standards of behavior in previous lifetimes. For souls that were placed in human forms in their previous incarnation, these standards include avoidance of activities that Hindus believe are polluting. Among the most polluting activities are handling and working with animal carcasses or human corpses, touching excrement and other waste materials, dealing with childbirth, and eating meat. Not only are people who regularly perform these activities polluted themselves, but any members of a higher caste who come into physical contact with them likewise become polluted and must bathe ritually to cleanse themselves. One’s present place in society—one’s “station in life”—varies with the degree to which one is associated with pure or impure activities. In turn, whether one is associated with pure or impure activities depends on one’s behavior in previous lives, including the degree to which one has allowed oneself to become polluted or failed to cleanse oneself in previous incarnations.

India’s traditional caste hierarchy is so intimately tied up with Hinduism that the two are almost inseparable. First, the caste into which one is born depends on one’s actions in previous lives. People are born into a low caste either because their soul has not yet been through enough lifetimes to have reached a higher form, or because their sins in a previous lifetime merit reincarnation into a low caste. Thus, all “men” were not

Some people have been taught that inequalities caused by globalization only started in the twentieth century. In fact, global inequalities began centuries ago. As early as the 1500s, the products of the two American continents were shipped to Europe. Mesoamerica and the Andes were the homelands of the two great New World civilizations: the Aztec and the Inca, respectively. Like the upper classes in Europe, the Aztec and Inca elite surrounded themselves with treasures, many in gold and silver. The trade (and plunder) of these precious metals produced huge fortunes for some Europeans and changed the balances of military power and political influence.

By the 1700s and 1800s, products were pouring out of the conquered regions of the Americas and Asia. In the islands of the Caribbean, northern Brazil, and the American South, enslaved Africans produced the cotton, tobacco, sugar, and cacao that were worn, eaten, and drunk by western Europeans. In Asia, spices, tea, porcelain (“china”), hardwoods, and other products produced by peasants and craftsmen were shipped over land or, later, over sea to satisfy European appetites and tastes. Britain’s colony in India, for example, provided early English textile factories with cotton and other fibers. In the process, India’s own highly skilled textile weavers suffered. Although the costs of transporting goods from Asian, African, and American colonies were high, Europe’s climate did not allow the production of tropical crops, and the labor costs of both African American slaves and Asian peasants were a fraction of the costs of production. As these brief examples show, the effects of globalization on inequalities are several centuries old, at least.

Today, globalization affects the standards of living of all nations and peoples. Academics, officers and boards of directors of corporations, leaders of rich and poor nations, and working class people disagree on whether globalization will raise or lower the income and wealth of the poorer nations.

On the positive side, expansion of international trade provides overseas markets for the products of the rich and poor alike, presumably allowing many people in poor countries to produce and sell more than they otherwise would and raising their living standards. On the negative side, the richer countries and their companies have advantages due to their greater access to productive technology, shipping and marketing facilities, skills and information, and other resources that give them greater control over prices and other terms of trade.

During the twentieth century, it is fairly clear that economic inequality among regions and nations widened. The growth of economies in the richer regions of North America, Europe, New Zealand, and Australia dramatically outpaced growth in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and East Asia (except in Japan). Whether continued globalization in the

twenty-first century will increase or decrease the economic gap between poor and rich nations is hotly disputed. Within the poorer countries, there is much evidence that income and wealth differences increase in the early phases of industrialization. Companies from richer nations open factories or other enterprises in the poorer countries mainly to lower their production costs. They hire local managers or contract with local businesspeople. In turn, managers and business owners hire workers at low wages, which they can do because of high rates of unemployment and relatively lax labor laws in the host country.

People migrate to cities in search of new jobs, higher incomes, and better opportunities for themselves and their families. Many workers benefit, meaning that the opportunities they have are better than their alternatives. However, even as workers earn wages and learn new skills, local managers and subcontractors generally benefit disproportionately. Because of factors like geography and educational level, some people are unable to find decent jobs or other income-earning niches like small businesses, so often they fail to gain from all the investments and job creation.

A revealing example is China, which has experienced the world’s fastest growth since the 1980s. China’s economic growth rate has hovered between 8 and 12 percent for more than two decades because of its plentiful labor, its central government that seemingly values growth above other goals, the work ethic of its citizens, and the loosening of restrictions on internal migration and foreign investment. Hundreds of millions of Chinese have experienced increases in their living standards by moving from rural villages to work in factories in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Beijing, and dozens of other cities along the eastern and southern coasts.

Hundreds of thousands of Chinese factory owners, real estate investors, and market entrepreneurs have become fabulously wealthy. However, hundreds of millions in rural areas have yet to participate significantly in the economic boom. Some have actually lost their livelihood when local Communist Party officials have not compensated them when a new factory takes over the land they have been farming. Hundreds of coal miners have died from mine collapses, and tens of millions of Chinese experience some of the planet’s worst air pollution from coal-fired power plants (see Chapter 6).

In late spring and summer of 2010, several events worried the Chinese government and perhaps are a preview of the country’s near-term future.

On January 23, 2010, a 19-year-old worker, Ma Xiangqian, was living in a factory dormitory in Shenzhen city and leapt to his death. Ma had followed the path of his three older sisters in migrating to a coastal city for factory jobs. In the month prior to his suicide, Ma had worked 286 hours,

*(continued)*

The Chinese Communist Party controls much of the information available to its citizens on TV, newspapers, and the internet. In June, 2010, these young workers on strike used their mobile phones to photograph their actions and posted them on the internet.



including 112 hours of overtime—three times the legal limit. By May, nine other Chinese employed in the same factory killed themselves. All ten worked at Foxconn, the world's largest computer manufacturing contractor. Foxconn is a subsidiary of Hon Hai Precision Industry, a Taiwan-based company that produces electronics components for Apple, Hewlett-Packard, and Dell. Hon Hai outsources the unskilled factory work to China's Foxconn because of lower production costs.

At the time of the suicides, Foxconn assembly line wages were \$132 (83 cents an hour), not including overtime which is practically mandatory. According to the *New York Times*, Foxconn employs more than 800,000 Chinese, most recent migrants from the countryside. Shenzhen, the city in southern

China where Foxconn and hundreds of other manufacturing and assembly plants are located, has grown from a tiny village to a modern city of at least 14 million since 1980. Family members of the ten suicides claimed their sons and daughters died because of long hours, poor working conditions, and oppressive management practices for which Foxconn has long had a reputation. Foxconn claimed the suicides were not job-related, and, of course, motives for suicides are difficult to discern.

In June of 2010, Foxconn nearly doubled worker wages, perhaps to express public remorse for its workers' deaths and perhaps because of a rising labor shortage in coastal cities in the last several years. For 25 years since the early 1980s, hundreds of millions of China's rural poor have left their

created equal in the Hindu worldview; it is legitimate that some castes have more power and privilege and more status and wealth than others.

Second, each caste is broadly associated with certain occupations. Each village contains a number of castes, most of which are named according to the occupation traditionally performed by their members. Thus, a village might include castes of priests, merchants, blacksmiths, potters, tailors, farmers, weavers, carpenters, washers, barbers, leather workers, and "sweepers" (the last refers to those who remove human waste matter from people's houses). Just as activities are ranked in Hindu beliefs according to their degree of purity and

impurity, so occupations and those who perform them are ranked. Working with animal carcasses is defiling, so leather working is a defiling occupation, and leather workers are so polluting as to be untouchable. The same applies to sweeping: people who remove human wastes from houses or spread excrement over village fields are polluted, and their touch pollutes those of higher castes. Therefore, members of the leather working, sweeping, and other castes associated with defiling occupations were traditionally untouchable. (Discrimination against people of untouchable ancestry is now illegal in modern India, although it still occurs in many rural regions.) Untouchables usually live in their



home towns and villages and migrated to cities in search of jobs, predominantly low skilled. Most send money back home to help their families and work long hours, including overtime, to make ends meet as costs of housing and food skyrocketed.

Lately, many migrants (precise numbers are unknown) have returned to their roots in the countryside, setting up businesses or finding employment in emerging interior industries. For many, city life and factory work have not been as rewarding as they had hoped. Most young workers eat at factory dining rooms and live in factory dormitories with numerous roommates sleeping on bunk beds. As the Chinese economy developed, increasingly younger workers come to expect a better life and grow dissatisfied with low wages and poor work conditions that the previous generation found acceptable. This has happened repeatedly in the historical spread of industrialism.

China's government—officially communist—is mostly concerned with political stability and maintaining a “harmonious society.” The Chinese Communist Party leaders believe that governing over 1.3 billion people, including 56 minorities, requires measures and policies that citizens of nations with a different past and a vastly contrasting present find abhorrent. Social unrest, manifested by strikes and demonstrations, could spread to become nationwide, unraveling the social order and leading to political chaos and disunity—conditions that China experienced numerous times in the past 3,500 years. So, the central government controls information via the Internet and media. It acts with what many consider undue force to put down demonstrations and labor strikes.

Recently, the Chinese Communist Party has eased controls on the labor force. In the past, the government suppressed strikes and other kinds of labor unrest and censored media reports of them and other kinds of demonstrations. Yet

in May 2010, Chinese workers at four Honda motor plants managed by Chinese subsidiaries went on strike. The government did little to force them to return to work and, surprisingly, did not prevent the state-owned media from reporting the strikes. Honda responded by increasing wages to entice their employees back to work. But it also hired replacement workers and all but a few employees returned to their jobs rather than lose employment. The government also returned to its former restrictions on the media reporting of labor problems. Then, on June 22, 2010, workers in southern China struck a Toyota plant that supplies parts to the Japanese automaker.

China's population is four times larger than that of the United States. Its economy is the world's third largest. It faces serious problems of energy supply and resource depletion. Social unrest is increasing. China's government believes (probably correctly) that continued growth is necessary to avoid sociopolitical chaos. It appears the Chinese Communist Party is trying to find ways to continue the growth (through low production costs) even as it satisfies worker demands for higher wages and better working conditions.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Some think recent advances in information technology such as e-mail, the World Wide Web, and cell phones will lessen inequality both within and among nations. How might this occur? What other changes will be required if it is to happen?
2. Suppose the Chinese government fails to balance economic growth based on low wages with worker demands. If China actually should fall into chaos, what will happen to the global system?

SOURCES: Chang (2009); *New York Times* online editions of June 2, 6, 9, 13, and 22, 2010 (retrieved June 22, 2010); *Columbus Dispatch*, June 16, 2010, pp. A6, A7

own special section of the village, separate from members of higher castes. Because they contaminate temples by their entry, they cannot go inside a temple. Their touch contaminates water, so they must use separate wells. These and other restrictions on their behavior are sometimes extreme.

Members of high-ranking castes, however, such as priests, landowners, warriors, and merchants, need the services of low-ranking castes. Again, this is because Hinduism defines some essential activities as polluting, so members of castes who would be defiled by these activities need lower castes to perform these services for them. The bullocks needed for farming die, so

someone has to remove dead cattle from the village. Brahmin women give birth just as other women do, so the women of some low-ranking caste have to serve as midwives because handling blood and placentas would pollute other Brahmin women. Everyone passes bodily wastes, so someone must remove these wastes from the houses of high-caste members, lest these substances pollute their occupants. Accordingly, each caste has its proper role and function in the economic, social, and religious life of the village.

In Hindu beliefs, one's soul is reincarnated into a higher or lower form partly according to how well one fulfills the obligations of one's caste in the present

Hinduism regards certain substances and activities as spiritually defiling or polluting. Ritual bathing—here in the Ganges River—removes the pollution.



© Bernard Wolfe/Photo Researchers, Inc.

life. Leather workers, for instance, cannot do much to improve their lot in this life, but by faithfully fulfilling their obligations to members of higher castes, their souls will attain higher reincarnations in future bodies.

Although the castes are interdependent in that each “needs” the products and services made by the others, one should not conclude that intercaste relations are harmonious, or that the complementary tasks associated with each caste are entirely mutually beneficial. A great deal of friction and outright conflict exist between individual members of different castes. In fact, local castes as a whole group sometimes organize themselves with a council to pursue their common interests.

Although most castes had names that referred to occupations, in fact, members of a single caste made their living in diverse ways. Most members of lower castes were farmers, regardless of their caste name, and many higher-caste persons engaged in farming as well. Also, there was no simple relationship between caste membership and access to resources or wealth; some Brahmins were poor, some smiths wealthy.

Many people think caste hierarchies and restrictions are no longer important in India. In the anonymity of city life, restrictions on behavior clearly are hard to maintain, and many lower-caste urbanites are well-educated, middle-class people. So, caste distinctions have withered (but not died) in urban areas. In the countryside, however, where most people are still farmers, caste distinctions remain, though in weakened form. For decades, the government of India has given preferential treatment in hiring to members of lower

castes, so having an identity as a member of a lower caste may bring some benefits.



## Classes in Industrial Societies: The United States

In class societies individuals and families have different degrees of ownership of productive property and material goods, have varying degrees of influence over public decisions made by a government, and are ranked in the respect or esteem accorded their position in the traditional society or contemporary nation.

An important point to make about classes is that they are seldom organized *as classes*. There are no occasions on which the members of a given class come together for discussion or common action (unlike, say, an extended family or lineage). Indeed, members of a single class do not necessarily believe they have much in common with one another (unlike the members of a labor union). Many people cannot precisely identify the class to which they belong (unlike Indian *jati* or *varna*); about four-fifths of Americans refer to themselves as “middle class.” People cannot say how many classes exist in their societies. In fact, there is considerable debate within the social sciences over what the term *class* means, or whether it has any other than the vaguest meaning.

Although the concept of class is vague, no one can deny the enormous differences in wealth, power, and

prestige that exist in stratified societies. The term *class* refers to all the people in a given stratified society who receive comparable levels of rewards. Members of different classes have different access to the material resources (income, property, wealth), influential relationships (social networks, political contacts), and cultural knowledge (formal education, “social graces”) that are positively valued. Unlike caste membership, people are potentially able to move up or down in a class system during their lifetime. Interclass marriage, personal talent, hard work and effort, and good luck can allow upward mobility. More commonly, being born into a given class puts one so far ahead of or behind others that few people rise or fall very far in the class structure during their lifetime.

In this section, we concentrate on the class structure of one industrialized society—the United States. In this country, the kind of work one does (occupation) is often assumed to be the best single overall indication of class membership. (“What kind of work do you do?” or “Where do you work?” is one of the first questions American adults ask of new acquaintances, and the answer gives a lot of information about a person very quickly.) Occupation is generally a good indication of income, and one’s income influences so much else: overall lifestyle, access of one’s children to education, the kinds of people with whom one associates socially, the kind of church or club to which one belongs, and so on.

Unfortunately for our desire to make societies neat and orderly, the different criteria used to define class membership are not always mutually consistent. For instance, people disagree on the prestige of many occupations—attorneys, physicians, and academicians are despised by some but granted high prestige by others, for example. For some occupations, there is a disjunction between income and prestige—nurses and teachers are held in higher regard than plumbers and assembly-line workers, but often they do not earn as much.

So, it may be difficult to decide to which class some individual belongs. One way around this ambiguity, favored by some sociologists, is to separate the three kinds of rewards from one another and define a separate class ranking for each reward. We can distinguish classes defined on the basis of prestige (*status groups*, as some call them) and on the basis of income or wealth (*economic classes*), for instance. The definitions and methods used for ranking the classes depend partly on our interests.

In the United States, the most widely accepted approach to stratification uses the concept of economic

class, in which class membership depends largely on individual and family wealth. Using wealth as the primary basis for assigning class ranking has four major advantages.

1. Wealth is more measurable than other indications of class membership (although cash income alone does not measure it adequately).
2. Wealth is the best single indication of the overall benefits individuals and families are receiving from their citizenship in the nation. Money cannot buy you love, happiness, brains, or many other things, but it can buy you much of what Americans value (including education and consumer goods and, nowadays, better looks and tighter bodies).
3. Extremely high wealth is generally correlated with ownership of productive resources such as factories, financial institutions, and income-producing real estate. Many wealthy people own the nation’s large businesses or made their money in finance. Either they built their companies themselves, or their ancestors made fortunes through business activity and passed their ownership along to the current generation. Many of the wealthiest persons gain most of their income from the stock market, which means either they earn large annual dividends or they get their earnings by buying low and selling high. However, notice that many persons become wealthy by selling their skills on the labor market, in industries like law, entertainment, medicine, and sports.
4. Wealth levels broadly determine people’s access to political power. Through political contributions, the wealthy have a greater say in who gets nominated and elected to important offices, which is why many Americans push for campaign finance reform. Through lobbying efforts, the rich enjoy greater influence on the laws and policies of the nation than their numbers warrant. By providing much of the funding for think tanks and other public advisory groups, the wealthy subsidize the expertise of many economists and other social scientists who advise government. People who serve in the government as elected or appointed officials may later work in the private sector, which covets both their expertise and their political connections.

For these and other reasons, we can learn the most about class inequalities in the United States by focusing on the distribution of wealth.



**TABLE-13-1** Distribution of Household Income in the United States, 2008

Quintile	Percentage of Income Earned
Poorest fifth	3.4
Second fifth	8.6
Third fifth	14.7
Fourth fifth	23.3
Richest fifth	50.0
Richest 5 percent	21.5

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2009, p. 5, Table 1); <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-236.pdf>; retrieved July 2, 2010

*Income inequality* is one measure of the distribution of wealth. Table 13.1 summarizes income inequality for 2008, the latest year for which the U.S. Census Bureau has published information. In the table, American households are divided into fifths based on their 2008 cash income. For example, the poorest one-fifth (20 percent) of households earned only 3.4 percent of all income, whereas the richest one-fifth of households earned 50 percent of the total income earned by all households. The table also shows that the richest 5 percent of American households earned 21.5 percent of the total family income in 2008.

U.S. Census Bureau data over the past three decades reveals that income inequality has been increasing. In 1973, the bottom three-fifths (the “poorest” 60 percent) of American households earned 31.8 percent of all cash income, but by 2006, their share had fallen to 26.7 percent—a *loss* of 5.3 percent. In 1970, the richest one-fifth earned 43.3 percent of all cash income, but by 2008, their share had increased to 50 percent—a *gain* of 7.2 percent. To make the same point more simply, in 1973 the ratio of the incomes of the richest fifth to the poorest fifth was 10.4, whereas in 2008 the ratio was 14.7. So, the relative benefits of economic growth over the last three decades have been distributed unequally, going far more to the affluent than to the poor and even those who view themselves as middle class.

The distribution of income alone does not tell the complete story of inequality in the United States, however, because figures on annual *income* do not show how much *wealth* is owned by families of different classes. Yearly income figures such as those in Table 13.1 greatly underestimate the economic inequality in the United States. People’s standards of living are not

determined directly by their annual income, nor is their influence on government policies at the local, state, and national levels. If we consider the distribution of wealth, we see that middle-income families, and even families generally considered affluent, own little in comparison with the truly wealthy.

Surveys funded by the federal government provide estimates of the net worth (wealth) of American families. *Net worth* includes all the family assets (property) owned minus debts. Assets include material property such as residential homes and other real estate, motor vehicles, household possessions, and the like. Material assets directly affect standards of living. Financial assets include money saved and invested in institutions like banks, bonds, and stocks. Saving and investment assets vastly increase a family’s economic security and can be withdrawn from banks or sold on the stock market to acquire material assets. Savings and, especially, investments also earn additional future income and wealth, although not without risk.

The Federal Reserve Board (the “Fed”) is the semi-governmental institution that tries to regulate the economy by affecting interest rates. Every three years, the Fed publishes a *Survey of Consumer Finances* that estimates the wealth held by American families. The most recently available survey is based on information gathered in 2004.

The Economic Policy Institute, a private, nonprofit institution, uses the Federal Reserve surveys to estimate the concentration of wealth in the United States. The latest year for which estimates are available is 2004. For that year, the Economic Policy Institute concluded that the richest fifth of families held 85 percent of the wealth, the middle fifth held 4 percent, and the poorest fifth had negative net worth (they owed more than they owned). The net worth of the vast majority of the population was actually *less* than the amount owned by the top 1 percent: the richest 1 percent of families owned 34 percent of the wealth, whereas the bottom 90 percent owned 29 percent of the wealth. So, the truly wealthy 1 percent owned more than the bottom 90 percent put together. It is revealing to look at how much wealth is owned by the truly, truly wealthy, such as the richest 400 people in the United States (see A Closer Look).

To illustrate how wealth inequality has risen over the last few decades, we can compare the *wealth ratio* for various years: the ratio of the wealth owned by the very richest Americans to the median American wealth. In 1983, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans owned 131 times the wealth of the median

The income and wealth gap between the very rich and the very poor is enormous in the United States. This family is homeless.



American. In 1998, the wealth ratio grew to 168. In 2007, the figure was 190.

## Maintaining Inequality

One issue in studying stratification is figuring out how such large inequalities first developed long ago, in prehistory. This problem cannot be addressed in this book, other than to note that inequalities between groups of people usually arise from a complex combination of intensive agriculture, control over scarce resources, large-scale cooperation, and conquest warfare. Most archaeologists who study stratification in prehistory agree that significant inequalities (deserving of the term *class*) did not exist until after the evolution of civilization (see Chapter 6).

Further, we know that in most stratified societies, a conquering militaristic group imposed its rule over the indigenous population of a region. This was true in African states such as Bunyoro and Zulu and in the ancient civilizations of the Americas such as the Aztec and Inca. Conquest of the weaker by the militarily stronger was also important in forming the ancient Old World civilizations of East Asia, Mesopotamia, and India. Historically speaking, the lower classes did not consent to their low standing but had it forced on them.

A major theoretical question about stratification in contemporary societies is: How do such high degrees of inequality in stratified societies *persist*? As the United States illustrates, a small percentage of the population typically control most of the wealth and wield a great deal of influence over public affairs. Why does the relatively underprivileged majority allow them this power and privilege? Why doesn't inequality produce more conflict and even revolts?

In fact, there is class conflict in a wide range of stratified societies. Resentment, rebellion, and occasional attempts at revolution occur in stratified societies in all parts of the world (which is not to say that they are universally present). A great many powerless and poor people do not simply accept their place in the hierarchy. Arguably, global economic inequality and concerns about cultural imperialism are as much responsible for international terrorism as are ethnic conflicts and religious ideologies.

One possible explanation of how stratification persists is that members of the highest stratum (hereafter called the *elite*) use their wealth and power to organize an armed force stronger than that of their opposition. If the elite somehow monopolize control over weapons or organize a loyal army, then they can use coercion and threats to maintain their access to rewards and resources. Elites do sometimes use armed force to put down rebellions, and certainly the ever-present threat of

“One billion dollars is no longer enough,” says the first line of the 2007 Forbes 400 website. For the past 25 years, *Forbes* magazine (whose editor Steve Forbes once ran for president) has published a list that identifies the 400 wealthiest Americans. In 2006, it took \$1.3 billion to be one of the richest 400 Americans.

In 2006, the *Forbes* list included such well-known Americans as William (Bill) Gates (Microsoft, the richest of all with a net worth of \$59 billion); Warren Buffet (Berkshire Hathaway, an investment firm, \$52 billion); Larry Ellison (Oracle, \$26 billion), Michael Dell (Dell computers, \$17.2 billion); Paul Allen (Microsoft cofounder, \$16.8 billion); Steve Jobs (Apple, the “igod” of iTunes and iPhone, \$5.7 billion); George Lucas (movies, \$3.9 billion); Steven Spielberg (movies, \$3.0 billion); Donald Trump (real estate, \$3.0 billion); Oprah Winfrey (talk show host, \$2.5 billion); Ted Turner (former owner of Time Warner and the largest landowner in the country, \$2.3 billion); and George Steinbrenner III (New York Yankees owner, \$1.3 billion).

People with the historic last names of Walton (Wal-Mart), Rockefeller (Standard Oil), Getty (oil), Hearst (newspapers), Johnson (floor wax and cleaning products), Marriott (hotels), Wrigley (chewing gum), and Disney (media) made the list.

Other members you’ve probably never heard of but you do know their businesses, like Ty Warner (Beanie Babies), Les Wexner (founder of The Limited and a major owner of Victoria’s Secret), Jean Pritzker (Hyatt), Wayne Huizenga (Blockbuster), Frederick Smith (FedEx), James Jannard (Oakley sunglasses), Philip Knight (Nike), Rupert Murdoch

(FOX and the *Wall Street Journal*, among other media properties), Charles Dolan (HBO), Pierre Omidyar (eBay), Jeffrey Bezos (Amazon.com), Peter Buck and Fred DeLuca (Subway), and Michael Illitch (Little Caesar’s and the Detroit Tigers and Red Wings).

Some lucky members inherited their money. Others made their fortunes in real estate, commercial centers and shopping malls, financial services like banking and mutual funds, newspapers, cruise lines, the stock market, construction supplies, hotels, pro sports teams, auto retailing, gambling casinos, energy, medical supplies and pharmaceuticals, cable and satellite TV, NASCAR tracks, and fast foods.

One of the richest 400 Americans, Michael Bloomberg, is mayor of New York. One, A. Alfred Taubman, spent time in jail for price fixing. One, Henry Nicholas III, has a bad-boy reputation. Some are giving away most of their fortunes to charitable causes, like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Ted Turner, and Bernard Marcos.

Altogether, the richest 400 Americans own \$1.54 trillion worth of assets. Most people cannot grasp this amount. How much money is this, in terms people can relate to? If \$1.54 trillion were divided among the citizens of the United States, then every child, woman, and man would receive about \$5,100. Rounding off the numbers, if the wealth of the richest 400 Americans were cashed in and distributed equally, each of the 300 million Americans would receive more than \$5,000.

SOURCE: The Forbes 400 ([http://www.forbes.com/2007/09/19/forbes-400-introduction-lists-richlist07-cx\\_mm\\_0920richintro.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/09/19/forbes-400-introduction-lists-richlist07-cx_mm_0920richintro.html); retrieved November 10, 2007)

coercion and fear of punishment deters resistance to the elite’s wealth, prestige, and power.

Yet in most stratified societies, the elite only occasionally find it necessary to actually use force. Use of military might is costly to them. Suppose the elite wait for rebellions to occur and then use police or armies to put them down. Even if rebellions fail, suppression by police and armies produces more hatred and resentment and more awareness of the relative wealth and power of the elite. Repression increases fear, as intended by elites, but it also can backfire and lead to a greater probability of future rebellion. Notice also that the elite’s reliance on brute force and oppression to maintain their wealth and power potentially reduces or eliminates their honor and esteem, one of the three major rewards of stratification, and one that elites presumably covet. Further, those who supply the military might—

armies, guards, thugs, or police—must be paid or otherwise provided for by the elite. Payment requires resources. Either the elite can take these resources from their own wealth, thus reducing it, or they can increase their exploitation of the majority population, thus breeding still more hatred and resentment toward themselves. Finally, relying entirely on the loyalty of an army is risky because this allegiance may change, as many dictators know or fear. In sum, reliance on threat and armed force alone is both costly and risky.

None of these points deny that armed force is an important way to sustain high degrees of inequality. Probably few elites have remained in power for many generations without using force and periodically suppressing rebellions and dissent. Nonetheless, stratification systems that rely entirely or largely on force seem to be short-lived and unstable and have been



The difference between the net worths of the very rich and everyone else is much larger than the gap in annual incomes. This couple seems to have the status that used to be called “jet set.”



© Sam Bassett/Getty Images/Riser

replaced by those that use other mechanisms. What other mechanisms are available?

### *Ideologies*

We address this question by noting yet another reason coercive force alone is seldom solely responsible for maintaining inequality. A single rebellion can have many causes, but a persistent *pattern* of rebellion is caused mainly by the lower strata's perception that they are exploited or not receiving their fair share of rewards. Seeking out and eliminating rebels (or, one might suggest, terrorists) do little to change the reasons people rebel. The instigators may be sanctioned or eliminated, but the underlying discontent that causes persistent conflict remains. Imprisoning or killing instigators removes them from rebellions, but sometimes removing one instigator creates several more instigators. Sooner or later, there will be new instigators who organize new rebellions and attacks. Further, while armies or police eliminate rebels, innocents are usually killed, injured, or harmed economically. This can alienate those who otherwise would be passive about their place in the world. For these and other reasons, armed force alone is unlikely to eliminate the perceptions of unfairness, injustice, cultural domination, or other attitudes that cause rebellions and violence.

It helps elites maintain their privileges if they can influence the perceptions of the underprivileged about

why they are underprivileged. For example, if poor people think it is God's will that they are poor, they are less likely to rebel than if they believe they are poor because of exploitation. Or, if they think the elite use their property and power to benefit everyone in the society, they are less likely to challenge the elite. Or, if they think that a concentration of property and power is inevitable because that's just the way human life is, they will be less likely to resist. Or, if they think that they, too, can acquire property, power, and prestige through their own achievements, they are more likely to put their effort into improving their own position rather than into causing trouble. Finally, if “the masses” are divided internally on the basis of values, ethnic identities, perceived racial threats, religious attachments, regional loyalties, and so forth, then they are less likely to unite in the political arena.

If, to state the general point, members of the lower strata adopt a set of beliefs that justifies and legitimizes the rewards received by the higher strata, then they are more likely to try to join the system rather than to beat it. In such beliefs, the elite have a powerful and relatively cheap tool with which to dampen opposition to their power and privileges. Further, these ideas increase the prestige of the elite. If people believe that inequality is God's will, or that the activities of the elite benefit all, or that the elite became elite through intelligence and hard work, then the elite deserve the honor and respect of everyone else. (Not surprisingly, elites

themselves find it easy to believe such things about themselves.)

We call those ideas and beliefs that explain inequality as desirable or legitimate **ideologies**. The term *ideology* also has a broader meaning, often referring to any set of ideas held by a group—as in the phrases *leftist political ideology* and *feminist ideology*. Here we use the term in the narrow sense, to refer only to ideas that justify the status quo of inequality.

In many stratified societies, ideologies are based on religion. We are familiar with the notion of the “divine right of kings” from feudal Europe—certainly a handy supernatural mandate for kings and aristocracies! Similar notions are common in non-Western stratified societies. For instance, in Bunyoro, a kingdom in East Africa, the health and welfare of the ruler were mystically associated with the fertility and prosperity of the whole kingdom. Anything that threatened his life was believed to be a threat to everyone. In many ancient civilizations, such as the Aztec, the Inca, the Japanese, and the Egyptian, the ruler himself was believed to be a divine or semidivine being. In pre-twentieth-century China, the emperor had the “Mandate of Heaven,” meaning that Heaven itself had granted him secular authority over the vast Chinese Empire for as long as he ruled it wisely and humanely. In traditional India, as we have seen, Hindu beliefs about reincarnation and pollution were so intertwined with the caste system that they both explained and legitimized its inequities.

The preceding examples illustrate a few ways religion serves ideological functions. In stratified societies, religion commonly gives the elite a supernatural mandate, provides them with the supernatural means to punish people, and gives them ritual functions to perform that are believed to benefit the whole population.

### American Secular Ideologies

Do similar kinds of religious ideologies exist in modern industrial societies, some of which are as highly stratified as any pre-industrial society?

Some people who are critical of the impacts of the Judeo-Christian heritage of the West believe it supports greed and accumulation. In fact, however, many New Testament passages warn Christians about the accumulation of wealth. The best known are the story of

the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) and the passages about the rich man who came to Jesus seeking salvation (told in Matthew 19:21–24, Mark 10:21–25, and Luke 18:22–25). Lesser-known scriptures say the poor are blessed and the rich are oppressors (Luke 6:20–24, James 2:2–6, and James 5:1–6). Two passages in Acts (2:44–45 and 4:32–37) seem to instruct Christians to hold their possessions in common, which not only does not support wealth accumulation but is a rather anticapitalist teaching.

Further, most citizens do not believe that the richest Americans have a supernatural mandate for their wealth. The wealthiest families do not justify their income and ownership of property and financial assets by invoking religious authority. Religion is not generally used to justify the wealth and power of particular individuals and families. At most, some wealthy claim to be “blessed,” but most take credit for their own success or admit that they are “lucky.”

Finally, Judeo-Christian teachings historically have been and still are used to support social and political movements that seek to correct inequalities that are believed to be unjust. The nineteenth-century antislavery movement is one example. More recent examples include the civil rights and liberation theology movements. And a variety of churches and denominations are resolutely against the Establishment in their beliefs. In the political realm, certainly many officeholders attend church and find ways to work their religious faith into their speeches to certain audiences. But few gain politically by claiming they are God’s chosen officials. Even suspicion that a politician thinks he or she is carrying out divine will is a political liability (although some citizens will believe it, depending on whether they agree with his or her policies).

In brief, with regard to the issue of who has what and why, most Americans, and Westerners generally, are *secularists*: they explain the unequal distribution of rewards by events here on earth, not by the will of heaven.

Ideologies do not have to be based on religion, however. There are only two essential features of ideologies:

1. They justify (legitimize) inequality by affecting people’s consciousness, not by threatening or using physical coercion.
2. They are believable to large numbers of people, based on existing cultural knowledge.

In the first condition, *consciousness* refers to cultural attitudes, values, worldviews, and so forth. In the

**ideologies** Ideas and beliefs that legitimize and reinforce inequalities in stratified societies.

second condition, *believable* means that effective ideologies match people’s general ideas about how their society works. Ideologies must make sense in terms of existing cultural knowledge, or they will be ineffective. **Secular ideologies** as well as religious ideologies can have both features.

Many social scientists argue that secular ideologies take two forms in the modern United States. One is that the whole nation benefits from inequality. Because a few people are very wealthy, many citizens believe that the middle and lower classes are better off than they would be if wealth were distributed more equally. After all, the chance to get rich motivates people to do their best, and we all win when our fellow citizens perform up to their potential. Besides, the accumulation and investment of wealth are necessary to create jobs from which poor and middle-class people benefit. The most familiar example of this notion are justifications for tax cuts for wealthy people (note that a tax cut has the same effect as increasing income). If wealthier people are made even wealthier, the argument (or ideology) goes, they will invest their extra income in expanding businesses, thus creating jobs that eventually trickle down to everyone. Putting more resources into the hands of the rich will “grow the economy,” thus benefiting everyone, according to this economic theory (or ideology).

A second secular ideology is that the elite earn their rewards through their own merit and efforts. They are more intelligent, ambitious, hard working, willing to take risks, and so forth. In short, the elite have personal qualities that account for their success. This is, of course, accurate for some members of the elite. Those who inherited their wealth or were lucky enough to buy the right stock at the right time or get into (and/or out of) the right housing market early enough, however, receive the same rewards as those who earned their rewards by performing actual work.

To the extent that they are widely believed, these two ideas fit with Americans’ other beliefs about the way people are and how their society works. They are compatible with widespread beliefs about human motivation—people need strong incentives before they will make the effort to get a good education and have a responsible career. They also fit with many American values such as individual freedom, progress, the work ethic, and private ownership of property.

Of course, many Americans do not believe these two ideas. (If you do not believe them, then they are



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Although politicians in the United States appeal to religious values in their campaigns, few claim to have actually been chosen by God.

not effective ideologies for you.) Others believe these ideas are an accurate portrayal of how the whole nation benefits from economic inequality. (If you fall into this camp, you will think these ideas are objectively true, rather than merely ideologies.) Your personal opinion depends on your class, upbringing, ideas about human nature, political views, and so forth. Can the comparative perspective of anthropology shed any light on the issue of whether stratification benefits society at large, or mainly members of the elite class themselves? To answer this question, we look at the major theories of inequality.

**secular ideology** An ideology that does not rely on the will of supernatural powers but justifies inequality on the basis of its society wide benefits.





## Theories of Inequality

Sociologists and anthropologists distinguish two theories to analyze stratification. One holds that a high degree of inequality in the distribution of rewards is necessary, morally justified, and beneficial to all members of society. This view is called the **functional theory of inequality**.

A contrary view holds that a high degree of inequality not only is unjust or even immoral but also robs the whole society of the benefits of much of its potential talent, which lies undeveloped in many of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. This view is known as the **conflict theory of inequality**. It holds that a high level of inequality offers few benefits to anyone except the elite and, indeed, is harmful to the whole society because of the conflicts it creates and the lack of equal opportunities it entails.

### Functionalist Theory

The functionalist theory holds that inequality is necessary for a stratified society to motivate its most talented and hard-working members to perform the most important roles. Some roles (including jobs) require more skill and training than others. In most cases, the more skill and training required for a job, the fewer the number of people qualified to do the job and the more valuable their abilities are to the whole group. Functionalists argue that unequal rewards are effective ways to recruit the most able individuals into the most socially valuable roles. Unless there are rewards for those with the talents most of us lack, they will have no incentive to put those talents to work in activities that benefit all of us.

Also, in the functionalist view, inequality is not only socially useful but also morally justified. If society as a whole is to enjoy the fruits of the labor of its small number of well-trained, talented, and hard-working individuals, it is only fair and

**functional theory of inequality** Theory holding that stratification is a way to reward individuals who contribute most to society's well-being.

**conflict theory of inequality** Theory holding that stratification benefits mainly the upper stratum and is the cause of most social unrest and other conflicts in human societies.

right that it reward these individuals with material goods, respect, and control over public decision making.

The functionalist analysis of inequality makes a lot of sense. People who do the most valuable things often get great rewards. However, it is difficult to measure the *social* “value” of various activities, as the global financial crisis so clearly shows. It is reasonable that rewards be proportionate to personal qualities like effort and skill, but the two are not always correlated.

Two objections to functionalism are possible within the framework of the functionalist theory itself. First, there is no reason to believe that the high degree of inequality that *actually exists* in stratified societies is necessary to ensure that those with the scarcest talents fill the most valuable roles. In industrialized nations, for example, how many dollars does it take to motivate a qualified individual to manage a major company? In the United States, chief executive officers (CEOs) of large corporations enjoy relatively large compensation packages. In 2005, American CEOs earned 262 times the compensation paid to workers. This is part of a 40-year upward trend from the 1965 earnings ratio (24), the 1977 ratio (35), the 1989 ratio (71), and the 1995 ratio (101).

Comparing the 1977 CEO/worker ratio of 35 to the 2005 ratio of 262, CEOs in 2005 earned 7.5 times more than CEOs earned in 1977. Were the top executives of American companies responsible for a sevenfold increase in productivity and profits between 1977 and 2005? How did they get so much better in 28 years? In 2005, an average worker worked 262 days to earn what a CEO earned in one day. On any given day, is a CEO 262 times more valuable to the company than an ordinary worker?

Given the financial crisis that began in 2008, it seems a little naïve to believe that CEOs earn their dollars, at least CEOs in the financial sector. But why should CEOs in financial institutions be any different from those in autos or “public” utilities?

Speaking more generally of elites, is there an actual relationship between the compensation (rewards) of elites and their contributions to their groups or to the nation as a whole? Obviously, there is no way to measure this relationship. Compensation amounts are mostly set by markets, but markets respond to supply and demand, not to the “value” that some activity or role has for society at large.

For these reasons, one objection to the functionalist theory is that no one knows how much inequality is

needed to motivate people. Nor does anyone know how to calculate the benefits that elites actually offer to their group or to society at large. In brief, there is no reason—no reason at all—to think that the *high degree* of inequality that actually exists in some stratified society is necessary for the nation to enjoy the benefits of *some degree* of inequality. Is there any reason to think that America as a whole would be worse off if the wealthiest 20 percent owned only 40 percent of the wealth rather than 85 percent?

Second, functionalists assume the system of stratification *effectively* places qualified individuals in important roles. It is a large assumption, however, that those who are best able to perform the most important roles are those who are usually recruited for them. In all systems of stratification, there is a powerful element of inheritance of wealth, prestige, and power. Even assuming that most members of elite classes of the present day actually earned their rewards, many will pass their resources along to their heirs. Sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, and the like may or may not be talented, hard working, and meritorious. Even if elite families do not transmit wealth to their children, the latter still have a head start in life from the extra help they get in education, job prospects, contacts through social networks, and other privileges. Certainly, children born to poor families can and do succeed, but they must overcome more obstacles than those born to privilege. If every generation were born with nearly equal access to the means to succeed in life, we could be more confident that those who occupy the most important roles are those who are best qualified to fill them. For 2010, the American inheritance tax is 0 percent. What have the children of the wealthiest Americans done to earn this income? The functionalist theory that those who receive the highest rewards are most deserving would be more plausible if the (metaphorical) playing field in which people compete were leveled.

Suppose there were some way to calculate the amount of inequality that is optimal for a given society. Suppose further that the society could devise some way of beginning each generation with everyone on an equal footing, with truly equal opportunities to compete. (This could be partly accomplished by steep inheritance taxes, which are often opposed by those who in other contexts—such as racial preferences in hiring—say they believe in equal opportunity.) Then the functionalist theory of inequality might apply. But no stratified society has ever achieved this condition, partly because these questions are unanswerable and

partly because the wealthy and powerful would have to consent to such a change, and they have no incentive to do so.

## Conflict Theory

The conflict theory takes off from various objections to functionalism, such as the two just given. But it goes much further. Conflict theorists claim that stratification is based ultimately on control over productive resources, such as land, technology, information, and labor. Once elites gain control over these resources—by whatever means—they get other people to do work that benefits themselves. How this is organized varies among different kinds of economic systems. In ancient preindustrial states and some chiefdoms, the noble class controlled the land and other productive resources and the commoners had to provide tribute and labor to the nobility in return for the privilege of using it. In parts of feudal Europe, serfs were tied to their estate and ordinarily had strong rights over the land they worked, but each year they still had to contribute a certain number of days of work or a certain proportion of their harvest to their lord.

As for the capitalist economic system, Karl Marx—the nineteenth-century “father” of conflict theory—argued that capitalist societies include only two fundamental classes. Members of the capitalist class (or *bourgeoisie*) own the factories and tools. Members of the working class (or *proletariat*) have only one thing to sell on the market: their labor. To earn their living, workers must sell their labor to some capitalist. This seems like an equitable arrangement. The capitalists buy the labor they need to operate their factories, mines, and fields to sell goods and make profit. The workers get the jobs they need to support their families by selling their time and skills for a wage set by the market for labor (Chapter 7).

But, Marx noted, the goods the workers produce must be worth more on the market than the workers themselves receive in wages, or there would be no profit for the capitalists. The difference between the amount capitalists receive for the goods they sell and their costs (including the amount they pay their workers) is *profit*. In Marx’s controversial view, profit is based on the exploitation of workers. The belief that workers receive a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work is merely an ideology.

Conflict theorists are criticized for being ideologues themselves, though of a different political persuasion than functionalists. If one wants to find exploitation in



© But see new caption

Conflict theorists hold that stratification exists and persists because elite classes are able to exploit others. This woman is boxing up clothing for shipment. Is her employer therefore exploiting her, as Karl Marx claimed?

an unequal relationship, one can usually do so. Critics of conflict theory claim that the value-laden term *exploitation* does not adequately characterize relationships between chiefs or kings and commoners, between lords and serfs, or between capitalists and workers. Conflict theorists play down the valuable services that elite classes perform, such as maintaining social control, organizing the society for the provision of public goods, and accumulating productive resources (capital) put aside to increase future production.

Many conflict theorists assume it is possible to organize a complex society without rewards as unequal as exists in real stratified societies. This is a rather unrealistic view of human nature, according to some critics of the approach. They say this is one reason “communism” has collapsed almost everywhere. Complex societies are always hierarchically organized, with centralized leadership. Many critics believe the functions of leaders, controllers, and organizers are so valuable to society at large that they deserve the rewards

they receive. And who is to say what/how much/what kinds of rewards elites deserve?

### **Who Benefits?**

Contrasting the two theories, we see that functionalism emphasizes the positive aspects of stratification, whereas conflict theory emphasizes the negative side. Functionalists say the class structure benefits society at large directly or indirectly—indirectly because of the useful services wealthy people provide. Conflict theory points to the costs of stratification not just to those on the bottom of the social ladder but also to society at large. A country or other form of society loses the undeveloped potential of its underprivileged members. Societies also suffer the periodic violent conflicts (rebellions, revolutions) or the ongoing disorder (crimes, labor strikes, political dissent) that result from a high degree of unjust inequality and inherited privilege.



Conflict theorists argue that many of the problems that have afflicted modern North America in the last couple of decades are caused (or at least made worse) by increasing inequality. Much resentment toward “the system” comes from people’s sense that their lives will not get better or are getting worse. Unable to identify the causes of their frustrations, some white conservative groups find scapegoats in African Americans and Jews, immigrants, the United Nations, and all those South Asian and Chinese laborers who work for “peanuts.” Unable to make a personally acceptable living in a socially acceptable manner, inner-city youths turn to drug dealing and other kinds of crime. Economic hardship contributes to family breakups. Poorer people need more social programs, funded by taxpayers, who watch stories in the media about people cheating the government and so elect representatives who provide *fewer* services—for the poor, at least. More generally, the sense of national unity and social responsibility is undermined by worsening inequality, according to conflict theorists.

Stating that the liberal media distort news, talk show pundits like Limbaugh, Hannity, and Beck ridicule the “elites” (they mean “intellectual elites” rather than “economic elites”) for promoting policies that are dragging the nation down the road to “socialism.” President Barack Obama (who is not “really” a U.S. citizen) is accused of favoring “socialized medicine” (like those foreigners in Europe or Canada have, with their long waiting lists for “essential” surgeries), and of failing to uphold the nation’s “traditional values” (Obama is a “closet Muslim,” after all).

Does anthropology’s comparative perspective have anything to say about who benefits from inequality? In premodern stratified societies, elites did indeed perform some vital roles for the whole population, just as functionalists claim. For example, elites organized labor to construct and maintain public works projects, provided relief to regions struck by famine or hardship, promoted large-scale foreign trade, and raised a military force to provide for the defense of the political unit (see Chapter 12). Some kind of central authority is useful and may be necessary for such tasks to be coordinated effectively. Cooperation on a large scale, involving hundreds or thousands of people, requires organization. Organizing hundreds or thousands of people requires leaders and decision makers. Provided they make decisions they believe are in the public interest, decision makers deserve rewards.

On the other hand, elites took on some roles that probably were created to maintain their positions at

the top of society. Ordinary people regarded the religious functions of elites or of the priests they supported as indispensable to the general welfare, but in fact the rituals did not bring rain, sustain the fertility of land and females, or assuage the anger of the gods. It seemed socially useful that elite classes in ancient civilizations regulated access to land, irrigation water, and other resources, but it was partly because elites themselves controlled so many resources that other people’s access to them had to be “regulated.” The law and order that states governed by elites helped maintain benefited everyone, but the elite’s power, wealth, and internal political rivalries produced violent conflicts that otherwise would not have occurred.

From this comparative perspective, we can question whether some of the “functions” carried out by elites in industrialized nations are imaginary. We might also wonder whether some of the benefits other people receive from the roles performed by elite classes exist only because society’s institutions are organized in such a way that the roles of elites are widely perceived as beneficial.

Who benefits from the inequality in stratified societies? Functionalists are probably correct in assuming that some degree of inequality is needed for motivation. Most people agree that unequal rewards for unequal efforts and talents is a fair and just standard. However, we do not know how much inequality is necessary to provide incentives, much less whether some particular stratified society—including whichever one you are a citizen of—has approximately the right amount. We do know that power and privilege are partly inherited, and, therefore, the current members of the upper class are not automatically more talented and diligent than everyone else. Looking at other stratified societies, we see that elites do provide some useful services for the population at large. But we also see that many widespread ideas about their functions are “just ideologies.” It is easy to imagine that many of their “essential roles” are useful only under circumstances that previous elite classes had a hand in creating and that present elites use their privilege and power to perpetuate.

Most citizens in stratified societies would benefit from inequality, if only there were some way to find out what the optimum amount of inequality is for a particular society, if only there were some way to achieve this optimum initially, and if only there were some way to ensure that opportunities to succeed and achieve are equal for children born in varying circumstances. But, so far, no known human society has ever achieved this utopia.

## Summary

**1 Explain the systems of equality and inequality called egalitarian, ranked, and stratified.** The terms *egalitarian*, *ranked*, and *stratified* portray cultural differences in inequality in wealth, power, and prestige. Forager egalitarianism is explained by the frequent movements of camps, the ability of individuals to choose their band affiliation, the cultural value placed on sharing and the social pressure against making oneself stand out, and the difficulties of maintaining exclusive access to a territory. Many horticulturalists also are egalitarian, as illustrated by the “big men” of Melanesia. In ranked societies such as Tikopia of Polynesia, there are a set number of honored positions (chiefs, titles) to which only a small number of people are eligible to succeed. High social honor and limited power are limited to titled persons, but whether such persons have significantly more wealth than others varies between ranked societies. Stratified societies, found in all ancient civilizations and states and all modern nations, have marked inequalities in access to all three kinds of rewards.

**2 Discuss the primary differences between castes and classes.** In caste systems, there is little or no between caste mobility, the castes are legally or normatively endogamous, and higher caste persons consider those of the lowest castes to be unclean or polluting. Castes are best known from India, where they were intimately associated with the Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and pollution. Classes exist in all modern countries. In the United States, the best criterion of class membership is wealth. Studies conducted by scholars and by the federal government reveal differences in income and enormous disparities in the distribution of wealth.

**3 Explain why and how ideologies are important in maintaining inequalities in stratified societies.** How the highly unequal distribution of rewards persists

in stratified societies is puzzling. The mobilization of armed force by the elite is an insufficient explanation. Cultural beliefs that inequality is inevitable, divinely ordained, legitimate, or beneficial to society as a whole provide ideologies that justify and reinforce the power and privilege of elite classes. Among many peoples of the past and present, religious beliefs provided ideologies, as exemplified by most ancient civilizations and states. In modern countries, ideologies tend to be more secular. This is because effective ideologies must be compatible with people’s overall cultural ideas about how their society works. In the United States, prevalent ideas about the overall societal benefits of inequality, about the fairness of unequal rewards for unequal talents and efforts, and about how the well-to-do achieved their wealth are often interpreted as secular ideologies.

**4 Describe and analyze the functional and conflict theories of stratification.** The functionalist and conflict theories offer sharply contrasting ideas about stratification. Functionalists hold that societies offer unequal rewards to those individuals who have the scarcest talents and who use them to perform the most socially valuable roles. Conflict theorists claim that inequality is based ultimately on control over productive resources. Comparisons suggest that although elites often do perform valuable services for society at large, many of their “functions” are illusory. Also, many benefits of stratification exist only because past elites have set up the structure of society so that elite “services” are necessary. The functionalists claim that some degree of inequality is necessary to motivate individuals is probably correct. However, there is no way of knowing whether any society has the optimal amount, nor has any society ever succeeded in establishing the equal opportunity required for the functionalist theory to be correct.

## Media Resources

**The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center**  
[www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter.

Other material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.



# 14 RELIGION AND WORLDVIEW



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## **Defining Religion**

*Beliefs About Supernatural Powers  
Myths and Worldviews  
Rituals and Symbols*

## **Theories of Religion**

*Intellectual/Cognitive Approaches  
Psychological Approaches  
Sociological Approaches*

## **Supernatural Explanations of Misfortune**

*Sorcery  
Witchcraft*

*Interpretations of Sorcery and Witchcraft*

## **Varieties of Religious Organization**

*Individualistic Organizations  
Shamanistic Organizations  
Communal Organizations  
Ecclesiastical Organizations*

## **Revitalization Movements**

*Melanesian Cargo Cults  
Native American Movements*



The religion of a people includes their traditional ways of communicating and interacting with supernatural powers.

These Buddhist monks are praying at a temple in Thailand.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Describe** how anthropologists define and think about cultural diversity in religion and worldview.
- 2 **Analyze** the strengths and weaknesses of the three main anthropological theories of religion and worldview.
- 3 **Analyze** how witchcraft and sorcery might benefit individuals and groups.
- 4 **Discuss** how anthropologists collapse the diversity of human religions and worldviews into four major categories, and analyze the relationships between these categories and social life.
- 5 **Describe** revitalization movements, the conditions under which they are most likely to occur, and their fate.

All peoples have some form of religion. Religion is related to worldview (Chapter 2)—conceptions of reality that affect interpretations and perceptions of things and events and, therefore, how individuals act in patterned ways. Like other dimensions of culture, religion and worldview vary remarkably among the world's diverse peoples. In this chapter, we introduce this diversity. We begin with a description of some of the most important aspects of religion from a comparative perspective, using examples. Then we cover some of the main theories social scientists employ to understand religion. Next, we look at some of the major forms of religion that have most interested anthropologists. We conclude by discussing religious movements, which often occur when a people are undergoing rapid change and foreign domination.



## Defining Religion

How can we best define religion so as to encompass all the diverse religions of humanity? A nineteenth-century definition that many scholars still use is E. B. Tylor's **animism**, or "belief in spiritual beings." Most modern conceptions follow Tylor's lead: all religions include beliefs that some kind of spiritual or supernatural powers exist. By expanding on Tylor's definition, we present an overview of religion in comparative perspective.

**animism** Belief in spiritual beings.

## Beliefs About Supernatural Powers

As discussed in Chapter 4, nineteenth-century anthropologists proposed that religion had passed through evolutionary stages. As cultures evolved, the early, rudimentary forms evolved into more complex forms. For Tylor, the three stages of religion were animism, polytheism, and monotheism. Monotheism occurs, he argued, in complex ("advanced," "evolved") societies. But, in fact, elements of animism exist even within religious traditions commonly considered monotheistic. Christianity, for example, has many kinds of spiritual beings such as saints, angels, Satan, and the souls of deceased and living humans.

Spiritual *beings* usually have qualities such as the ability to assume a bodily form, a personality with emotions, and a consciousness and will. Usually gods and other kinds of beings respond to human actions in some way: If you communicate with them (by prayer), they will listen, and if your actions displease them, they will react negatively. Some beings have human origins or are associated with living or deceased persons such as souls, ancestral ghosts, and important people who did such notable things that they became gods. There are numerous other kinds of beings: spirit helpers, nature spirits, demons, zoomorphic spirits, forest spirits, and so on. The characteristics people attribute to supernatural beings vary enormously: They can be unpredictable or consistent, irrational or reasonable, vengeful or forgiving, amoral or just.

In the religious traditions of Western civilization—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the supreme being is all-knowing and all-powerful, expects sacrifices or worship, and is mindful of human behavior and

morality. The gods that many other peoples believe in have none of these characteristics, however. They can be tricked and manipulated. Often, they are commanded more than worshipped. Sometimes people do not believe gods are concerned about the morality of human actions: They do not punish wrongdoing, in either this life or the next. There is no belief that *sin* (violation of a commandment or moral precept) even exists.

“Beings” are not the only kind of supernatural powers. The worldview of various peoples includes the belief in other powers that are more like mystical substances or forces than beings. For example, before becoming predominantly Christian, Polynesians believed in *mana*, a diffuse, incorporeal power that permeated certain people and things. *Mana* lent supernatural potency to objects, which explained unusual qualities such as why some fishing lures worked so well. The gods gave *mana* to certain people, which explained extraordinary success or why chiefs had the right to receive privileges and issue commands. Specific pieces of land were infused with *mana*, which explained why they produced such bountiful harvests.

In contrast to beings such as gods, supernatural *forces* or *substances* generally cannot take on a physical appearance and have no will of their own. Rather, they are known mainly by their effects: *Mana* makes a chief successful; pollution sickens a woman or man. In many cultures, the beliefs about how powers work are indefinite: One performs a ritual and utters an incantation (spell), and the effect that the rite and spell are intended to cause simply happens. This is generally known as *magic* and is discussed later in this chapter.

## Myths and Worldviews

Beliefs about supernatural powers are not the only dimension of religion. Religion also includes **myths**—oral or written stories (narratives) about the actions and deeds of supernatural powers and cultural heroes. Sometimes, myths explain how the entire universe was created. They may recount how and why people, animals, plants, and natural features originated. Myths may explain how a people acquired their tools and customs and how they came to live where they do. They often tell why people should or should not act in certain ways, and what happened to someone in the past who did something people are forbidden to do.

North Americans mostly learn their mythology in formal settings: Myths are taught at church and, to a lesser extent, at home. (Here we need to emphasize



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In this depiction of a biblical myth, Eve offers forbidden fruit to Adam. Their original sin explains the origin of evil in the Judeo-Christian worldview.

that calling the Bible, Koran, Torah, and other religious texts *myths* is not intended to imply that they are false.) In many societies, however, there are no formal worship services. Elders recount myths informally, sometimes in moments of leisure. Myths are repeated regularly on days set aside for religious performances. They are sung or chanted while one is doing daily tasks. The fact that myths sometimes are recounted rather casually does not mean that their importance in a people’s way of life is negligible. A people’s worldview—and therefore their behavior—is affected by their myths.

For example, in the 1960s, historian Lynn White argued that the Judeo-Christian account of creation

**myths** Stories that recount the deeds of supernatural powers and cultural heroes in the past.

**O**n October 2, 2006, a milk truck driver entered an Amish school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He killed five girls in the school and then committed suicide. Americans were horrified at the senselessness of the attack, but it was the subsequent reaction of the Amish community that left many dumbfounded. Just hours after the incident, an Amish neighbor comforted the family of the shooter. The grandfather of one girl said that people must not think the assailant was evil. Many of the Amish parents forgave the attacker. Clearly, the Amish are outside the American cultural mainstream.

Amish roots lie in Switzerland, where their Christian sect broke off from the Anabaptist movement in 1693. Persecuted and martyred in Europe because of their practices of shunning and foot washing, many Amish migrated to the Americas in the 1700s and early 1800s. They originally settled in Pennsylvania, but because their population grew during the last century, the Amish migrated and established new communities in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and adjacent states as well as in Ontario, Canada. Judging from their increased numbers and geographical spread, the Amish have done well in Canada and the United States.

The Amish believe they should live by certain values. First, their faith emphasizes humility and submission to the will of the community over individualism and personal freedom. Pride is one of their major sins. Second, the Amish prefer simple living to seeking self-gratification by unnecessary consumption that is for symbolic display. They look down on clothing styles and jewelry that beautify personal appearance and celebrate the self. The Amish consider themselves “plain people.” Third, they believe the scriptures mandate equality, so they dislike differences in levels of wealth and consumption within their communities. Farm sizes should be limited to the acreage that a family can work using equipment that is (literally) horse-powered. Fourth, Amish think that work itself is virtuous. Work builds character and keeps the mind and body away from frivolous concerns; community cooperation in projects helps tie the group together. Tools and other devices that save too much labor (that are “too handy”) are unwelcome.

These and other values contrast to the individualism, self-gratification, competitiveness, materialism, future orientation,

and other values that the Amish see as characteristic of the surrounding society. Like people everywhere, the Amish have fun, but many activities such as dancing, joyriding, movie and TV watching, and alcohol drinking are too “worldly” and are considered sinful, as is divorce and the use of artificial birth control. Amish people who participate in such activities or who persistently fail to uphold Amish values may be excommunicated and shunned until they repent.

The Amish believe that maintaining their values and religious beliefs requires that, insofar as possible, they keep themselves separate from the influence of the wider North American population (whom they often call “English”). For economic reasons alone, the Amish cannot isolate themselves completely, but they do attempt to minimize their interaction with the outside world. The Amish do various things to maintain their separation. They converse among themselves using an old German dialect. They forbid television and radios, out of concern that access to mass media will corrupt their values. They discourage travel outside the immediate area except for economic necessity, for fear it will expose people to worldly influences and weaken community ties. Amish children are not educated beyond the eighth-grade “basics” (most communities have their own schools with Amish teachers), both because this level is all the Amish consider necessary for their way of life and because children could learn things that might weaken their faith.

Over the decades, Amish leaders have decided that new technologies threaten their “plain” way of life, and so the Amish are not allowed to own and use many things the English consider necessities. Contrary to what many outsiders believe, however, the Amish are not restricted to nineteenth-century technologies. Transportation, household products, and farming technology illustrate how they allow technology in, but keep control over its impacts.

- *Transportation.* Amish are well known for their horse-and- buggy travel. (In areas with large Amish populations, signs are posted to warn motorists of their presence on the highways.) The Amish are not allowed to own or drive cars or to have driver’s licenses. They can ride in cars driven by non-Amish for certain purposes, however, including

makes it easier for North Americans to view nature as something to be conquered and used for their own profit and gratification. God gave humans “dominion” over nature and told us to “subdue” the earth and its living creatures (see Genesis 1:26–30). When it suits our purposes and interests, we have no *divine* prohibitions against polluting the air and water, ruining the habitats of other creatures, destroying the landscape

with strip mines and highways, and so forth. According to this argument, because of the religious heritage of Western civilization—which influences the worldview of Europeans and peoples culturally derived from Europe—Westerners are more likely to believe that God gave the earth to humans to conquer and exploit than to preserve and protect. In contrast, Westerners might show more respect for other living things if (as



conducting business, visiting distant relatives, and traveling to medical facilities and auctions.

- *Household products.* Bishops in most Amish communities outlaw the hookup of Amish households to 110-volt electricity carried by public power lines. Leaders think that connections to public power sources will lead to undue dependence on the outside. Also, this prohibition prevents family access to television and other mass media. Families cannot own household conveniences powered by 110-volt electrical current, such as lights, stoves, and refrigerators. On the other hand, most church districts allow access to other sources of power, including propane, kerosene, and electric power that comes from batteries or that is generated by family-owned generators. For example, light bulbs are prohibited, but homes have gas lanterns; kerosene refrigerators and propane stoves are allowed and widely used.
- *Farm equipment.* Some modern farm machinery is not allowed or can be used for only certain purposes. Farmers are not allowed to use self-propelled tractors to plow, harvest, or do other field tasks. However, they can use tractors with gasoline engines to blow silage into the barn, power hydraulic systems used for tools, and spin ventilation fans. Farmers also are allowed to take mechanical corn binders, hay balers, and some other kinds of gasoline-powered equipment into their fields, provided that the equipment is pulled by horses rather than self-propelled.

These specific technologies are only a sample. Many outsiders are puzzled by the restrictions and allowances. Allowing some things in while keeping similar things out seems curious, and in some cases even hypocritical. Amish ride in cars for non-normatively approved visits, emergencies, and work, but they cannot own or drive them. Neighborhoods have a public telephone or two located in a place where several families have access to it, yet the Amish cannot have private phones in their homes. Amish prohibit electric stoves and refrigerators, yet propane stoves and kerosene refrigerators are permitted. Amish use engines in their barns and even in their fields when the equipment is pulled by horses, they may not use engines to propel farm machinery. What's the logic behind these restrictions and allowances?

Sociologist Donald Kraybill has conducted extensive research on just such questions. The Amish have to reconcile two opposing objectives. On the one hand, the economic viability of their communities requires that they adapt to a changing world by adopting efficient technologies. On the other hand, wholesale adoption of these technologies might unravel their way of life, having a negative impact on the purity of their religion, the integrity of their values, and the cohesion of their community. Amish leaders have to walk a fine line. The combinations of restrictions and allowances are compromises between the need to change and the desire to stay the same.

Amish policy toward automobiles is a good illustration. Cars are handy for transportation—too handy for the Amish. The freedom cars offer would take people away from the neighborhood and expose them to worldly things such as movies. In addition to their practical use as vehicles, private ownership of cars would promote individualism and independence from the community. Soon more well-to-do families would buy and drive nicer cars and begin to use them as status symbols, threatening Amish egalitarian values. Finally, car ownership would threaten horses and buggies, which are a key symbol of Amish identity and a visible mark of their separation.

At one time, car use as well as ownership was banned. But, after World War II, population growth led to the formation of new communities that lived too far away for travel by horses and buggies. Soon some Amish hired English drivers to take them to funerals, weddings, barnraisings, and the like. In the 1970s, more and more Amish found it impossible to make a living by farming, and they started their own businesses in areas such as carpentry, cabinetmaking, retailing, and, more recently, retail tourism. Other Amish have jobs in the dairy and other industries. Transportation to and from the business or the job site is required, and many Amish businesses hire cars on a regular basis, leading to the emergence of “Amish taxis” driven by non-Amish. So, under changed economic conditions, the use of cars became a necessity. But the Amish still avoid many negative impacts of cars on their traditions by continuing to ban their ownership.

Similar considerations apply to farm machinery. Using some farm machinery in fields boosts economic efficiency, but propelling it by horses keeps farms small and family-run. It also

*(continued)*

in some cultures) the sacred myths of our religious heritage recounted how some of us are descended from bears or other animals, or that earth is our sacred mother, or that gods instruct us not to waste any resource, or that trees are just as precious to God as humans. In short, if Western scriptures emphasized the importance of living in harmony with nature rather than subduing nature, perhaps the ecological crisis would be less of a crisis.

Judeo-Christian scriptures can be interpreted in many ways and used for many purposes, however, not all of which involve the uncontrolled exploitation of resources for profit or material self-gratification. The Old Order Amish of North America, for example, are thoroughly and devoutly Christian, but they reject much of the materialism of modern society (see A Closer Look).

ensures the continuance of the tradition of calling on one's neighbors to help with harvest and other labor-intensive operations. Self-propelled, rubber-wheeled tractors could be too easily used to transport people off the farm, partially substituting for the tabooed car and further undermining the horse and buggy, which is still a main visible symbol of Amish identity.

Banning private telephones but allowing community phones also makes sense as a compromise. Private phones threaten the face-to-face interaction and visiting that are essential for community cohesion. Incoming calls—as the non-Amish know all too well—disrupt family life and studies. Community phones, however, are essential for things like making medical appointments, calling veterinarians, handling emergencies, placing business orders, and calling taxis. Today, a number of neighbors often share the expense to install a phone shanty to place and receive calls for such purposes.

Those Americans who admire the “simple life” have a tendency to romanticize the Amish. But like people everywhere, Amish experience family problems, including physical abuse. Before teenagers decide whether to remain Amish, many of them experience years of sowing their wild oats, drinking alcohol, partying, driving cars, and doing other actions Amish consider sinful. Amish control what teachers offer in school, usually teaching only subjects compatible

with their way of life—a practice that in other contexts might be called brainwashing. In parts of Ohio, some Amish with dairy herds have failed to control manure, leading to runoff into streams and rivers.

Amish, then, have problems just like the rest of humanity. But their ability to retain most of their traditions by *selectively incorporating* new technologies to keep their living standards high is remarkable. It explains the twentieth-century growth and spread of their communities. Compared to the “English,” Amish families are large: An average couple has six or seven children. Further, Kraybill estimates that four out of five Amish children remain Amish, staying with their communities and retaining their heritage. Large families mean that the population grows rapidly, while a low “dropout rate” means that the number of people carrying Amish culture and transmitting it to future generations grows almost as fast. The compromises that keep communities prosperous have led most young people to choose to remain Amish, so Amish culture is in little danger of becoming assimilated by the “English.” If Amish leaders refused to compromise with changing economic forces, how much poorer would their communities become, and how many more Amish young people would abandon their faith?

Source: Kraybill (1989)

A people's myths—and this is our general point—are more than stories they tell after dark or recite on appropriate occasions. Myths do more than satisfy curiosity and help pass the time. Myths help to form a people's worldview: their conceptions of reality and the interpretations of events that happen in society and the natural world. Worldview and myths affect people's beliefs about how they ought to relate to the world and to one another (see Chapter 2), and therefore they affect how people behave in their everyday lives.

### Rituals and Symbols

People everywhere believe that gods, ghosts, demons, ancestral spirits, and other supernatural beings take an active interest in worldly affairs, particularly in the lives of human beings. You can ask them for blessings or aid through prayer. Sometimes you can command them to do things for you or for other people. Human

behavior can control or influence powers. In the context of religion, the organized performance of behaviors intended to influence spiritual powers is **ritual**.

Rituals are *stereotyped*: Definite patterns of speech or movement, or definite sequences of events, occur in much the same way in performance after performance. In general, people performing rituals want supernatural powers to do things on their behalf. For example, some central Canadian Inuit believe that their hunts for sea mammals fail because an undersea goddess is angry about the peoples' misconduct. They persuade the goddess to release the game by performing a ritual in which camp members publicly confess their violations.

Rituals the world over have *symbolic* aspects. These symbolic aspects are so important that some anthropologists define ritual itself as *symbolic behavior*. For example, rituals often occur in *places* that have symbolic significance to the performers. They may be held where some mythological event occurred, or where the women who founded a matrilineage were born. Muslims are supposed to make pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Millions of Hindus journey to the city of Varanasi to pray and bathe in Ganga Ma (Mother Ganges). To die and be cremated in Varanasi

**ritual** Organized, stereotyped, symbolic behaviors intended to influence supernatural powers.

and have your ashes mix with the river can help you achieve *moksa*, spiritual liberation. Buddhists may go to the site of the Bodhi Tree, where 2,500 years ago Siddhartha's meditation led to his enlightenment and transformation into The Buddha. In Shinto, the ancient religion of Japan, shrines at which people pray to spirits and to their ancestors are set apart from other spaces by a Torii, an arch supported by two pillars.

There are other ritual symbols. Rituals often involve the display, touching, and manipulation of *objects* that symbolize an event (e.g., the cross), a holy person (statues of Jesus and Mary), a relationship (wedding rings, the symbol of holy matrimony), and a variety of other things. Buddhist and Hindu temples are filled with statues and relics. The *language and behavior* of ritual carry deep symbolic meanings, as in the Christian rituals of worship, hymn singing, prayer, baptism, and communion.

Anthropologists often classify rituals on two bases. The first basis is their conscious *purposes*—the reasons people themselves give for performing rituals. For example, some people believe that divination rituals allow them to acquire information from a supernatural power about some past event, such as illness, or to foretell the future. Familiar examples include Tarot cards, crystal balls, and palm reading. There are also curing, sorcery, sacrificial, and exorcism rituals. There are rituals to renew the world, to make a man out of a boy and a woman out of a girl, to make people and nature fertile, and to free the soul from a dead person's body.

Many peoples use rituals to control the weather. The Hopi (discussed in Chapter 9) believe that rainfall that fills springs and streams and nourishes crops is brought by supernatural beings. These beings, called *kachinas*, live in the peaks of mountains to the west of Hopi villages. They bring life-giving rain to the Hopi cornfields when they come in the form of clouds. In the spring and summer, the Hopi believe, *kachinas* dwell in the villages. During this period, men wearing masks of the *kachinas* perform ritual dances, impersonating and honoring the spirits. The spirit enters the body of the dancer, who thus becomes the *kachina*. The dances bring rain to the Hopi cornfields.

The second basis of classifying rituals is their *timing*—on a regular schedule (like weekly worship services or annual religious holidays) or simply whenever some individual or group wants or needs them (like funerals or prayers for a sick person). If rituals are held regularly (seasonally, annually, daily, monthly), they are called *calendrical rituals*. The Hopi, Zuni, and other Pueblo peoples follow a ritual calendar in which certain rituals are performed by certain groups at the same time every



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As this Hindu religious pilgrim praying in Varanasi, India, illustrates, rituals include symbolic behavior and objects.

year, in the same sequence. The same cycle is repeated the following year.

In contrast, *crisis rituals* are performed whenever some individual or group needs, wants, or asks for them—for purposes of curing, ensuring good hunting or fishing, burying or honoring the dead, or accompanying other events that happen sporadically or unpredictably. The supernatural curing practiced by shamans, described later, is the most widespread type of crisis ritual.

With this brief and broad overview of religion in mind, we consider some of the major theoretical orientations offered to understand or explain religion.

## Theories of Religion

Why do all cultures have religious beliefs, myths, and rituals? With regard to beliefs, people cannot actually prove the existence of supernatural powers such as



ghosts, gods, demons, angels, souls, *mana*, and so forth. Although people who follow a particular form of religion may believe that traditional accounts of their past reflect historical events, outsiders to the religion are more likely to consider at least parts of them entirely mythical. Indeed, some people who do not share the beliefs of a given culture think such beliefs result from ignorance or superstition.

As for rituals, people who are outsiders to a religion and worldview are unlikely to believe that rituals are effective. To nonbelievers, most rituals seem like a waste of time and resources. For example, when a Trobriand Islander plants a yam garden, he does some things that “work” in the way he thinks they do: He clears the land, removes the weeds, and so forth, just as anyone should for success. But a Trobriander believes certain acts that outsiders consider superfluous are also necessary for success in gardening. He hires a magician to perform rites and spells to improve his yam harvest. Outsiders (nonbelievers) to Trobriand beliefs understand what the gardener gets out of the first kind of activity: a yam harvest, if nature cooperates. But what does he get out of the magic rites and spells? How did Trobrianders come to believe that magical rites are needed?

We can look at this behavior in another way to see a main problem in understanding the rituals of Other cultures. From an outsider’s perspective, when the Trobriander plants a crop and weeds his garden, his actions are effective in attaining the goal he has in mind—they work in more or less the way he thinks they do. But when the garden magician performs rites and spells, his actions do not achieve the result he has in mind. The magic does not “really work.” How, then, did the Trobrianders get the idea that they do?

Speaking broadly, to those who do not share the particular religion’s beliefs, rituals do not have the effects performers intend. The crazy woman is not “truly” restored to sanity by exorcizing the demon; no spirits “really” enter the body of the medicine man; there were no “genuine” witches in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. Why, then, do so many people believe in the power of ritual?

Some people who consider themselves sophisticated say that religious beliefs and rituals are based on ignorance and superstition. All anthropologists reject (or should reject) this nonanswer to the question, Why

religion? Its ethnocentrism is apparent: Superstition is something that someone else believes in but you do not. Many of our own beliefs seem superstitious to others, and undoubtedly many of the accepted truths of the twenty-first century will be considered superstitions by the twenty-second century. Even if we think such beliefs and practices are superstitious, we still have not explained them. Why does one form of superstition develop in one place and another form in another place?

You already have thought of possible answers. If rituals do not have the effects people intend, they may have other effects that people find useful or satisfying. If the conscious reasons people give for performing rituals seem inadequate, perhaps their meaning is entirely symbolic: They convey and reinforce deep meanings and values that help people cope with life or that tie people together. As for myths, if they are not accurate historical accounts, perhaps they are symbolic statements that help people make sense of reality and give meaning to real-world things and events. Maybe religious truths are a different kind of truth than scientific truths: They cannot be subjected to tests and experiments to see whether they work the way people think they do, but they nonetheless work on another level.

Social scientists have proposed many theories for why religion exists. Some theories hold that beliefs, myths, and rituals provide benefits that people want or need but cannot acquire without religion. Broadly, social scientists have proposed three types of theories: the intellectual (or cognitive), the psychological, and the sociological.

### Intellectual/Cognitive Approaches

Those who posit the **intellectual (or cognitive) approach** assume that humans seek explanations for the world around them. Religious beliefs help satisfy the human desire to understand and explain things and events. Without religion, much of the world would be incomprehensible and inexplicable, which (these scholars argue) would be intolerable to the mind of a conscious, reasoning, problem-solving species like *Homo sapiens*. For example, religion satisfies the human demand for understanding by providing explanations for the movements of the sun, moon, and stars. *Origin myths* explain things like the creation of the sky, land, and water; where animals and plants come from; and where people got their language, tools, rituals, and other customs and beliefs. The essential purpose of religion, in the intellectual view, is to provide people with explanations.

**intellectual (or cognitive) approach** The notion that religious beliefs provide explanations for puzzling things and events.

Sir James Frazer was an influential scholar who championed the intellectual approach. His most famous work was *The Golden Bough*, published in 12 volumes at around the turn of the twentieth century. One of Frazer's main interests was the development of rational thought. He argued that human thinking progressed through three stages that he called magic, religion, and science. The earliest cultures practiced *magic*; they attempted to control the world by performing rites and spells. Later cultures came to believe in the existence of supernatural beings, who demanded that people worship them or make sacrifices to them, giving birth to *religion*. Finally, people realized that neither magical techniques nor worship of imaginary beings enabled them to explain or control events. With the advent of *science*, the errors of magic and religion were replaced with knowledge of true cause-and-effect relationships. In Frazer's view, magic, religion, and science are alternative worldviews: Each provides people with an intellectual model of the way the world works and a means to manipulate events and people. Because science is a superior system of knowledge, Frazer thought it was replacing magical and religious beliefs.

The idea of Frazer and others that religious beliefs provide people with explanations for things and events is correct, as far as it goes, but it surely is an incomplete explanation for religion. Religion does satisfy curiosity about the world, but this is not its only function. The people whom Frazer called “savages” possess and use practical knowledge just as “civilized” peoples do—a Trobriander knows that he must care for his yams as well as perform garden magic. Conversely, many “scientific” people believe in and practice religion—including many persons who make their living practicing the science for which religion supposedly substitutes! Those scientists who go to church apparently find little or no contradiction between their religious beliefs and worship and their scientific knowledge and practice. Religious beliefs do not simply substitute for objective knowledge. People don't “have” religion because they “lack” science. Somehow, the two are complementary.

Although few scholars today hold that religion exists solely or even mainly to provide “prescientific” people with explanations their culture would otherwise lack, the intellectual approach is by no means passé. Clifford Geertz, a leading humanistic theorist (see Chapter 4), argued that religion provides its believers with the assurance that the world is *meaningful*—that events have a place in the grand scheme of things, natural phenomena have understandable causes, suffering and evil happen to

good people for some good reason, wrongs will be righted and injustices corrected. Cultural beings (i.e., humans) cannot tolerate events that contradict the basic premises, categories, and worldview of their cultural tradition. Yet such events do occur periodically. Because of religion, people are able to maintain their worldview in spite of events that seem to contradict it. Religion, Geertz believed, reassures believers that the world is orderly rather than chaotic, all within the framework of their existing cultural knowledge.

Stewart Guthrie is another contemporary scholar who views religion in cognitive terms. Guthrie thinks the essence of religion is the belief that natural phenomena have humanlike properties. He points out that people tend to see the world *anthropomorphically*: We tend to attribute human motives, purposes, feelings, senses, and other characteristics to living and nonliving things that are not human. For example, thunder is the voice of the gods, clouds are the spirits of our ancestors, the sun is our life-giving father, Mother Earth is alive, the wind is the breath of a god. Anthropomorphism is natural to human thought, and most of us regularly think this way, as when you think your computer hates you, you swear at your car, or you interact with your pet as if it were a person.

When we see the world as “peopled” with spirits (as in animism), or think that different gods control various aspects of nature (as in polytheism), or believe that one god created and controls everything (as in monotheism), we are attributing human characteristics to the natural world. In Guthrie's view, this actually is a smart thing to do. If you think there are no humanlike beings making things happen, and you are wrong, then the consequences are costly. If the earth is in fact our mother, but we treat her as nonliving, then she might punish us. But if we think anthropomorphically about the earth and take steps to worship and protect her, then no harm is done. If there is a war god, and our enemy sacrifices to him but we do not, we may all be killed, so why take the chance? As Guthrie phrases it, religion is then a “good bet.”

However, not all the rituals that result from beliefs that humanlike beings control natural processes are “harmless.” In fact, many rituals are quite costly. They require sacrifices to deities or ancestors, and they consume time and energy that could be used in other ways. In some societies, religious beliefs are costly indeed. In some ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, priests pierced their bodies with thorns to make themselves bleed because they believed the gods demanded blood sacrifices. Humans were also sacrificed. Attributing

Psychological approaches hold that religion helps individuals and groups cope with crisis, uncertainty, grief, stress, trauma, and other emotional distress. This Iraqi woman cries at a funeral.



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human properties to nonhuman entities is not always harmless: religion often helps motivate individuals and groups of individuals to do horrific things to others—and sometimes to themselves.

### Psychological Approaches

The notion that religion helps people cope with times of trouble, stress, and anxiety is a common one. Sicknesses, accidents, misfortunes, injustices, deaths, and other trials and tribulations of life can be better handled emotionally if one believes there is a reason and meaning to them or that one's troubles can be controlled or alleviated by means of ritual. Scholars who make such arguments follow the **psychological approach**.

In anthropology, a well-known psychological theory of religion was proposed by Bronislaw Malinowski, whom we introduced in Chapter 4. Malinowski thought that religion (including magic) serves the valuable function of giving people confidence when they are likely to be unsuccessful despite their best efforts. There are always natural phenomena that people cannot control and that constantly threaten to ruin their plans and efforts. Belief in the power of ritual to control these

(otherwise uncontrollable) elements instills confidence and removes some of the anxiety that results from the uncertainties of life. Not only do rituals relieve our worries, but they may also help us be more successful in activities by making us more confident of success.

People grow frustrated—and occasionally violent—when they cannot control what happens to them or those they care about. Our lives are filled with uncertainties and unknowable futures. Our families and friends don't always do what we want or what we think is right for them. Accidents happen. Stock markets fall. Housing prices collapse. Our relatives pass away. Bosses fire us. Crops fail. Professors fail us. We fail ourselves. Religion (and in this context, especially “faith” in a power with more knowledge and power than humans have) is there to offer hope and comfort. Often, it helps us cope with frustrated hopes by telling us what we can do to make things better. For example, during a 2007 drought in Georgia, people got together to pray for rain. It did rain later.

Another specific psychological theory of religion holds that, as self-conscious beings, we humans are aware of our own mortality. Knowing that we will eventually die causes us great anxiety and leads us to worry about our own death. Experiencing the serious illness or death of a parent or other relative likewise produces grief and psychological stress for most people. We must have some way of coping emotionally with the grief over the death of our loved ones, and with the anxiety caused by the knowledge of our own mortality. Religion helps us cope

**psychological approach** The notion that the emotional or affective satisfactions people gain from religion are primary.



by denying the finality of death and by leading us to believe in a pleasant afterlife, in which our immortal souls live forever.

The notion that belief in life after death helps to calm our fears and alleviate our anxieties seems reasonable. This theory is tainted by an ethnocentric assumption, however: although most religions do include beliefs about some kind of afterlife, in a great many cultures, the afterlife is far from pleasant. The Dobu people of Melanesia believe that human bodies also have a ghostly form, seen as a shadow or a reflection. During life, the ghostly self goes out at night and appears in the dreams of other people. Once the corpse rots after death, the ghosts of people go to a place called the Hill of the Dead, where they have a “thin and shadowy” existence and mourn for their homeland. How are such beliefs about the afterlife “comforting”?

Certainly, religion is psychologically useful. For some people some of the time, it relieves anxieties, calms fears, and helps them cope emotionally with life’s uncertainties and hardships. That religion often serves such functions is indisputable. Yet, sometimes religious beliefs actually increase our anxieties, fears, and stress levels. Consider the Kwaio, a people of the Solomon Islands. Kwaio believe that women are polluting to men, so Kwaio wives are expected to take elaborate precautions to avoid polluting their husbands when preparing food for them. If a man dies of an illness, his wife may be blamed, and perhaps killed, for her “offense.” Just whose anxieties and fears are relieved by this belief?

The general point of the Dobu and Kwaio examples is that, from a psychological perspective, religion has two faces. On the one hand, it does—for some people, some of the time, in some respects—help us cope emotionally with times of trouble and hardships. On the other hand, beliefs about supernatural powers and what they do often create fears and anxieties that would not otherwise exist. Pleasant afterlives (“Heaven”) offer us comfort and hope. But what *psychological* benefit does the threat of eternal damnation (“Hell”) offer? This question leads logically to the sociological approach.

## Sociological Approaches

“Societies need religion to keep people in line,” you may have heard people say. The idea of this **sociological approach** is that religion instills and maintains common values, leads to increased conformity to cultural norms, promotes cohesion and cooperation, promises eternal rewards for good deeds and eternal damnation for evil acts, and so forth. Those who champion the sociological

approach hold that religion exists because of the useful effects it has on human societies—because of its *social functions*. Religion helps societies maintain harmonious social relationships between individuals and groups. It encourages people to respect the rights of others and to perform their proper duties. It is part of the socialization process that instills deeply held values in children.

Consider the Ten Commandments, for example, which serve as a moral code for the three major religions of the West. Two prescribe how people ought to feel and act toward God and other people, and eight give rules for actions, including the five “thou shalt nots” (see Exodus 20:3–17). Note that five of the divinely ordered prohibitions are against the commission of acts that could result in harm to others, such as killing and stealing. God gave us commandments that will, if obeyed, lead to good relationships with others and therefore promote earthly social order. More general Judeo-Christian moral guidelines are the Golden Rule (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) and love of one’s neighbor (Matthew 19:19); both are useful prescriptions for harmonious social life.

Religion also enhances the cohesion of society by making people sense their interdependence on one another and on their traditions. Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist of the early twentieth century, was influential in formulating this perspective. Durkheim’s view was that the main function of religion in human society is to promote *social solidarity*, meaning that religion has the effect of bringing people together and enhancing their sense of unity, cohesion, and reliance on their society’s customs. Groups of people who share the same beliefs and who gather periodically to perform common rituals experience a feeling of oneness and harmony.

The most important social function of religion, Durkheim believed, is to strengthen social solidarity. There also are other versions of the sociological approach. One is that religion helps to maintain social order (that is, religion serves as a social control mechanism—see Chapters 12 and 13) by increasing conformity to norms, inculcating shared values in children, reminding people to act responsibly, teaching moral lessons through myths and doctrines, legitimizing the existing social structure, and so forth.

**sociological approach** The effects of religion on maintaining the institutions of society as a whole by instilling common values, creating solidarity, controlling behavior, and so forth.



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This crowd is gathered for a ritual in Irian Jaya, Indonesia. French sociologist Émile Durkheim proposed that rituals involve gatherings and common activities that enhance social solidarity among a group of people.

One mechanism by which religion maintains social control is by offering rewards for good behavior and punishments for antisocial behavior. When people have an accident or get sick, they may think they are being punished for some crime or deviant action, for example. This deters the individual from future deviance and also serves as an example to others, teaching them to act properly in the future. In the afterlife, gods may reward virtue and punish sinful behavior. Such socially useful effects of religion are widespread.

Not all peoples have such beliefs, however. In some worldviews, gods and other kinds of spiritual beings have little or no interest in the morality or immorality of human actions. There is no concept of “sin” as behavior that violates a doctrine or divine will, and the fate of a person in this life or in the afterlife is not related to her or his moral character or conduct.

There is a relationship between whether spiritual beings punish and reward people according to their character or conduct and the general nature of the cultural system. In his cross-cultural research in the 1960s, Guy Swanson found a striking relationship between the degree of social inequality in a society and the likelihood that its religion includes beliefs that spiritual beings punish

wrongdoing. Generally, societies in which there is greater inequality (class societies—see Chapter 13) are much more likely than egalitarian societies to believe that gods or other spirits will reward and punish individuals according to how well they behave.

Like the cognitive and psychological approaches, the sociological theory works in some cases but not in others. At some times, in some places, and in some contexts, religion teaches the difference between right and wrong and thus encourages social harmony. It strengthens solidarity by bringing people together. It inculcates the belief that good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is punished eventually, if not immediately.

But also, sometimes religion has effects that few people believe are socially useful. It has contributed to wars and led to persecutions. It can help unite the members of one country, or of one faith, yet promote wars between them and other countries or other faiths. It is a source of disunity as well as unity within many societies, in the past as well as present. It often contributes to ethnocentrism, racism, narrow-mindedness, gender discrimination, and other socially harmful attitudes and practices. In stratified societies, its beliefs have supported vast social differences in powers and privileges. Occasionally, as among the

ancient Mayans and Aztecs, it has led people to sacrifice blood from their own bodies by piercing with thorns and has led priests to drag war captives to temples where their hearts are offered as sacrifices to the gods. When used as ideologies, religious beliefs may support all kinds of inequalities and injustices. There may be ways in which such impacts are “socially useful,” but clearly they are not useful to *everyone*.

## Supernatural Explanations of Misfortune

One occurrence that many peoples attribute to the action of spiritual powers is personal misfortune, including death, illness, and events that many Westerners consider accidents. Many beliefs and rituals of various societies are concerned with explaining, preventing, and curing illness and disease.

Cross-culturally, two major complexes of beliefs about misfortune are common. First, many peoples believe that sickness or other unfortunate occurrences are caused by the action of spiritual powers. The violation of a taboo can lead to sickness. The ancestral spirits of kin groups cause their members to become ill because of conflict or bad feelings within the group. Similar beliefs often apply to accidents that many Westerners attribute to bad luck or carelessness. Drownings, falls, snakebites, prolonged failure to succeed at some activity—such events are evidence of unfavorable supernatural intervention. The victim has offended a god or spirit, who brings an “accident” as punishment.

Second, many people think illnesses or other misfortunes are caused by the action of some evil human using special supernatural powers against the afflicted person. The belief that certain people, called *sorcerers* and *witches*, have powers to harm others by mystical means is enormously widespread among humanity. Sometimes, witches and sorcerers are thought to strike randomly and maliciously against people who are innocent of any wrongdoing. More commonly, they direct their evil magic or thoughts toward those against whom they have a grudge. Sorcery and witchcraft are worth considering in more detail.

### Sorcery

**Sorcery** is the performance of rites and spells intended to cause supernatural harm to others, that is, sorcery is a form of evil magic. In some cultures, almost everyone

learns to harm their enemies by sorcery techniques. Among such peoples knowledge of sorcery rites and spells is widespread. Among other peoples, sorcery is a more specialized practice; only certain people inherit or acquire the knowledge of how to recite spells and perform the rites correctly.

In 1890, Sir James Frazer proposed that magic (including sorcery) is based on two kinds of logical principles or assumptions. Both involve a symbolic identification of something (e.g., an object or action) with something else (e.g., an event or a person).

The *imitative principle* is often stated as “Like produces like.” That is, if an object resembles a person and the sorcerer mutilates the object, then the same thing will happen to the person. The so-called voodoo doll is a familiar example. In another kind of imitative magic, the magician or sorcerer mimics the effects she or he wants to produce. Sorcerers among the Dobu of Melanesia cast spells by imitating the symptoms of the disease they want their victims to suffer.

The second logical premise underlying magic and sorcery is the *contagious principle*, stated as “Power comes from contact,” that is, things once in contact with someone can be used in rites and spells to make things happen to that person. By performing sorcery rites and spells on such objects as hair clippings, bodily excretions, nail parings, umbilical cords, or jewelry and clothing, one can cause harm to one’s enemies. In societies in which sorcery rests on the contagious principle, people must dispose of objects they have been in contact with, including things have come out of or off of their bodies, lest one of their enemies use them for sorcery.

Sorcery practices are related to the social life of a people. For example, who accuses whom of sorcery reflects how individuals and groups relate to one another. In any society, certain kinds of social relationships are especially likely to be beset by conflict. Co-wives of a polygynous man may be jealous over their husband’s favors or may compete for an inheritance for their children. People who have married into a kin group or village may be viewed as outsiders who are still loyal to their own natal families. Two men who want the same woman, or two women who want the same man, have reasons to dislike each other. Men who are rivals for a political office have conflicts of interest.

**sorcery** The performance of rites and spells for the purpose of causing harm to others by supernatural means.



These and other kinds of relationships are sources of strain and conflict within a human group. Which relationships are likely to cause strain and conflict depend on the way the society is organized: brothers-in-law are allies in one society, but their interests regularly conflict in another society, for instance. The relationships most likely to be strained are *patterned*, meaning that individuals who have these relationships with one another are most likely to experience conflicts.

Suppose you were brought up in a culture that explained illness or accident by sorcery. If you or a relative became ill or suffered misfortune, you would not suspect just anyone of harming you. You would ask: Who has a motive to perform evil magic against me? Who envies me? Who would profit from my sickness or death? With whom have I recently quarreled? These people are your prime suspects, and they are the ones you or your family are most likely to accuse.

Members of most cultures reason in much the same way. They believe sorcerers do not strike randomly but harm only their enemies or the people toward whom they feel anger, envy, or ill will. Accusations of sorcery, therefore, usually follow the prevalent lines of conflict: Because people who stand in the same kinds of relationships are likely to accuse one another again and again, sorcery accusations are patterned.

## Witchcraft

Witchcraft is another explanation that people in many societies give for personal misfortune. There is no universally applicable distinction between sorcery and witchcraft. Whereas sorcery usually involves the use of rites and spells to commit a foul deed, anthropologists usually define **witchcraft** as the use of psychic power alone to cause harm to others. Sorcerers manipulate objects; witches need only think malevolent thoughts to turn their anger, envy, or hatred into evil deeds. (The English language's main distinction between the two—witches are female, sorcerers usually male—is not useful cross-culturally.) Many cultures believe in the existence of both kinds of malevolent power, so sorcery and witchcraft are often found among the same people. Like sorcery accusations, accusations of witchcraft are likely to be patterned because people most often believe that both witches and sorcerers

harm only people they dislike, hate, envy, or have a conflict with.

Cultures vary in the characteristics they attribute to witches and in how witches cause harm. The following examples illustrate the diversity.

- The Navajo of the American Southwest associate witches with the worst imaginable sins. Witches commit incest, bestiality (sex with animals), and necrophilia (sex with corpses); they change themselves into animals; they cannibalize infants; and so on.
- The Nyakyusa of Tanzania hold that witches are motivated mainly by their lust for food; accordingly, they suck dry the udders of people's cattle and devour the internal organs of their human neighbors while they sleep
- The Azande of southern Sudan believe witches possess an inherited substance that leaves their bodies at night and gradually eats away at the flesh and internal organs of their victims. Witches, as well as their victims, are considered unfortunate because the Azande believe a person can be a witch without even knowing it. Witches can do nothing to rid themselves permanently of their power, although they can be forced to stop bewitching some particular individual by overcoming their bad feelings against their victim.
- The Ibibio of Nigeria believe witches operate by removing the spiritual essence (soul) of their enemies and placing it in an animal. This makes the victim sick, and he dies when the witches slaughter and consume the animal. Sometimes Ibibio witches decide to torture, rather than kill, a person. In that case, they remove the victim's soul and put it in water or hang it over a fireplace or flog it in the evenings. The afflicted person will remain sick until the witches get what they want out of him or her.
- The Lugbara, a people of Uganda, claim that witches—who are always men—walk around at night disguised as rats or other nocturnal animals. Sometimes they defecate blood around the household of their victims, who wake up sick the next morning.
- The Gebusi of Papua New Guinea blame all illnesses on witchcraft. They attacked and killed so many persons whom they identified as witches that nearly one-third of all deaths among them resulted from revenge against witches.

To someone who does not share these beliefs, they are logically outrageous. No one's soul leaves his or her body at night to cavort with other witches, for example. It might seem that these beliefs are socially harmful as well, as the

**witchcraft** The use of psychic powers to harm others by supernatural means.

Gebusi illustrate. Beliefs about witchcraft, fear of witchcraft, and accusations of witchcraft engender conflict and aggression among a people. Finally, the treatment that many suspected and “proven” witches receive offends our notions of social justice. As we know from the witch hunts of European and American history, the truly innocent victims of witchcraft are usually the accused witches, who sometimes are cruelly executed for crimes they could not have committed.

## Interpretations of Sorcery and Witchcraft

Given their seemingly harmful effects and the injustices that frequently result from them, why are beliefs about and accusations of sorcery and witchcraft so widespread?

Why do so many of the world’s peoples think that some or all of their misfortunes are caused by the supernatural powers of their enemies? Many answers have been offered to such questions. In line with the overall theoretical approaches discussed earlier, the answers fall into two categories: cognitive and sociological. (In the following discussion, for simplicity, we use the term *witchcraft* to refer to both witchcraft and sorcery because the ideas presented have been applied to both kinds of beliefs.)

### Cognitive Interpretations

The most influential cognitive interpretation is that witchcraft explains unfortunate events. Most people find the idea of coincidence or accident intellectually unsatisfying when some misfortune happens to them or their loved ones, so they search for other causes. Their logic is something like this: I have enemies who wish me harm, and harm just came to me, so my enemies are responsible.

The classic example of how people account for misfortune by the actions of witches are beliefs of the Azande in Africa. Azande attribute prolonged serious illnesses and many other personal misfortunes to witchcraft. Ethnographer E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1976, 18) describes their beliefs:

Witchcraft is ubiquitous. . . . There is no niche or corner of Zande culture into which it does not twist itself. If blight seizes the groundnut crop it is witchcraft; if the bush is vainly scoured for game it is witchcraft; if women laboriously bail water out of a pool and are rewarded by but a few small fish it is witchcraft; . . . if a wife is sulky and unresponsive to her husband it is witchcraft; if a prince is cold and distant with his subject it is witchcraft; if a magical rite fails to achieve its purpose it is witchcraft; if, in fact, any failure or misfortune falls upon any one at

any time and in relation to any of the manifold activities of his life it may be due to witchcraft.

This does not mean that Azande are ignorant of cause and effect and therefore attribute every misfortune to some witch who is out to get them. When a man seeks shelter in a granary and its roof falls and injures him, he blames witchcraft. But the Azande know very well that granary roofs collapse because termites eat the wood that supports them. They do not attribute the collapse of granaries in general to witchcraft. It is the collapse of this particular granary at this particular time with this particular person inside that is caused by witchcraft. Don’t granaries sometimes fall when no one is sitting inside them? And don’t people often relax in granaries without the roof falling? It is the coincidence between the collapse and the presence of a particular person—a coincidence that many other peoples consider bad luck—that Azande witchcraft explains.

Another cognitive benefit is that witches serve as scapegoats. When things are going poorly, people do not always know why. Witchcraft provides an explanation. It also provides people with a means to do something about the situation: identify, accuse, and punish the witch responsible. If, as is often the case, things still do not improve, there are always other yet to-be-identified witches. People can blame many of their troubles on witches—evil enemies conspiring against them—rather than on their personal inadequacies, bad luck, or wider conditions in their societies.

### Sociological Interpretations

One sociological interpretation is that witchcraft reinforces the norms and values that help individuals live harmoniously with one another. Every culture has notions of how individuals ideally ought to act toward others. Witches typically are the antithesis of these cultural ideals. They act like animals or actually change themselves into animals. They mate with relatives. They often put on a false front, pretending to be your friend by day while they eat your liver by night. They have no respect for age or authority. They are in league with the forces of evil (in the Judeo-Christian tradition, witches made compacts with the Devil, agreeing to be his servant in return for worldly pleasures). All the most despicable personal characteristics of people are wrapped up in the personality of witches, whom everyone is supposed to hate. So, witches symbolize all that is undesirable, wicked, and hateful. Just as one should despise witches, so should one hate all that they stand for. In short, by providing a hated symbol of the abnormal and the antisocial, the witch strengthens cultural conceptions of normatively approved social behavior.

Another argument is that witches provide an outlet for repressed aggression, and thus beliefs about witches lower the overall amount of conflict in a society. Writing about the Navajo in 1944, Clyde Kluckhohn argued that Navajo culture emphasizes cooperation and good relationships between members of the same extended household. When bad feelings do develop within the household, Navajo culture encourages people to suppress them. But, pent-up hostilities have an outlet in the form of witches, whom people are allowed to hate and gossip about. Because most of the persons the Navajo believe to be witches are members of distant groups, usually little action is taken against them. Solidarity between relatives of the in-group is preserved by displacing hostility to people of the out-group.

Another sociological interpretation is that witchcraft beliefs serve as a mechanism of social control. This might work in two ways. First, many people believe in the existence of witchcraft but do not know which specific members of their community are witches. This leads individuals to be careful not to make anyone angry, since the offended party might be a witch. Second, individuals who fail to conform to local norms of behavior are most likely to be suspected and accused of being witches. People who are always mad at somebody, who carry grudges for prolonged periods, who always seem envious and resentful of the success of others, who have achieved wealth but selfishly refuse to share it in the culturally accepted manner—such violators of these and other normative standards frequently are believed to be the likely perpetrators of witchcraft. Fear of being accused and punished presumably increases adherence to the norms and ideals of behavior.

Most of our readers will deny that they believe in sorcery and witchcraft. Those who do believe probably have *wicca* (which some call *paganism*) in mind, which obviously is different from the way we have used witchcraft and sorcery to refer to supernatural powers employed for harmful, antisocial purposes. Of course, we could broaden our definitions of sorcery and witchcraft to include paganism by removing the “antisocial” elements. Then *wicca* becomes almost the same as *magic*, as anthropologists usually use the term.

We could change the definitions in another way. We could remove the part of the definition that refers to

“supernatural powers.” Then sorcery and witchcraft would include beliefs that unknown persons harm others using techniques that cannot be demonstrated to be real or that are unknown. In the United States, in the 1950s Senator Joseph McCarthy played on peoples’ fears by claiming that the government and Hollywood were filled with Communists dedicated to overturning all that Americans hold dear. In the 1980s and 1990s, various supremacists blamed certain political factions and minorities for social problems and what they believed to be the degeneration of their nation’s values. What does the rest of twenty-first century have in store along these lines?



## Varieties of Religious Organization

As we know from earlier chapters, to compare cultures anthropologists develop classifications based on differences and similarities. All classifications are simplifications of the real world, and those of religions are no exception. They must be broad to show contrasts, but their very broadness inevitably obscures many details. In classifying diverse religions into a relatively few forms or types, we oversimplify and, to some degree, distort, as humanistic anthropologists remind us. Nonetheless, a classification of religion provides a general picture of religious diversity among humanity and illuminates the cultural contexts of religious beliefs and practices.

Anthony Wallace proposed an influential classification of religions. Wallace used the word *cult*, a term that calls to mind exotic and usually short-lived sets of beliefs and practices that revolve around a “cult leader.” To avoid such negative connotations, we prefer the phrase *religious organization*. The word *organization* emphasizes the social groups and relationships that coordinate activities to control or worship specific supernatural powers for various purposes. *Religious organization* does not mean the “entire religion” of a people. Rather a peoples’ total religion includes many different kinds of organizations devoted to different purposes, like curing illness, controlling weather, worshipping gods, hunting animals, divining the future, renewing nature, protecting people from enemies, saving souls, and keeping ancestral spirits happy.

Wallace distinguished four types of organizations:

1. **Individualistic.** Each individual has a personal relationship with one or more supernatural powers, who serve as the person’s guardians and protectors.

**individualistic organizations** Religious organizations based on personal relationships between specific individuals and specific supernatural powers.



The aid of the powers is solicited when needed for personal goals.

2. **Shamanistic.** Some individuals—shamans—have relationships with supernatural powers that ordinary people lack. They use these powers primarily for socially valuable purposes, to help (especially cure) others in need. They may also act on behalf of their band or village to cause supernatural harm to the group’s enemies. Usually shamans organize and direct crisis rituals.
3. **Communal.** The members of a particular group gather periodically to perform rituals that benefit the group as a whole. There are no full-time religious specialists, as is also true of individualistic and shamanistic cults. Usually, leaders who control and direct the rituals are elders or respected members of the group on whose behalf the rituals are performed
4. **Ecclesiastical.** Some societies have full-time religious practitioners who form a religious bureaucracy. The actual practice of religion is managed or carried out by formal, specialized officials—priests—who perform mainly calendrical rituals. The priesthood is usually materially supported by institutionalized governmental authorities through taxation or redistributive tribute (see Chapters 7 and 12).

The Concept Review summarizes these four forms of religious organization.

Any given culture has more than one kind of religious organization, but the varieties are not randomly distributed among the world’s peoples. Rather, they occur in a rough evolutionary sequence. Most notably, in many foraging bands and horticultural tribes—such as the Inuit, Ju/’hoansi, and Yanomamö—shamanistic rituals are common, whereas ecclesiastical rituals occur mainly in stratified chiefdoms and states. Be aware, though, that the evolutionary matching of kinds of cults with kinds of economic and political organizations is rough and general.

Further frustrating our desire to “pigeonhole” religious diversity is the fact that many societies have several religions, sometimes at odds with one another. In the Caribbean nation of Haiti, *voudon* (voodoo) persists even though the official hierarchy of the Catholic Church has tried to eliminate it for more than a century. Multiethnic nations, of course, have a variety of religions within their borders (see Chapter 17). Even nations that are linguistically and culturally homogeneous are religiously diverse. South Korea, for example, is an industrialized, urbanized

nation, most of whose 43 million people are Buddhists or Christians or express no religious affiliation. But many Buddhist or Christian Koreans today seek the services of shamans (who are usually women) to help with illness or difficulties in their personal lives. Many Japanese people have Christian-style weddings and Buddhist funerals, and the same individuals also may honor their ancestors at Shinto shrines. Some North Americans pay spirit mediums (“channelers”) large sums of money to put them in contact with deceased relatives, a practice comparable in many ways to shamanism. Palm and crystal ball readings are modern examples of divination (“fortune telling”) used by some people who denounce superstition in other contexts.

These and other complications should not obscure the general pattern, however. The religions of hunter-gatherer bands differ generally and significantly from those of complex chiefdoms and states, as we now discuss. Because one major point is that religious beliefs, myths, and rituals are embedded in the context of a people’s entire cultural system, we discuss how they relate to economic and political organization.

### Individualistic Organizations

The defining characteristic of individualistic organizations is that individuals intentionally seek out particular spirits or other supernatural powers to protect and help them. As their name suggests, they emphasize direct, personalized interactions between individual persons and supernatural powers.

The most well-known examples are **vision quests**. Vision quests are widespread among Native American peoples but are especially important for the Great Plains tribes. To Plains peoples, the world is charged

**shamanistic organizations** Religious organizations in which certain individuals (shamans) have relationships with supernatural powers that ordinary people lack.

**communal organizations** Religious organizations in which the members of a group cooperate to perform rituals intended to benefit all.

**ecclesiastical organizations** Religious organizations in which a full-time priesthood performs rituals believed to benefit believers or the whole society, usually in large buildings dedicated to religious purposes or deities; found in complex societies.

**vision quest** The attempt to enlist the aid of supernatural powers by intentionally seeking a dream or vision.



Form of organization	Major Characteristics
Individualistic	Each individual has a special relationship with one or more supernatural powers who serve as personal guardians and protectors. Individuals seek assistance from their guardian spirits when needed.
Shamanistic	Some persons—shamans—have power to contact supernatural beings at times of crisis to help (especially cure) individuals. Shamans may also act on behalf of their band or village harm enemies.
Communal	Members of a well-defined group gather periodically for collective rituals that generally benefit the group as a whole. “Elders” often have special roles in rituals.
Ecclesiastical	Societies or their divisions have full-time religious officials—priests—organized into a religious bureaucracy supported by tribute or tax. Priests officiate at calendrical rituals that benefit the whole society or political unit, making people dependent on priests and rituals for their spiritual and material welfare.

with spiritual energy and supernatural power. Power exists in inanimate objects, such as rocks or mountains, and in living animals and plants. Humans require the aid of the supernatural in many activities—in hunting, warfare, and times of sickness or other troubles.

Spiritual power most often comes to individuals in visions. Visions play an important role in religious life because through them people achieve the personal contact with the supernatural that is essential in various endeavors. Spiritual powers occasionally make contact with individuals for no apparent reason, coming to them as they sleep or even as they are walking or riding alone.

More often, humans—especially young men—seek out these powers through an active search, or quest, whose purpose is to acquire a vision. There are places that supernatural powers are believed to frequent: certain hills, mountains, or bluffs. A young man goes to such a location alone. There he smokes and fasts, appealing to a power to take pity on him. Among one tribe, the Crow, sometimes a man will even amputate part of a finger or cut his body to arouse pity. The vision commonly appears on the fourth day because four is a sacred number to the Crow.

The way the power manifests itself varies. Sometimes the man hears the spirit speak to him. Sometimes the spirit comes in the form of a dreamlike story. In other instances, it simply materializes before his eyes, taking the form of a bear, bison, eagle, or some other large animal. Sometimes small animals like rabbits, field mice, and dogs also appear. The power tells the man how it will help him. It

might give him the ability to predict the future, locate enemies, find game, become a powerful warrior, or cure illness. It tells him the things he will have to do to keep his power—what songs to sing, how to paint his war shield, how to wear his hair, and so forth. It also tells the man some things he cannot do; for example, if the power comes from an eagle, the man might be prohibited from killing “his brother,” the eagle. As long as the man continues to behave in the prescribed manner, the power will be his supernatural protector, or *guardian spirit*. Through the spirit, the man acquires special powers other men do not have.

There is no known culture in which individualistic organizations make up the entire religion. Even among the Plains Indians, among whom the vision quest is unusually well developed, shamanistic and communal organizations also exist.

### Shamanistic Organizations

A **shaman** is a person recognized to have a special relationship to supernatural powers, which he or she frequently uses to cure sickness. In many societies (especially among foraging peoples), shamans are the only kind of religious practitioner; that is, they possess the only kinds of abilities not available to ordinary people. Usually, shamans are not full-time specialists. Rather, they carry out their tasks whenever their services are needed, usually in return for a gift or fee. Otherwise, they live much like everyone else.

People believe shamans possess several qualities. They have access to the power of spiritual beings, which anthropologists usually call *spirit helpers*. The effectiveness of shamans to cure or to cause harm comes from their ability to contact their spirit helpers. Shamans commonly communicate with spirit helpers by achieving an

**shaman** Part-time religious specialist who uses his special relationship to supernatural powers for curing members of his group and harming members of other groups.



© Catherine Karnow/Corbis

Religious healing aids people in societies at all levels of complexity and development. This South Korean woman is leading a *kut*, a ritual that helps her clients with physical, psychological, and family problems.

altered state of consciousness, referred to as a *trance*. They reach trance in various ways: through the intake of drugs, ritual chanting, or participation in percussive or rhythmic music. The Tungus, the northeast Asian people from whom English acquired the word *shaman*, use tambourines and drums to achieve the trance in which they journey to the spirit world to discover the cause of illness.

Peoples who practice shamanism interpret trance as a sign that some spirit, usually one of a shaman's spirit helpers, has physically entered the shaman's body. The spirit takes over (possesses) the shaman's body and speaks to the assembled audience through his or her mouth. When possessed, the shaman becomes a *medium*, or mouthpiece, for the spirits. Shamans may lose control over their actions and their voices may change quality because a spirit is speaking through them. People culturally interpret the unusual behavior and strange voice as evidence of genuine possession and is a sign of a shaman's power.

The way a person becomes a shaman varies from people to people because the details of the role are defined by

local cultures. Many scholars argue that shamans are individuals who are unusual in some way: they hear voices, parts of their bodies tremble uncontrollably, they dress or act in strange ways, and so forth. Members of their community interpret their "difference" as a sign that they have been chosen by a spirit to become a healer. However, just as often shamans are normal people who act like everyone else when not in the role of shaman. Ju/'hoansi healers use dance and percussion to achieve the trance state that makes them powerful and able to diagnose and cure illness. When not in the role of healer, however, they are indistinguishable from other people. Thus, whether shamans are believed to be "different" from other people varies cross-culturally.

Shamans are usually considered to have knowledge and powers that others lack. They acquire these in three major ways. In some societies, they undergo a period of special training as an apprentice to an experienced shaman, who teaches the novice chants and songs and how to achieve the trance state. Among other peoples, shamans must endure difficult deprivations, such as





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As these Jamaicans illustrate, healing physical and psychological ailments are important activities and functions of religions.

prolonged fasting, the consumption of foods culturally considered disgusting, or years of sexual abstinence. Finally, in many societies, shamans are individuals who have experienced some unusual event. For example, they may have miraculously recovered from a serious illness or injury, or they claim to have had an unusual dream or vision in which some spirit called them to be its mouthpiece.

In some cultures, shamans, as healing experts, work alone during the actual cures, although many other people may be physically present. Sometimes, though, shamans have helpers in the curing tasks. Among the Navajo of the American Southwest, shamans (called “singers”) have assistants who fetch objects, help construct the elaborate sandpaintings used in curing, supply food and drink for

all-night cures, and perform other duties. Navajo singers need the help: in olden times, some of the curing ceremonies lasted nine nights.

Some people say that the shaman “is the world’s oldest profession,” by which they mean that shamanism predominates among the “simplest” known peoples. Perhaps this is true, but shamanism can be complexly organized. Among the Zuni, who now live on a reservation in western New Mexico, 12 special groups of people (sometimes translated into English as “medicine societies”) are recognized as knowledgeable about curing. Different medicine societies know the secret techniques for curing various illnesses. If a Zuni becomes ill with specific symptoms, he or she goes to the appropriate society to be healed. Once healed, the person has learned the secrets of the society and so is usually then initiated into it.

### Communal Organizations

Like shamanism, communally organized rituals have no full-time specialists who make their living as religious practitioners. They do have leaders—often elderly persons or individuals with a special interest in the results of a ritual—who manipulate the symbolic objects or address the supernatural.

Communal rituals are held to intercede with the supernatural on behalf of some group of people, such as a kin group, an age group, a village, or a caste. To illustrate, we consider two widespread kinds of communal rituals organized by descent groups: ancestral and totemism.

#### Ancestral Rituals

All worldviews hold that people have a spiritual dimension—a *soul*—that lives on after the physical body has perished. Beliefs about the fate of the soul after death vary widely. Some peoples—such as Hindus and Buddhists—believe the soul is reincarnated into another person or animal. Others hold that the soul passes into a spiritual plane, where it exists eternally with a community of other souls and has no further effects on the living. Still others believe souls become malevolent after death, turning into ghosts that cause accidents or sickness or terrify the living.

Another common belief about the fate of souls after death is that they interact with and affect the living, especially their descendants. The many peoples who hold such beliefs use rituals to induce the spirits of their deceased ancestors to do favors for them or simply to leave them alone. Beliefs and rituals surrounding the interactions between the living and their departed relatives are called **ancestral rituals**, or *ancestor worship*.

**ancestral rituals** Rituals the conscious purpose of which is to worship, honor, or beseech the deceased ancestors of a kin group

The Lugbara of Uganda provide an example. The patrilineage is an important social group to the Lugbara. As the most important members of the lineage, lineage elders oversee the interests and harmony of the entire group. They serve as the guardians of the lineage's morality, although they have no power to punish violations physically. The Lugbara believe the spirit of a deceased person may become an ancestral spirit of her or his lineage. The spirit punishes living descendants who violate Lugbara ideals of behavior toward lineage mates. People who fight with their kinsmen (especially their older relatives), who deceive or steal from their lineage mates, or who fail to carry out their duties toward others are liable to be punished by a spirit. Sometimes this happens because the spirit sees an offense committed and makes the offender ill. More commonly, spirits do not act on their own initiative to make someone sick. Rather, they act on the thoughts of an elder who is indignant because of the actions of some lineagemate. John Middleton (1965, 76) describes Lugbara beliefs about the power of lineage elders to cause illness by invoking ancestral spirits:

[The elder] sits near his shrines in his compound and thinks about the sinner's behavior. His thoughts are known by the [spirits] and they then send sickness to the offender. He "thinks these words in his heart"; he does not threaten or curse the offender. For a senior man to do this is part of his expected role. It is part of his "work," to "cleanse the lineage home." Indeed, an elder who does not do so when justified would be lacking in sense of duty toward his lineage.

In the Lugbara example, we see how elders maintain harmony and cooperation in the lineage by invoking the power of deceased members. This is a common feature of ancestral rituals.

Matrilineal peoples have similar ways of organizing ancestral rituals. The Ndembu of Zambia provide an example. When a woman experiences fertility problems, people often say that she is forgetting her ancestress or doing something disapproved by an ancestress. The cure consists of a lengthy ritual in which many members of the matrilineage make the victim "remember" her relative.

Why do some societies have rituals devoted to making the spirits of their deceased ancestors help rather than harm them? Like other "why" questions, this one is controversial. Many anthropologists agree, however, that such beliefs are related to the degree of importance of large kin groups in a society. The greater the importance of kin groups such as lineages and clans in making public decisions, regulating access to resources,

allocating roles, controlling behavior, and so on, the more likely a society is to develop rituals that control or worship ancestors. This is consistent with sociological interpretations of religion and worldview.

### *Totemic Rituals*

Another widespread form of communal cult is **totemism**, the cultural belief that human groups have a special mystical relationship with natural objects such as animals, plants, and, sometimes, nonliving things. The object (or objects) with which a group is associated is known as its *totem*. The group most often is a unilineal kin group, such as a clan. The totem frequently serves as a name of the group—for example, the bear clan, the eagle clan, the sun clan.

The nature of the relationship between the members of the group and its totem varies widely. Sometimes the totem is used simply to identify the group and its members, much like our surnames. Often, a mystical association exists between the group and its totem object. People believe they are like their totem in some respects. Or, the totem may be used as a symbol of differences between clans. In many populations—most notably some of the aboriginal peoples of Australia—the members of a clan treat their totem like a clanmate, believing that the totem gave birth to their ancestors in a mythical period. The welfare of the clan is mystically associated with the welfare of the totem, so periodically the clan gathers for rituals that ensure the reproduction of its totem.

### *Other Communally Organized Rituals.*

There are many other kinds of communal organizations. For example, rites of passage are usually communally organized: Leaders organize them to socially recognize or even cause the transitions from one life stage to another (see Chapter 10). Like ancestor veneration and totemism, rites of passage involve cooperation by the members of a group to achieve socially valuable goals.

Various rituals that control natural processes and seasonal rhythms often are communally organized. Eastern Pueblo peoples who have lived along the Rio Grande of New Mexico for hundreds of years organize agricultural, hunting, fertility, and other rituals by season. As among Zuni and Hopi, the same rituals occurred in the same sequence year after year. The same ceremonial

**totemism** A form of communal religious organization in which all members of a kin group have mystical relationships with one or more natural objects.

groups are responsible for organizing and staging them. They require large-scale cooperation by the entire community, bringing people together several times a year for a common purpose believed to benefit all.

These examples show why many kinds of communal cults are called *rites of solidarity*. In addition to their conscious purposes—respecting ancestors, controlling nature, and so forth—they provide a ritual means to strengthen and maintain good relationships among the group’s members. Also, in most cases, those who lead them are supposed to have good character and to remain pure around the days of the performance, thus upholding values, norms, and other kinds of cultural standards.

### Ecclesiastical Organizations

In Chapters 6 and 12, we showed that occupational specialization accompanied the development of civilization and states. Civilizations and states developed among New World peoples, such as the ancient Incas, Aztecs, and Mayans. They also evolved in the Old World cities of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, East Asia, and India. In these regions, and later in most other world regions, specialization extended into the religious dimension of cultural systems. Rather than organizing rituals on a communal basis—in which a wide range of people controlled and participated in the performance—a formal bureaucracy of religious specialists controlled many public rituals. The religious bureaucracy probably also had a large voice in formulating the religious laws, which prescribed certain kinds of punishments for those who violated them.

These religious specialists are known as **priests**. It is instructive to compare priests with shamans. In addition to their more specialized status, priests differ from shamans in several respects. First, with the exception of people like the Zuni, shamans are not organized as a group and cooperation between them is minimal. Indeed, many peoples believe that enemy shamans engage in supernatural battles with one another, with the stronger shaman winning the battle, which leads to the recovery or death of the sick person. In contrast, priests are hierarchically organized and are usually subsidized and supported by a formal government, either by the high-ranking chiefs of a large

chiefdom or by the state (see Chapter 12). Second, priests undergo a lengthy period of formal training because they must master the complex rituals needed to perform their role. Third, the priests were at or near the top of the social ladder in ancient civilizations, so individual priests lived much better than the population at large. Fourth, shamans typically perform mainly crisis rituals, whenever some person requires their services. The rituals at which priests officiate tend to be calendrical—they occur at regular intervals because the powerful gods that the rituals appease demand regular praise or sacrifice.

A final difference is especially revealing. With the development of a *priesthood* comes a strong distinction between priest and layperson. The layperson has little control over the timing of religious performances or the content of myths. The population at large relies on the priesthood to keep it in the proper relationship to supernatural powers. This creates a sense of spiritual dependence on the priesthood and on the state apparatus that so often sponsors it, a dependence that reinforces the high degree of stratification found in states.

These state-sponsored rituals are called *ecclesiastical* (meaning “of or pertaining to the church”) because their priesthood was highly organized and their rituals were usually held in grand buildings that served as temples. The organization of ecclesiastical religions were largely under the control of the government. Officials exacted tribute or taxes to finance the construction of temples, the livelihood of the priesthood, the sacrifices that often accompanied state rituals, and other expenses needed to support and organize religious activities on a fantastically large scale.

There is little question that ecclesiastical organizations provided rituals, myths, and beliefs that supported the domination of the ruling family or dynasty. (See Chapter 13 for more on ideologies.) The content of the beliefs, myths, and rituals almost invariably expressed the dependence of the entire population on the ruler’s well-being and on the periodic performance of rituals. A common belief of official state religions is that the ruler is a god-king: He not only rules by divine mandate but is himself a god or somehow has divine qualities. This was true of most of the ancient civilizations and of the states that developed in sub-Saharan Africa. The complex chiefdoms of Polynesia and the Americas had comparable ideas (see Chapter 12).

In the ancient complex chiefdoms of Hawaii, there were marked social distinctions between the noble and commoner classes. The nobility was viewed as endowed with a supernatural power called *mana*. *Mana* was partly hereditary, and within a single family the eldest child inherited the most *mana* from his or her parents. The highest-ranking noble, the paramount chief, was believed

**priest** A kind of religious specialist, usually full-time, who officiates at large-scale, bureaucratically organized rituals that keep the population in proper relationship to deities or cosmic forces.





© EPA/Alessia Paradisi/Landov

Ecclesiastical cults feature grandiose temples, awe-inspiring physical symbols, and specialized priests to mediate between laypersons and gods. This Catholic mass is being performed at the Vatican.

to be descended from one of the gods of the islands. This descent gave him the right to rule because he had more *mana* than anyone in the chiefdom. Other nobles (lesser chiefs and their families) were relatives of the paramount chief and thus also were endowed with *mana*. *Mana* gave chiefs the power to curse those who were disloyal or disobedient or who violated some taboo, which further reinforced their authority. Hawaiians believed the prosperity of a chiefdom and everyone in it depended on the performance of certain religious rituals held in grand temples. Because commoners did not have enough *mana* to enter a temple, only priests and nobles could perform the rituals needed to ensure prosperity. Everyone in the chiefdom thus relied on the social (and religious) elite for their well-being.

In ecclesiastical organizations, many rituals are held to keep the entire polity in a beneficial relationship with supernatural beings. For example, in the state religion of the ancient Aztecs the gods had to be periodically appeased or they would cause the world to end in a

cataclysm. To keep the gods' goodwill, the priesthood periodically performed human sacrifice at temples, offering the heart of the victim (usually a war captive) to the deities. Aztec priests also stuck sharp thorns into their tongues, earlobes, and even genitals as blood offerings to the gods. The ancient Egyptians believed their pharaoh would rule in the afterlife—just as in the present world—so when he died, he took much of his wealth, his wives, and his servants into the next world with him. Japanese believed the emperors of their nation were descended through males from a sun goddess; in later Japanese history, the emperors were so set apart from the mundane world that political affairs were handled by the shogun, who ruled in the name of the emperor. The emperor of old China—who was at various times in the history of Chinese civilization the most powerful man on the planet—ruled so long as he had the mandate of heaven.

Organizing ecclesiastical rituals on a grand scale consumed enormous resources, but they did not necessarily wipe out other kinds of local-level rituals. Common people

usually continued to rely on local shamans to cure them, to practice magic, to believe in witches and sorcerers, and to worship their ancestors. In ancient China, Korea, and Japan, for example, each household and lineage continued to revere its own ancestors through communal rituals and to make offerings to them at family shrines.

In medieval Europe, Catholicism was ecclesiastical: The authority of the Church was tightly interwoven with the exercise of secular power, although there often was conflict between popes and various kings. Only in the past few centuries has the formal alliance between the power of government and the will of the gods been broken for any length of time. We should not assume that even this official separation between church and state will necessarily be permanent. As the recent history of Iran and Afghanistan suggests, the intermingling of political and ecclesiastical authorities can be reborn in the modern world. This may even happen in democratic nations.

## Revitalization Movements

So far, we have discussed religion in cultures that are changing only slowly. When a peoples' way of life or physical survival is threatened by contact with powerful outsiders, often they seek the aid and protection of the supernatural. They may form and join social movements, usually called **revitalization movements**.

Revitalization movements are most likely to occur when three conditions coalesce: (1) rapid change, usually caused by sudden exposure to unfamiliar people, customs, and objects; (2) foreign domination—or even widespread fear of foreign domination—which leads to a sense of social, ethnic, or even racial inferiority; and (3) the perception of relative deprivation, meaning that people sense they lack wealth, power, and esteem relative to those who dominate them. Historically, revitalization movements were especially common during colonialism, in which a foreign power subjugated an indigenous people. Colonialism did not always lead to revitalization movements, however.

**revitalization movement** A religious movement explicitly intended to create a new way of life for a society or group.

**cargo cults** Melanesian revitalization movements in which prophets claim to know secret rituals that will bring wealth (cargo).

Revitalization movements usually originate with an individual (a *prophet*) who claims to have had a dream or vision. Sometimes the prophet claims to be a savior (a *messiah*) sent by a spiritual being to save the world from destruction. In the dream or vision, the prophet received a message (a *revelation*) from a god, an ancestor, or another spiritual power.

Revelations typically include two kinds of information given by the spirit or spirits and taught by the prophet. The first is a statement about what is wrong with the present-day world, about why people's lives have changed for the worse. Prophets and followers commonly blame the introduction of corrupting foreign objects and habits—such as tobacco, alcohol, money, new religions, formal schooling, the relaxation of old moral standards—for the troubles of today.

Second, revelations usually include a vision of a new world and a prescription for how to bring it about. In some cases, the message is vague and secular, with the prophet claiming that earthly lives will improve if people do (or stop doing) certain things. However, the message is often *apocalyptic*: The prophet says the present world will end at a certain time, and only those who heed his message will be saved. The expulsion or death of foreigners is a frequent theme of apocalyptic visions: Foreigners will be drowned in a flood, burned in a fire, swallowed up by an earthquake, or killed by deities or ancestors. Another common theme is the reversal of existing political and economic dominance relations: Foreigners will work for us, we will have the wealth instead of them, we will tax them and make laws that they must obey. Nearly always, the prophets' revelations are *syncretic*, that is, they combine elements of traditional myths, beliefs, and rituals with introduced elements.

The following examples from two regions illustrate revitalization movements.

### Melanesian Cargo Cults

The area called Melanesia in the southwest Pacific experienced numerous revitalization movements in the early to mid-twentieth century. Melanesians placed great cultural value on wealth and its distribution as the means to become a big man or powerful leader (Chapter 13). The value they placed on wealth led them to be most interested in the material possessions of German, English, French, and Australian colonial powers. Because European wealth was brought to the islands by ship or plane, it became known as *cargo*, and the various movements that sprang up with the aim of acquiring it through ritual means became known as **cargo cults**.



Members of the John Frum cargo cult in Tanna, Vanuatu, perform a ritual march. They await the return of their messiah, John Frum, who will bring them wealth and a new life. This movement, which has also become a political party, has existed on the island of Tanna since the 1940s.



© Lamont Lindstrom

To Melanesians, all Europeans were fantastically wealthy; yet the Melanesians seldom saw them do any work to earn their possessions. Those whites who lived in the islands certainly did not know how to make trucks, canned foods, radios, kerosene lanterns, stoves, and so forth. In many traditional Melanesian religions, technology was believed to have been given to people by deities or spirits. It followed that European objects came from their God. Further, when the whites who lived in Melanesia wanted some new object, they simply made marks on papers and placed them in an envelope or asked for the object by speaking into metal things. Some weeks later, the object was delivered in ships or airplanes. Surely, the cargo was made by spirits, and the acts the whites did to get their spirits to send cargo were rituals. Melanesians therefore believed that they, too, could acquire this wealth through the correct ritual procedure, which they frequently believed the whites were selfishly withholding from them.

Numerous prophets sprang up among diverse Melanesian peoples, each with his own vision or dream, each with his own story to explain why the Europeans had cargo and the Melanesians had none, and each claiming to know the secret ritual that would deliver the goods. The prophet often claimed to have received a visit from one of his ancestors or a native deity, who told him that the whites had been lying to people about how to get cargo.

The Garia of the north coast of Papua New Guinea illustrate common themes of cargo cults. Like most other

indigenous peoples, missionaries came to the Garia. Also, like many other peoples, the Garia initially adopted Christianity for reasons other than those the missionaries had in mind. They assumed the whites knew the ritual secrets that were the “road to cargo.” The missionaries would give it to the Garia if only they practiced what the missionaries preached: church attendance, monogamy, worship of the true God, and cessation of pagan practices such as sorcery and dancing. Based on their belief that the missionary lifestyle and Christian rituals held the secret of cargo, many Garia converted to Christianity early in the twentieth century.

But the cargo did not arrive. The Garia grew angry as they concluded that the missionaries and other Europeans were withholding the true ritual secret of how to get cargo to keep all the wealth for themselves. In the 1930s and 1940s, two Garia prophets arose. They told the people that the missionaries had been telling them to worship the wrong gods. God and Jesus were both really deities of the Garia, not of whites. The Europeans knew the secret names of God and Jesus and asked them for the cargo with secret prayers. All along, Jesus had been trying to deliver the goods to the Garia, but the Jews were holding him captive in heaven. To free him, the Garia had to perform sacrificial rituals. To show him how poor they were and to make him feel sorry for them, they had to destroy all their native wealth objects. If they did these things, Jesus would give the cargo to the ancestral spirits of the Garia, who would in turn deliver it to the living.



## Native American Movements

Revitalization movements also occurred among American Indians, whose sufferings at the hands of white traders, settlers, armies, and administrators are well documented. Two movements were especially important, both precipitated by a deterioration of tribal economic, social, and religious life.

### Handsome Lake

In the 1600s and 1700s, the Seneca of New York and Pennsylvania were one of the members of the League of the Iroquois (Chapter 11), a loose confederation of different tribes who agreed to live in peace and come to one another's aid in case of attack by surrounding tribes. Like other members of the League, the Seneca traditionally were matrilineal horticulturalists. Men hunted, traded for furs, and went on raids against neighboring tribes, while women owned most of the farmland and did most of the planting and harvesting of corn and other crops.

By 1800, the Seneca had lost most of their land to the new state of New York, Anglo settlers, and land speculators. Whites committed many atrocities against them in the 1780s and 1790s, partly because most Seneca supported the British during the American Revolutionary War. Devastating diseases—such as smallpox and measles, which wiped out millions of Native Americans all over the continent—reduced the tribe to a fraction of its former numbers. Seneca men had been proud warriors and hunters but these activities became more difficult because of the loss of land and the presence of whites. The American government waged psychological warfare against them, intentionally corrupting their leaders with bribes and liquor and generally attempting to dehumanize and demoralize them.

Seneca men turned to alcohol and drank away most of what little money they could still earn from the fur trade. Neighboring peoples, who once feared the Seneca and other members of the League of the Iroquois, ridiculed them. Witchcraft accusations increased internal conflicts and divisions within their communities. Many women lost their desire for children and took medicines that caused them to abort or become sterile altogether. A way of life—and perhaps an entire people—was dying.

In 1799, a Seneca man named Handsome Lake lay sick. Three angels cured him and gave him a revelation from the Creator. Handsome Lake reported that the Creator was saddened by the life of the people and angry because of their drunkenness, witchcraft, and use of

abortion medicines. The Seneca must repent such deeds. Handsome Lake had two more visions during the next year. He prophesized an apocalypse in which the world would be destroyed by great drops of fire, consuming those who did not heed his teachings. People could save themselves and delay the apocalypse by publicly confessing their wrongs, giving up sins such as witchcraft and drinking, and performing certain traditional rituals.

The apocalypse did not occur, but Handsome Lake was able to give his teachings a new, more secular twist between 1803 and his death in 1815. He continued to preach temperance because, he said, the Creator had never intended whiskey to be used by Indians. He encouraged peaceful relations with both whites and other Indians. He urged that the scattered reservations of the Seneca be consolidated, so that the people could live together as one community. Family morality must be impeccable: Sons were to obey their fathers, divorce (commonplace among the matrilineal Seneca in aboriginal times) was no longer to be allowed, and adultery and domestic quarreling were to cease. Handsome Lake also succeeded in changing the traditional division of labor, in which women cultivated the crops and men who worked in the garden were considered effeminate. Seneca men took up farming and animal husbandry and even fenced their fields and added new crops to their inventory.

### Peyote Religion

Peyote is a small cactus that grows in the Rio Grande valley of Texas and northern Mexico. When eaten, it produces a mild narcotic effect. The ritual use of peyote among northwestern Mexican Indians predated European conquest. However, its consumption as the central element in a revitalization movement dates only from the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

In 1875, two southern Plains tribes, the Kiowa and Comanche, lost their land after military defeats. During their confinement to reservations in southwestern Oklahoma, the Lipan-Apache introduced them to peyote. By the 1880s, a revitalization movement began after the two tribes began consuming peyote at religious services. Like many movements, peyotism subsequently spread, reaching about 19 Indian groups in Oklahoma by 1899. During the early twentieth century, the church spread rapidly to other Indian communities throughout the western United States and Canada. Peyotism was and is syncretic, adopting many elements of Christian theology and worship along with the consumption of peyote as a sacrament.

Most modern nations have *religious pluralism*, meaning that followers of many different religions live inside their boundaries. For centuries, India has been home to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Jains. Since 1949, China has been officially atheistic according to its ruling Communist party, but in fact China has Confucians, Daoists, and Buddhists—and 20 million Muslims. Muslims are concentrated in China's western provinces, where the ethnic group called Uyghur live. Violent clashes between Uyghur and Han occurred in the spring of 2010 and relations remain uneasy. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are pluralistic, partly because of the way colonial powers established their boundaries and partly because of the spread of Islam and, later, Christianity.

In recent decades, international migration and global contacts have increased religious pluralism. The United Kingdom has hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims, most from its former colonies in South Asia. Turks migrated to Germany and other countries for work and many remained there. European nations like France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium have large numbers of Muslims from the Middle East. Most North Americans think of European as religiously tolerant ("too tolerant," some say), but in recent years several European countries have debated passing regulations and even laws about Muslim dress and mosques. In early 2010, a parliamentary committee in France recommended a ban on Muslim women wearing face veils in hospitals, schools, public transportation, and government offices. The ban is now enacted. In April 2010, the Belgian Parliament prohibited women from wearing clothing that partly or fully covers their faces. Violators could be fined or even jailed up to week. The citizens of Switzerland voted in a law forbidding the construction of any more minarets, the tall towers in mosques at which Muslims are called to prayer five times each day.

The United States remains predominantly (75–80%) professed Christian, although there are large differences in doctrines and lifestyles between denominations such as Episcopalians and Southern Baptists. Today students from around the world acquire visas to study in American and Canadian universities. Employers are looking for people who have high-tech professional job skills, for which American workers are either numerically insufficient or overpaid (depending on whether you believe labor or management). Except for the Jewish faith (6 million, or about 2 percent), it is difficult to know the numbers of non-Christian religions represented in the United States. The United States has 4.7 million Muslims (most of them native-born Americans), 2.7 million Buddhists, 1.1 million Hindus, and 1 million Baha'is. There are also the indigenous religions of Native Americans and beliefs like Wicca.

The United States faces the problem of accommodating religious diversity. In 2007, the issue arose in an American university. About 10 percent of the students at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, are Muslims. Muslims should pray five times a day and, as part of their preparation, they should wash their feet. To accommodate the students, the university installed foot-washing stations in some restrooms. Other students objected to what they claimed was special treatment for members of one religious faith. An outside organization, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, got involved because a public university built a facility to accommodate the followers of a particular religious doctrine, which they held to be a violation of the U.S. Constitution. Supporters of the footbaths responded by saying that the footbaths could also be used by other students, such as athletes, and that many of the university's holidays and the calendar itself accommodate the beliefs of Christians.

Similar issues have arisen in other universities, including whether cafeterias should be required to prepare special foods (without beef) for Hindus and whether exams should be rescheduled for a particular religious holiday for a religious minority. Some issues have been around for a long time, but their relevance is magnified by religious pluralism. Should Christian prayers be offered at meetings of city councils? Should Christian crèches be displayed on public properties? In the name of equal time, should intelligent design be taught as an alternative to evolution in the classrooms of public schools? (If the answer is yes, then should public schools also include the origin beliefs of Native Americans such as Navajos and Lakotas, of Hindus, and of numerous other religions?)

Increased religious diversity scares some Americans, including many who do not view themselves as religious persons. For now, the U.S. government is most interested in restricting immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Until recently, the religious affiliation of immigrants has not been much of an issue in whether their numbers should be controlled. It is worth recalling, however, that the Catholicism of Irish and Italian immigrants was an issue when large numbers of those immigrants arrived. After 9/11 and other events, Americans are more likely to worry about allowing Muslims to enter, legally as well as illegally. Today, hardly anyone publicly questions the concept of religious freedom as a basic American value, but many feel that this value does not mean that members of all religions should be allowed to immigrate.

### Critical Thinking Question

1. How far should a nation go in accommodating religious pluralism? Should religious affiliation be a criterion for denying or accepting admission into a country?

SOURCES: *World Almanac and Book of Facts 2007*, pp. 711–712; Lewin, "Muslims' Footbaths Set Off Debate," *Columbus Dispatch* (August 12, 2007, p. G2); "Belgium: Toward a Ban on Veils," *Time*, May 17, 2010, p. 13.

The peyote movement had no single prophet or leader. Local churches developed their own versions of services and rituals. One early leader was John Wilson, a Caddo/Delaware from western Oklahoma who had learned to ingest peyote from the Comanche. While eating dinner in the early 1890s, Wilson collapsed. Thinking him dead, his family began preparations for the burial. But a Caddoan named Enoch Parker told the family that he had learned in a vision that Wilson was not dead. Indeed, Wilson revived three days later. He reported that a great Water Bird had sucked the breath and sin out of his body, causing his collapse. Jesus brought him back to life after three days, telling him that his sins had been removed and that he was to teach the Indian people to believe in God and to use peyote to communicate with him.

Until his death in 1901, Wilson proselytized the peyote religion among the Osage, Delaware, Quapaw, and other groups. He preached that they needed to believe in God and Jesus, work hard, act morally, and stop drinking alcohol. They were to abandon their traditional religious practices because the spirits that formerly had aided them could be used for evil as well as good purposes. Wilson attracted a large number of adherents among the Osage, who combined the use of peyote in worship services with the Christian teachings they had learned in mission schools.

Peyote provided meaning and moral direction to tribal life during a period of rapid and harmful change. The peyote religion continues today on many reservations, especially in the central and western United States. It was legally incorporated as an official church—now known as the Native American Church—in 1918. Those who follow the Peyote Road eat pieces of the cactus during services, treating it as a deeply meaningful sacrament. Many members of the Native American Church say that the Creator intended peyote to be used by Indians. Periodically, the legislatures of some states have tried to outlaw the use of peyote because the cactus is a legally banned substance defined by the wider society as a “dangerous drug.” So far, the courts have upheld the right of church members to consume peyote as a part of their religious sacraments.

What is the fate of revitalization movements? Many with apocalyptic messages simply disappear when the end of the world does not occur. Other movements have been remarkably tenacious. In Melanesia, certain areas saw the rise and fall of numerous prophets, each claiming

to have the cargo secret. People followed again and again because they had no other acceptable explanation for cargo, for why whites had it and they lacked it, or for how they could acquire it. Certainly, their own worldly efforts—working for Europeans in mines and plantations, growing and selling coffee, copra, cocoa, and so forth—did not reward them with the fantastic wealth that whites enjoyed with virtually no effort. In some regions, cargo cults became political movements or parties. This was the fate of cargo cults among the Garia, Manus, Tannese, and some Malaitans.

Other movements do not wither away or transform into a more secular, political movement. They retain their religious character, frequently teaching that contentment is to be found within oneself rather than in worldly material things. After his death in 1815, Handsome Lake’s teachings became codified as the Code of Handsome Lake and is influential even today. Peyotism also became formally organized. Like many other revitalization movements that give birth to new religions, the adherents of peyotism are thus far largely confined to a single ethnic category: Native Americans.

Other movements grow over the centuries. From humble beginnings, they eventually attract millions of believers. They develop a formal organization, and the religious specialists called priests (including ministers, pastors, and the like) replace the prophets. The ancient prophets and disciples become the founders of the religion, their lives take on mythical proportions, and their revelations become texts that are considered sacred by believers. Followers become organized into an institutionalized church, which formalizes and codifies the texts so that they become official doctrines and creeds. The teachings and rituals cross national and ethnic boundaries. Beliefs and rituals go from being “local” to becoming “national” and sometimes “global.”

Most of the major religions of the modern world began as revitalization movements, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. These religions are sometimes called *world religions* because they have spread outside their original homelands. Today, more and more people are becoming familiar with world religions, not just through books and TV documentaries, but also through firsthand experience. Globalization brings old religions to new places, raising issues of how to accommodate religious pluralism (see the Globalization feature).



## Summary

**1 Describe how anthropologists define and think about cultural diversity in religion and worldview.** Defining religion is difficult because a definition should encompass all the diversity of religions found among humanity. Broadly, religion includes three components: beliefs about the nature of supernatural powers, myths about the historical actions of such powers and culture heroes, and symbolic rituals intended to influence them. These components affect a peoples' worldview and, hence, behavior in the secular world.

**2 Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the three main anthropological theories of religion and worldview.** Most theories fall into three basic categories. Intellectual/cognitive approaches hold that the most important purpose of religion and worldview is explaining things, events, and actions that are otherwise inexplicable. Psychological theories claim that myths, beliefs, and rituals function to help individuals cope with stresses, fears, uncertainties, grief, and other aspects of their lives. Sociological theorists argue that religion helps hold societies together by imparting common values and norms, punishing and rewarding people according to their behavior, providing ritualized occasions in which people gather and thus increasing social solidarity. Among one or another people, religion is probably helpful in all these ways. Not only is each theory incomplete, but for each there are many instances in which religion actually has opposite effects to the theory's principles. It is likely that no single theory can explain religion itself or the great diversity of human religions.

**3 Analyze how witchcraft and sorcery might actually benefit individuals and groups.** Many peoples believe that supernatural beings or forces cause group or personal misfortune, such as deaths, illnesses, and "accidents." The malevolent powers of sorcerers and witches are blamed for misfortune in the world view of a great many societies. Accusations of sorcery and witchcraft tend to be patterned

and to reflect prevalent conflicts and tensions in the organization of society. Although beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft at first glance seem harmful, anthropologists have argued that they have useful functions. They might provide emotionally useful explanations for why bad things happen to good people. They also might reinforce right behavior by providing hated symbols of wrong behavior and serve as a social control mechanism.

**4 Discuss how anthropologists collapse the diversity of human religions and worldviews into four major categories, and analyze the relationships between these categories and social life.** Religions and worldviews may be classified according to the ways rituals are organized, although any such classification is necessarily a simplification of the diversity of the world's religions. Four organizational modes are individualistic, shamanistic, communal, and ecclesiastical. In a generalized way, there is an evolutionary sequence to these organizations: They tend to be associated with different levels of cultural complexity. Ecclesiastical forms are regularly found in complex chiefdoms and states, where they legitimize and rationalize the powers and privileges of ruling families and elite classes.

**5 Describe revitalization movements, the conditions under which they are most likely to occur, and their fate.** Revitalization movements originate with prophets who claim to have received a revelation, which usually is syncretic and often apocalyptic. Most often, they are indigenous reactions to cope with current conditions, such as colonial domination, that are intolerable. Examples include Melanesian cargo cults, Handsome Lake movement among the Seneca of New York, and the peyote religion in many North American peoples. Most revitalization movements disappear, but some are transformed and develop into formal churches that evolve into world religions if they eventually attract tens of millions of members.

## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other

material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 15 ART AND THE AESTHETIC



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## **The Pervasiveness of Art**

### **Forms of Artistic Expression**

*Body Arts*

*Visual Arts*

*Performance Arts*

## **Art and Culture**

*Secular and Religious Art*

*Art and Gender*

*Social Functions of Art*



The Shakers of the nineteenth century emphasized simplicity and utility, not ornamentation and aesthetics, in the objects they manufactured. Yet today many of their products are considered works of art. Shaker chairs such as those hanging from the walls of this house are highly prized by collectors.



## Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will do the following:

- 1 **Discuss** the disagreement over whether art is or is not a cultural universal.
- 2 **List** the various forms of body arts.
- 3 **Discuss** the different forms of visual arts.
- 4 **Discuss** the different forms of performance arts.
- 5 **Explain** how art is integrated into our religious lives.
- 6 **Explain** how gender, identity, and social status are reflected in art.

*Art* is one of those elusive terms we all know and use, and think we understand, but it is difficult to define. Anthropologists are far from agreement on what constitutes art or even if it is a cultural universal. Many agree with Toni Fratto that "... there is no such thing as art.... Art in itself is not a universal human phenomenon but a synthetic western (cultural) category...." Other anthropologists have defined *art* by saying it is not utilitarian. The difficulty is, When does something stop being utilitarian and become art? Richard Anderson uses a Tikopean wooden headrest as an example. Any block of wood, even a log of the proper size, might serve as a headrest. A person might go further by cutting away portions of the block or log to form legs, which Anderson argues still serve the utilitarian purpose of lessening the weight of the block. If, however, the person carves designs on the headrest, this carving becomes its artistic component, and the object becomes art. According to Anderson, it is this artistic component, the design, that transforms the object from the realm of the utilitarian to the realm of art. Thus, it is ornamentation placed on the object—not its functional design—that defines it as art. In this chapter, we take a very different perspective, arguing that art is a universal that permeates virtually every aspect of human life.

There is much more to human life than acquiring necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. There is

also more to living than producing and using things for their utilitarian value. All peoples have both a sense of and a desire for the aesthetic: those things that appeal to the eye, the ear, the taste, the touch, the emotions, and the imagination. Such sensory experiences are important not only for their functional value but also because their color, form, design, sound, taste, and feel are pleasurable in their own right. Commonly, these experiences are sought after to stimulate our imaginations and emotions by creating feelings of happiness, fear, and even anger. These expressions of the aesthetic are what we generally call art—the subject of this chapter.

At what point is a piece of wood, stone, or ivory transformed into a work of art? When does noise become music? When do body movements become dance, and words become poetry, literature, or song lyrics? When does a shelter become architecture? Are there any limitations on what can be considered art? Can the preparation and serving of food be considered art? Is the painting or alteration of the human body art?

Something becomes **art** when its purely utilitarian or functional nature is modified for the purpose of enhancing its aesthetic qualities and thus making it more pleasurable to our senses. Artists can produce art objects that only they themselves will see or hear, but most of the time art is displayed publicly or used in social events such as gatherings or ceremonies. In such contexts, art objects sometimes take on an additional function: They become a means of communication. Thus, Western artists often claim they are trying to "make a statement" through their artwork, although we all recognize that the artistic message is in the eye of the beholder. In other cultures, too, artistic creations communicate messages that can have both religious and secular meanings.

Obviously, art is inseparable from the **aesthetic**, and the aesthetic is an elusive quality because it is subjective. Anthropologists since Franz Boas have argued that there

**art** Any human action that modifies the utilitarian nature of something for the primary purpose of enhancing its aesthetic qualities; or actions, objects, or words valued largely for their aesthetic pleasure or symbolic communication.

**aesthetic** Qualities that make objects, actions, or language more beautiful or pleasurable, according to culturally relative and variable standards.

are no universal standards for art. Something one society might find beautiful or pleasing, others might consider ugly, disgusting, or even repulsive. As we frequently hear, “There is no accounting for taste.”

Aesthetics cannot be separated from culture. Just as we learn other aspects of our culture, so we learn what is beautiful. Beauty is culturally determined. Aesthetics is unrelated to complexity, difficulty, or skill in creation or performance. Although we might appreciate the craftsmanship that went into making a piece of pottery, or the difficulty in performing a particular piece of music, we may or may not find them aesthetically pleasing. During a visit to Scotland, the English writer Samuel Johnson complained about bagpipe music. On being informed that bagpipes were an extremely difficult instrument to play, Johnson replied, “I wish it was impossible.”

Not only does every culture, as well as every individual, have its own ideas about what is aesthetically pleasing, but aesthetics change within a culture over time. For example, examining European or Chinese art over the past 2,000 years, one finds dramatic changes in both the nature and the complexity of designs. Thus, the idea of what is beautiful is not only subjective but also volatile and ever changing.



## The Pervasiveness of Art

In the urban, industrial world, we usually think of artistic creation as a separate and distinct kind of activity, and artistic objects as a special set of things. We also commonly think of art only in terms of “fine art”: painting, sculpture, music, and dance. If pressed, we might add great architecture, literature, and even poetry. We tend to categorize as art only those things whose sole or basic value is aesthetic. Artists, in turn, are those painters, sculptors, composers, writers, architects, performers, and others who produce these things of aesthetic value. Individuals not directly involved in the production of “art” are commonly seen as merely the audience or consumers—people who buy, see, and hear art.

The notion that art is a conceptually separate realm of social and cultural existence is not found among all peoples. As anthropologists have long noted, Native American peoples had no word for art in their languages. Similarly, other traditional peoples in other parts of the world frequently lack words for art. The basic reason for this is that art is integrated into virtually every aspect of their lives and is so pervasive that they do not think of it as something separate and distinct. The idea of “art for art’s sake” is a recent Western cultural phenomenon that in

some ways both distracts and diminishes the reality of human creative expressions. If we define art broadly, then it permeates virtually every aspect of our lives. All of us search for and attempt to create that which is aesthetically pleasing and, thus, we are all “artists.” Creative artistic expressions are found in even the most mundane and commonplace acts of the daily lives of all peoples. Consider, for example, three behaviors that most of us think of as “mundane” rather than “artistic”: dressing for the day, residing in a particular place, and eating.

We begin the day by ornamenting our bodies. From among our clothes, we make choices about what to wear based on colors and styles appropriate for the day’s events. We make choices on how to wear our hair and even the color of our hair. We may paint our faces and further adorn our bodies with jewelry of varying kinds, worn on our fingers and arms, around our necks, in our ears, noses, and—in recent years—other parts of our bodies. Some of us have our bodies permanently decorated with tattoos. By these everyday acts, we are artists, attempting to enhance the aesthetic qualities of our persons by making ourselves a work of art. Through these acts, we are also adept communicators of messages about ourselves; through hair, makeup, dress, jewelry, and other ways of adorning our bodies, we present to the public certain images of ourselves.

Consider your home. In finding or building a place to live, we don’t just look for something that will meet our physical needs; aesthetic appeal also plays an important role. We alter our homes by changing walls, adding rooms, remodeling the bathroom or the kitchen, and repainting everything in different colors inside and outside. We decorate the inside with furniture, rugs, paintings, posters, mirrors, and a host of knickknacks and smaller things. If we have a yard, we may remove or add trees, shrubs, flower beds, and fences. Even temporary apartment and college dormitory dwellers try to make a place their own. Although some of these additions and changes may be of utilitarian value or need, most serve to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the place where we live.

Finally, think about mealtimes. Whether we eat food raw or cooked, boiled, baked, fried, hot, or cold, and whether we season it with salt, pepper, garlic, or other herbs and spices, we are attempting to create something pleasing to our sense of taste. Our quest for new and exciting ways of preparing food seems endless, giving rise to the steady flow of new cookbooks from publishers. Nor is eating food a purely utilitarian act. We set the table and arrange the repast in bowls and on plates, which have usually been purchased for their aesthetic appeal. In our food preparation and serving, we attempt

These men in Morocco are producing traditional pottery.



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to create something that is appealing to both the palate and the eye. (Chinese, incidentally, are far more conscious of this artistic quality of food than are most North Americans.)

Even in our daily lives, then, we attempt to immerse ourselves in the aesthetic. The search for the aesthetic is reflected in the appearance of our persons, our homes, and our meals, as well as in our places of worship, recreation, and work. Much of our day is filled with music, song, dance, drama, comedy, literature, and sports, which we listen to, participate in, and sometimes create. Art is a cultural universal. But beyond this, the artistic impulse is seen in the everyday lives of individual human beings, for we are all both producers and consumers of art.



## Forms of Artistic Expression

Although art permeates all aspects of human activity, from clothing and furniture to music and theater, space constraints do not permit us to discuss all these diverse forms of artistic expression. For this reason, we limit our discussion to certain categories: body arts, visual arts, and performance arts.

**body arts** Artificial artistic enhancement or beautification of the human body by painting, tattooing, scarification, or other means.

## Body Arts

People around the world are highly creative in altering their physical appearance. Almost anything that can be done to the body is probably being done or has been done in the past. For convenience, we focus on the **body arts** of physical alterations, body painting, and tattooing and scarification.

### Physical Alterations

In most societies, people attempt to physically alter their bodies. Head and body hair is treated in many different ways. In Western societies, hair is styled and often artificially colored. Some people shave their head, their beard, and even their legs and armpits. Others let their beard and mustache grow and style them in various ways. Still others, particularly middle-aged men, attempt vainly to have replacement hair grow on the top of their head. In most Western societies, these actions are mainly a matter of fashion or personal taste; In other societies, such actions may have deeper cultural meanings.

In parts of Africa, a woman's status—for example, whether she is unmarried or married, or is a mother or a widow—is indicated by her hairstyle. Among the Hopis, adolescent girls of marriageable age wear their hair in a large whorl on each side of the head, creating the so-called butterfly hairstyle. After marriage, they wear their hair long and parted in the middle. Children among the Osage had their hair cut in patterns indicating their clan membership.



Wearing beards is not always a matter of personal taste and fashion. In many societies, such as Hasidic Jews, Mennonites, Amish, some Muslim sects, and Sikhs, wearing a beard is an act of religious belief. In the ancient world, social status was frequently associated with beards. In Egypt, only the nobility were allowed to wear beards. Not only did noblemen wear beards, but women of the nobility frequently wore artificial beards as well to indicate their social rank. In contrast, in ancient Greece, only the nobility were allowed to be clean shaven; men of commoner status had to let their beards grow.

Hair alterations are usually reversible because hair will grow back. Other parts of the body are altered permanently. Cranial deformation or head shaping has been and is still widely practiced among the peoples of the world. The skull of a baby is soft and, if the baby's head is bound, the shape of the skull can be permanently changed, flattening the back and the forehead or lengthening the head. In parts of France, cranial deformation was virtually universal until the eighteenth century. A baby's face was tightly wrapped in linen, resulting in a flattened skull and ears. In the Netherlands, babies once wore tight-fitting caps that depressed the front portion of the skull. The elite classes of the ancient Andean civilizations elongated the skull, as did the ancient Egyptians. Some peoples of central Africa bound the heads of female babies to create elongated skulls that came to a point in the back.

Some peoples permanently altered other parts of the body as well. In China, the feet of female children of high-status families were bound at the age of 5 or 6 to deform the feet and keep them small. Not only were small feet considered attractive, but foot binding was practiced as a visible indication that the family was sufficiently wealthy that its women did not have to do much physical labor. At the age of 5 or 6, girls among the Karen Padaung of Myanmar (Burma) have brass rings placed around their necks. As they grow older, more rings are added so that by the time they reach adulthood, their shoulders have been pressed down making their necks appear longer. In Western societies, plastic surgeons alter physical appearance by changing the shapes of the eyes, nose, mouth and jowls, or by increasing or decreasing the size of breasts, lips, thighs, hips, and waistlines.

The most widespread form of physical alterations to the body is the piercing of some part of the body for the attachment of ornaments. Ear piercing is probably the most common and wide spread. One or more small holes are pierced in one or both ears for the attachment of metal ornaments or feathers. However, some groups—such as the Maya, Aztecs, and many other Native American societies—cut open and stretch their ear lobes so they could

insert decorated clay, wood, stone, or metal ear spools up to two or more inches in diameter.

In parts of Africa and among some Native American peoples, holes were cut in either the lower and upper lips or both and were expanded so that large lip plugs, up to 3 inches in diameter, could be inserted. Sometimes, only women wore these disks, other times only men, and in some cases both. More extreme are nasal septum piercing found in Native America, Africa, and Oceania. In some cases, nose rings in gold or brass are inserted through the opening while others inserted bone, tusk, or shell ornaments or feathers.

Today, the widest range of body piercings is found in North American and Europe. Not only do many individuals have ear, nose, and lip piercings—some have piercings in their tongues, eyebrows, nose bridges, breasts, and pubic areas as well.

### *Body Painting*

Painting is a less drastic and a temporary way of changing an individual's appearance. Some peoples paint only their faces, while others paint almost their entire bodies. In some cases, body painting has religious significance and meaning; in other cases, it is purely secular, designed to enhance the person's physical appearance. Many peoples in Papua New Guinea cover their faces and limbs with white clay when a relative or important person dies, as a sign of mourning and respect for the deceased. The aboriginal peoples of Australia painted their bodies with red and yellow ochre, white clay, charcoal, and other pigments. During rituals, individuals were painted with elaborate designs covering most of the body. The colors and designs were standardized and had symbolic meaning. Ritual specialists who knew these designs did the painting for religious ceremonies. Outside of ritual contexts, for many Australian peoples, body painting was a secular and daily activity, performed by family members on one another. Individuals were free to use whatever colors and designs pleased them, so long as they were not ritual designs.

Among the most famous body painters are Nuba of the Sudan. Nuba body painting serves to note the individual's age, kin group, and ritual status as well as enhancing their appearance by emphasizing their physical strength and health. Starting at about age 5, girls paint their bodies completely in either red or yellow ochre. They continue painting until the beginning of their first pregnancy. Although some men just paint their bodies in black, others paint their bodies in elaborate designs using a range of contrastive colors. Although all men paint their bodies, young men between the ages of about 14 and 25 are the most active. Unless they are involved in some seasonal

Notice the ways the clothing and jewelry of these Maasai women serve to enhance their appearance.



agricultural tack, they paint a new design on their body every day or two. This painting frequently requires an hour or two of work. To prepare their bodies, they shave off all of their body hair, including the eyebrows and pubic hair, since virtually all parts of their bodies may be painted. Some designs are nonrepresentational, bars and bands, others are representational, usually of animals. New designs may also be incorporated. In their body painting, Nuba men attempt to achieve both balance and symmetry.

### *Tattooing and Scarification*

Tattooing and the related practice of scarification are widespread. Tattoo designs, achieved by etching and placing a colored pigment under the skin, have been practiced by diverse peoples. When the skin is too dark for tattooing designs to be seen, people may use scarification, the deliberate scarring of the skin to produce designs on the body.

Tattooing has a long history as an art form. It was practiced by the ancient Egyptians as well as by the ancient Scythians, Thracians, and Romans in Europe. The ancient Bretons, at the time of the Roman conquest, were reported to have had their bodies elaborately tattooed with the images of animals. In the fourth century A.D., when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, tattooing was forbidden on religious grounds. Tattooing virtually disappeared among European peoples

until the eighteenth century, when it was discovered in the Pacific and Asia by sailors and reintroduced to Europe as purely secular art.

Robert Brain noted an important difference between body painting and tattooing and scarification: Paint is removable, whereas tattooing and scarification are indelible and permanent. As a result, tattooing and scarification are usually associated with societies in which there are permanent differences in social status. In complexity of designs and parts of the body tattooed, peoples differed. Among some people, tattooing was limited to a few lines on the face, chest, or arms. For others, complex designs covered most of the body from the face to the legs. In some cases, every adult had some tattoos; in other societies, only certain individuals had tattoos. The significance and meaning of tattoos varied, but most had socioreligious significance. The more fully tattooed an individual was, the higher the social status.

The adornment of the body by tattoos is most elaborate in the scattered islands of Polynesia. In fact, the word *tattoo* itself is Polynesian. The word, like the practice of tattooing sailors, came into use as a result of the voyages of Western explorers and whalers in the seventeenth and later centuries. Tongans, Samoans, Marquesans, Tahitians, the Maori of New Zealand, and most other Polynesian peoples practiced tattooing, which everywhere was connected to social distinctions such as class or rank, sex, religious roles, and specialization. Polynesian peoples

The Nuba men of Sudan are widely known for their elaborated body painting.



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are all historically related, so it is not surprising that marking the body with tattoos is found on almost all islands, albeit to different degrees and with somewhat different styles.

Many Maori had large areas of their bodies covered with tattoos, which could be on the torso, thighs, buttocks, calves, and, most notably, the face. Skilled tattoo artists used several instruments to incise the curvilinear patterns characteristic of most Maori tattoos. One was a small chisel made of bone and etched into the skin with a hammer. Apparently, no anesthetic was used to relieve the pain and, in fact, tolerating the pain of the procedure may have been part of its cultural significance. To make pigment, several kinds of wood were burned for their ashes. After the artist made the cuts, pigment was rubbed into the wounds to leave permanent markings. The most skilled tattoo artists were rewarded with high prestige and chiefly patronage, and their craft was in such high demand that they traveled widely over New Zealand's two huge islands.

Both Maori men and women wore tattoos, although men's bodies were more thoroughly covered. For both sexes, tattoos were seen not merely as body ornamentation or expression of one's personal identity. Having tattoos brought certain privileges. Men who did not undergo tattooing could not build canoe houses, carve wood, make weapons, or weave nets. Untattooed women could not help in the gardens with sweet potatoes, the Maori staple vegetable crop.

Maori facial tattoos, called *moko*, have special importance. Women were tattooed on the lips and chin, often near the time of their marriage. Male facial tattoos were designed by splitting the face into four fields—left versus right of the nose, and upper versus lower at roughly eye level. *Moko* were basically symmetrical on the vertical axis, with curvilinear designs on the forehead and eyebrows, cheeks, and mouth regions. In many cases, virtually the whole male face was tattooed. Not just any *moko* design could be worn by just any male; designs were related to factors such as hereditary status, place of birth, and achievement in battle. Social restrictions thus were placed on the wearing of facial tattoos, suggesting they were important symbols of group identity and personal achievement. North Americans might see echoes of their own styles of clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, and other personal ornamentations in Maori and other Polynesian tattoos.

On other Polynesian islands, tattooing was similar to the Maori in broad pattern but varied in detail. In Samoa, for instance, a group of boys was tattooed together on the hips and thighs in their early teens, accompanied by much ceremony. The primary recipient of the tattoo was the son of a high-ranking chief, and other boys participated to share his pain and, therefore, publicly show their respect and loyalty. Supposedly, Samoan women disdained men as sexual partners if they did not have tattoos. Traditionally, Samoan girls received tattoos only on the backs of their knees, which they were not



supposed to reveal to others. It is interesting that in Samoa, greater and more elaborate male tattoos were connected to different sexually based biological functions. There was a saying:

The man grows up and is tattooed.  
The woman grows up and she gives birth.  
(Milner 1969, 20)

According to one interpretation, voluntary tattooing gives pain to men just as childbirth causes pain to women. Perhaps the male experience of pain by tattooing is connected to Samoan women's contempt for tattooless men.

In all of Polynesia, it was the people of the Marquesas whose bodies were most covered by tattoos. The highest-ranking chiefs had tattoos on even the soles of their feet. Alfred Gell argues that this relatively thorough covering of the body in the Marquesas wrapped the body in images in order to protect it from spiritual dangers. Gods and spirits were not tattooed; tattoo images protected the human body from spiritual harm.

Decorating the body by cutting and creating scars, or scarification, is more limited than tattooing among the world's peoples. Like tattooing, scarification is practiced for numerous reasons. Depending on the culture, both men and women may be scarred. Sometimes the scarred design is on the face; in other cases, the chest, breast, back, and even the legs and arms may be elaborately covered with such designs. Sometimes scarification forms part of the puberty rite or some other initiation rite. Among the Nuer of southern Sudan, a series of horizontal cuts is made on the foreheads of men who have completed male initiation rituals. These cuts symbolically mark and communicate a young man's maturity and courage. After the cuts scarify, the scars become permanent symbols of Nuer manhood.

## Visual Arts

**Visual arts** are produced from material, tangible objects, so they are part of the material culture of a people. They may be religious or secular in meaning and use. Usually, they are permanent in that they are meant for long-term use, but sometimes they are created for one-time use only and then destroyed. Visual arts encompass a wide range of basketry, ceramics,

textiles, clothing, jewelry, tools, paintings, masks, and sculpture, to name only a few examples. Metal, wood, stone, leather, feather, shell, paper made of fibers, pigments, and other materials are used in their creation. The two main factors that transform a material item into a visual art are form and ornamentation.

### Form

The physical form or shape of an object is a reflection of its utilitarian function, the materials available, the technical knowledge and skill of the person producing it, and the general lifestyle of the society. Nomadic or seminomadic foraging and pastoral people often produce items that are lightweight and easily transportable. One might think the visual arts of nomadic or seminomadic people are "less refined" than those of more settled peoples. But Inuit peoples of northern latitudes precisely carved small art objects out of soft soapstone and decorated many of their portable tools with figures of animals. Shields and hides were elaborately painted among many nomadic peoples of the American plains. Plains Indians heavily decorated their clothing and moccasins with shells and beadwork, thus allowing people to carry their art along with them. Native Americans of the western United States, especially the Southwest, used pigment to paint or hard stones to etch images of animals, celestial objects, people, mythological beings, and other things on rocks. The prehistoric people who created these images might have moved according to the season, but their art was stationary and long lasting. Today, we know these images as pictographs and petroglyphs, also called rock art.

Rock seems like a difficult object to use as a canvas, but the world's peoples have used other unusual materials as well, including sand (as we shall see later). Of course, the availability of wood, stone, clay, hides, and other natural materials does influence what people can create and how. The kinds of tools the artist uses to paint, etch, or sculpt are also important influences on the final artwork. Metal tools have advantages over stone tools in giving artistic form to a raw material. Peoples also differ in their technical knowledge of how to work stone or wood, and how to model clay or metals.

Within these natural and technical limitations, the form of an object is the result of the interplay of utilitarian function and aesthetic style. The function/style debate has long interested archaeologists. Prehistoric stone tools display a bewildering variety of forms. In North American archaeology, extensive typologies have been created to classify projectile point types, which differ in size, relative length and width, and shape (straight, concave,

**visual arts** Arts produced in a material or tangible form, including basketry, pottery, textiles, paintings, drawings, sculptures, masks, carvings, and the like.

convex, or even serrated). Some are unnotched; others are notched on the bases or sides. Many of these differences are undoubtedly related to function, but others seem to be purely stylistic. Great variability is also present in the vessel shapes and decorations of another archaeological favorite, pottery. Pottery vessels vary tremendously from one group to another, as well as within the same group of people over time.

One does not have to look at peoples remote in time or space to see that the form of an object that has utilitarian purposes is part of the artistic expression of a people. Look at something as mundane and “functional” as the legs of tables and chairs in our own culture. The legs can be straight or tapered, or round, square, or rectangular. The table may have a pedestal base. All are equally functional; they keep the seat or the top off the floor. The differences are a question of aesthetics, not of function. Thus, the physical form of an object may be part of its aesthetic appeal; however, it is sometimes difficult to determine where function ends and the aesthetic begins.

### Ornamentation

Ornamentation is design added to the physical form of an object. Humans are highly creative in developing ways of adding ornamentation to material items. Ornamental designs may be woven or carved into an object. They may be painted, incised, molded, or sewn onto an object. Or a combination of these techniques may be used to decorate.

In basketry and textiles, designs are commonly woven onto the item during its construction. For baskets, different colors of plant fibers, either natural or artificially dyed, are used for the designs. The same is true in the weaving of textiles, for which different colored yarns are used. Not all textile designs are created using fibers of contrasting colors, however. By using various techniques, weavers may create different designs in a single color.

Carving refers to creating a design by removing parts of the original form. Wood, stone, clay, ivory, shell, and bone may have carved designs. An object may be carved in three dimensions so that the form itself becomes the design, as in a piece of sculpture. Or the form of the object will remain the same, with only shallow relief carving of a design on the surface.

Painting is certainly one of the easiest and most versatile methods of ornamenting an object. It is possibly the oldest method of ornamentation; European cave paintings are at least 20,000 years old. All one needs to paint is a range of colors. To make colored pigments,

a variety of different materials may be mixed with water, oil, or fat, such as charcoal, plant materials, and natural mineral pigments. Paintings can be applied to wood, stone, clay, textiles, paper, or leather. Paintings can be applied to flat surfaces, such as cave walls, exposed rocks or cliff walls, wooden furniture, or canvas. They may be made on round or irregular surfaces, such as pottery, masks, and sculpture.

Incising consists of decorating an object by scratching lines into the surface. Like painting, incising appears to be one of the earliest ways of adding designs to an item. Incising is most commonly used on ivory, bone, and shell. In these cases, the scratched lines are frequently accentuated by adding some type of colored pigment, usually black or a dark color, so one can more readily see the design itself. Incised designs are also occasionally used for decorating clay pots and leather.

Designs on ceramics and metal are commonly modeled by raising certain areas above the surface. There are two ways in which this form of ornamentation can be accomplished. One is by making additions to the object after the surface area is finished. In pottery, for example, designs may be formed by placing little balls or coils of clay on the surface after the body of the pot has been formed. A similar technique is sometimes used in adding designs to metal items, as when metal wires shaped into designs are welded to the surface. More commonly, though, molds are created with designs carved into the surface area. Clay can be forced into these molds, or metal poured into them. After the object is removed from the mold, the design areas stand out as raised areas on the object surface.

Sewing is often used to add ornamentation to cloth or leather. Glass, bone, or shell beads may be sewn onto an item, forming designs, as on moccasins or clothing. Designs may be created by sewing with various colored threads of hair, plant fiber, quills, or metal, or by sewing different colors of fabrics together, as in a patchwork quilt.

This discussion has only touched upon some of the ways in which peoples add ornamentation to and create design on objects. When it comes to ornamenting objects, humans are highly creative. When most people think of artistic creativity, they think of the artist as creating a novel object (e.g., a unique drawing or sculpture) using some medium (e.g., paper or wood). Looking in broad cross-cultural perspective, we see that humanity as a whole has also been enormously creative not only in its styles but also in its techniques of ornamentation and in some of the surprising materials used.

The artistic tradition of the Osage of the central United States was, and still is, distinctly different from art in Western societies. Not only was Osage art fully integrated into the everyday material culture of the community, but it was also an expression of their religious beliefs. Even by Native American standards, the Osage were extremely religious. Religion governed virtually every aspect of their lives and their behavior. The Osage believed that everything in the universe was a creation as well as a manifestation of a great invisible force that they called Wah-kon-tah. Collectively, the visible universe was the tangible expression of Wah-kon-tah. Thus, the more one understood the visible universe, and the meanings and purposes of every type of animal, bird, plant, and other nature phenomenon, the more one understood this great mysterious and controlling force. Of course, the Osage realized that no one could ever fully understand the universe in all of its complexity. Thus, no humans could ever fully understand Wah-kon-tah. From their observation of the world about them, the Osage did come to understand certain things. Everything created by Wah-kon-tah was born and would eventually die. Everything created by Wah-kon-tah passed through the stages of birth, maturity, old age, and death. This was true for all animals, plants, birds, humans, and even natural phenomena. It was seen in the passing of the year, in spring, summer, fall, and winter. This was true individually as well as collectively. Someday even the Osage, like all other peoples, would disappear.

Many of the things created by Wah-kon-tah were blessings that had been bestowed on humans for their use. The sun and the associated fire gave warmth and comfort to humans. Certain animals and plants could be used for food and nourishment. The skins of certain animals and the bark, wood, and/or fibers of certain trees or plants could be used for clothing, shelter, and other material wants. Still other plants could be used to heal the sick. Everything created by Wah-kon-tah was for a purpose. Wah-kon-tah did not reveal the purposes of these creations to humans. Humans were unique among Wah-kon-tah's creations in that only they possessed *wa-thi'-gethon*, the power to search with the mind. Thus, humans were responsible for studying the universe about them in a never-ending search to gain ever-greater knowledge of the meanings and purposes of all of Wah-kon-tah's creations. Wah-kon-tah also bestowed on humans the ability to take their knowledge and use it to create new things.

So, endowed with the power to reason and to create, humans were responsible for securing for themselves the continued blessings of Wah-kon-tah. The greatest of these blessings were children, indicative of Wah-kon-tah's will that they as a people would continue to live. To this end, the Osage consciously structured every aspect of their lives and behavior in a manner that showed

respect for Wah-kon-tah. Just as all things created by Wah-kon-tah had purpose and meaning, so it had to be with them. Everything they did had to have purpose and meaning, with the ultimate goal of receiving Wah-kon-tah's continued blessings.

Based on their observation of the universe, the Osage noted two main divisions: the sky and the earth. The sky was the source of life, the father, and the earth was the nourisher of life, the mother. All living things existed in a narrow lens between earth and sky, which they called the *hoe-ga*, or snare. The countless other creations, animals, birds, plants, and other natural phenomena of Wah-kon-tah were associated with either the earth or the sky. Based on this cosmic model, the Osage organized their life as a symbolic mirror image of the cosmos. The basic unit was the clan, which symbolically represented a portion of Wah-kon-tah's creations. Collectively, nine of these clans, acting together symbolically, represented the forces of the sky, while the other 15 clans collectively symbolized the earth. All marriages had to be between a member of a sky clan and a member of an earth clan, with the children belonging to the clan of their father.

The village structure was modeled after the cosmos, with each village having two chiefs, a sky chief and an earth chief. The houses of the sky clan families were placed in a specific clan order along the north side of an east–west street. The houses of the earth clan people were placed in a specific clan order along the south side. The street itself symbolized the path of life, the passage of the sun from east to west, and the *hoe-ga* or snare. Rituals were organized following the same model; priests of the sky clans sat in a precise order on the north, while earth clan priests sat on the south.

Every morning before sunrise, the people of the village would arise and greet the sun with prayers. This ritual was repeated at noon and at dusk. Their lives were organized as one continuous prayer for Wah-kon-tah's blessings. Warfare, hunting, planting, harvests, marriage, death, and the naming of children were all structured as religious rituals.

Everything created by Wah-kon-tah had meaning and purpose, and thus it had to be with all of the material items used in their daily lives and rituals. Every animal, bird, shellfish, and plant had its own behavioral characteristics; bears, mountain lions, and eagles were powerful in different ways; otters could swim; wolves were tenacious; hawks were courageous; pelicans and shellfish lived for a long time; cedar trees did not “die” in the winter like other plants. The hides, feathers, shells, bones, wood, or bark of these and other animals, birds, and plants symbolically represented specific qualities of Wah-kon-tah. Colors also had meanings; red and white as in the sun and fire were colors of birth and life; black as in the night, charcoal, and the fur of the black bear was the color of death and destruction; blue as in the sky on a cloudless day was the color of peace and tranquility; and green as in the cedar tree in winter was the color of everlasting life.



Form and designs also had meanings. A disk shape or design was the form of the sun and thus life. A design divided with each side the mirror image of the other represented the sky and earth balanced as in the universe. A line with four lines descending from it was the *hoe-ga*.

Every object created by the Osage consisted of a number of different elements, raw materials, color, and form and/or designs. Each of these elements had a specific symbolic meaning. All objects consisted of several elements, each with its own symbolic meaning, which collectively gave meaning and purpose to the object. Ritual items were the most symbolically complex. A good example of symbolism in Osage art is found with the staff used in the Osage peyote church meetings.

Osage peyotism is an Osage form of Christianity. Established at the turn of the twentieth century, it replaced the traditional religion while retaining much of the traditional symbolism. Unlike other forms of peyotism, each Osage meetinghouse has a permanent concrete altar in the middle of the floor, and a set of ritual interments that have been consecrated for use in that specific church. The most important of these interments was the staff or *mon*, a word that means “arrow.” This staff consists of a straight wooden pole about 4 feet long. At the base end, it is carved into a four-sided arrow point. On the top is a crown of eagle and hawk feathers. Attached to the staff are “drop feathers,” a narrow strip of otter skin, a narrow strip of opossum hide, and a string of bells. When not in use during the meeting, the staff stands upright in a hole at the head of the altar. During the singing, the staff is passed in a clockwise direction from singer to singer. Each singer holds the staff in one hand while he sings.

Every aspect of the staff has multiple symbolic meanings. Each part has a distinct meaning; however, in association with other parts, new composite meanings are created. The staff in its entirety is symbolic of the ideal man. The upright feather crown, like a war bonnet, and the downward dropping scalp feathers, such as men wear in dancing, mean that this man is “Indian.” Some say that the staff represents Jesus Christ, the ideal man, clothed as an “Indian.” The arrow point at the end not only gives the staff its name, *mon* or arrow, but also introduces another dimension to this symbolic man. Arrows had traditionally been used in

both war and hunting. The arrow in the context of the staff introduces the symbolic meanings of spiritual protection and nourishment. The symbolic meaning of nourishment is further enhanced by the carving of the staff out of the wood of a tree that bears fruit, and is thus a source of food. The fact that the wood is from a deciduous tree adds the symbolism of death (loss of leaves in the fall) and rebirth (new leaves in the spring). The feathers add still another dimension to the *mon*. Among all creatures, birds fly in the air and thus come closest to the life-giving powers of the sun. As a result, feathers are spiritually pure and serve to guard one or cleanse one of evil. The fact that there are both eagle and hawk feathers is also of symbolic importance. The eagle was a symbol of power, and the hawk was considered the most courageous of birds. Even a small hawk will attack a large bird in defense of its nest.

Together, the eagle and the hawk symbolized the ideal man as both powerful and courageous. The otter is an animal much admired. At home on the land as well as in the water, it moves swiftly and is protective of its young. The otter in its swiftness symbolized the ability to avoid evil and protection. The opossum is a clean animal, pure in its habits. It can also feign death. Thus, the strip of opossum hide conveys the meaning of purity as well as death and rebirth. When the staff is moved, the bell will tinkle, like the sound of raindrops, symbolic of the life-giving rain. Just as the universe consists of land, water, and sky, so symbolic elements of land, the wood and the hides; water, the otter and the bells; and the sky, the bird feathers, are brought together in the construction of the staff. The staff was thus a symbolically constructed, Christ-centered universe, emphasizing the qualities of purity, safety, courage, power, and death and rebirth. Finally, the ordered movement of the staff during the ceremony was symbolic of an ever-moving, changing universe. A traditional Osage ritual involved first the symbolic creation of the universe and then putting it in motion through the use of ritual objects, song, movements, and other acts. Their peyote church ceremonies were structured in the same manner.

To the Osage everything had to have meaning and purpose. Everything in the universe was a creation of Wah-kon-tah. Thus, everything was sacred. The Osage, like all humans, had the abilities to alter and change material objects to meet the special needs of humans. To work properly, however, these changes had to be in accordance with the meanings and purposes that Wah-kon-tah had given to the objects they used.



© Courtesy Thomas Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa

Osage peyote staff.

SOURCE: Bailey, Swan, Nunley, and StandingBear (2004)

### *Art of the Northwest Coast: An Example of Style*

In visual arts, some two-dimensional image (e.g., a painting or drawing) or three-dimensional form (e.g., a sculpture or mask) is created. Cultures vary in many ways in their visual arts: the themes or subjects portrayed, the purposes of the artwork, the relationship between the artist and the public, and so forth.

Stylistic conventions are an important variation. In visual arts, stylistic symbolism may be especially important because artists in many cultures are not especially concerned with realistic portrayals of people or nature, but use conventional representations understood by themselves and the public. But, even when the intention is a realistic portrayal, symbolic representation may be necessary. In a painting or drawing, for example, three-dimensional reality is portrayed on a two-dimensional surface, and the stylistic conventions of different cultures may handle this problem of representation in various ways.

The art of some of the Native Americans of the Northwest Coast, from southern Alaska to Oregon, is one example of stylistic variation in imagery and two-dimensional representation. Although they were hunters, gatherers, and fishers—rather than cultivators—Northwest Coast peoples were largely sedentary villagers, which was made possible by the abundance and reliability of coastal and riverine food resources, especially fish (see Chapter 6). Their social and political organization included large descent groups, chiefly roles, and hierarchical ranking. Sponsoring the creation of art objects, displaying them, and/or using them in ceremonies were the ways groups and high-ranking people proclaimed their wealth and social position.

Northwest Coast art is famous for its sheer quantity, quality, and style. Many major Canadian and American museums contain substantial collections of masks, wooden sculptures, incised silver jewelry, carved boxes, finely woven blankets, and sometimes larger objects such as “totem poles” and painted housefronts. Animals, humans, and spirits are the most common subjects of the art of these peoples, although many creations represent animal–human–spirit at the same time. Because of the unique style used to represent these subjects, most Northwest Coast art is easily recognizable.

Animals such as beavers, ravens, hawks, frogs, bears, and killer whales were common subjects of the art, but their depiction was not intended to be realistic. Artists created animals by combining design elements representing what was culturally considered their most distinctive body parts. For example, beavers have two large incisors, a scaly (often hatched) tail, a rounded

nose, and forepaws (often holding a stick). Hawks are portrayed by emphasizing their distinctive beak, which is turned backward and often touches the face. Frogs are suggested by wide and toothless mouths. Bears usually are identified by paws with claws and a large and heavily toothed mouth. Images of killer whales have a large toothed mouth, a blowhole, and an exaggerated dorsal fin. Using such conventional design elements, Northwest Coast artists carved animals onto boxes, masks used in a multitude of ceremonies, huge cedar tree trunks representing a group’s or individual’s ancestry (commonly mislabeled “totem poles”), and other three-dimensional objects.

Painters are familiar with the problem of representing the world on flat surfaces. In the Western and many other artistic traditions, three dimensions are represented on two-dimensional surfaces (canvas or paper) by such techniques as relative sizes of images, perspective, and coloration, all intended to create the visual illusion of depth. Northwest Coast artists painted on many two-dimensional surfaces, including the flat sides of boxes and communal housefronts. They also wove representations of animals into blankets and incised lines into bracelets and other metal jewelry. Most often, their work on flat surfaces tried to retain as many as possible of the design elements characteristic of each animal, so that each animal representation would be identifiable. A common technique was to split the animal down the middle and paint profiles on each half of the surface. The result was a representation that distorted the actual shapes of the body and its characteristic parts, but retained the elements that conventionally identified the animal.

Yet another stylistic characteristic of Northwest Coast art is the artists’ apparent intolerance of empty spaces. The subject’s body, limbs, and even hands and feet were generally filled in by design elements. Most commonly, curvilinear patterns, stylized eyes, or faces were painted or carved inside body parts. Thus, one frequently observes a face on an animal’s torso or an eye pattern on a leg joint.

Although meaningful cross-cultural studies of visual arts are difficult, comparative studies have been made of stylistic elements found in ornamental designs. Working with the idea that art reflects the creator’s view of society, John Fischer studied the use of stylistic elements in 28 different societies around the world. He divided the societies on the basis of their degrees of social equality and inequality (see Chapter 13), thinking that the artistic expressions of egalitarian (primarily foraging) societies would differ from those of socially stratified (primarily intensive agricultural) societies. He examined the stylistic elements in terms of their relative



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Along the Northwest Coast, houses were elaborately decorated with designs that were symbolic of the family and its heritage. This Tlingit house is in Ketchikan, Alaska.

complexity, use of space, symmetry, and boundedness. Fischer found that in egalitarian societies, designs tended to repeat similar, symmetrical elements, with large areas of empty space without enclosures. In more stratified societies, ornamentation was characterized by asymmetrical designs that integrated unlike elements and more fully filled enclosed areas. Fischer interpreted these differences as symbolically reflecting the differing social realities of egalitarian and stratified peoples. Egalitarian peoples tend to live in small, scattered isolated groups, whereas in stratified societies, people live in crowded communities.

## Performance Arts

**Performance arts** encompass music, song, and dance, which use voice, instruments, and movement to delight the senses and communicate. (Theater/drama is also a performance art, but we do not cover it here.) Music, song, and dance are closely interrelated. Dancing is usually to the accompaniment of music, especially rhythms created partly by drumming, clapping, or other kinds of percussion. Singing is often accompanied by instrumental music. Traditional religious ceremonies and pageants commonly integrate music, song, and dance.

An interesting aspect of performance arts is that not only do we watch or listen to such formal performances,

but we also frequently perform them ourselves, in many cases for pure pleasure. We play our own pianos or guitars, we sing in the shower or as we drive, and we take part in social dances. The dual dimension of these art forms has been questioned by some anthropologists. Speaking only of dance, Adrienne Kaeppler has asked, “Is participation in rock and roll in any way comparable to watching ballet? Indeed, should ‘dances of participation’ and ‘dances of presentation’ be classified as the same phenomenon either in our own or other cultures, let alone cross-culturally?” She further questions whether dance performances for the gods should be categorized with social dancing, since their purposes are so different. Similar questions may be asked of music and song, which so often are part of religious rituals. For example, Osage rituals integrated music, song, physical movements (including dance), and theatrical performances to communicate ideas that could not be expressed by words alone. In his studies of Osage religious rituals, Francis LaFlesche argued that these rituals were not merely prayers for supernatural assistance but were educational as well. They were a manner of recording and transmitting the collective knowledge of the society, communicating social messages to the assembled participants. Thus, even within a society, the purposes of performance arts may differ significantly, depending on whether they are religious or secular in nature.

People raised in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition are quite familiar with the many functions of music in religious services. The lyrics of familiar hymns sung to praise God are an integral part of worship rituals. Music also helps to create the mood and sense of reverence for the service and is capable of altering the emotional state of the participants. The shared experience of singing in unison may help draw the congregation together, enhancing what many Christian denominations call their fellowship. In these and other ways, music is important in making the congregation receptive to the messages delivered by the sermon and prayers.

Music and other forms of performance arts are essential to the religious experience for diverse peoples in all parts of the world. The *voudon* (voodoo) religion of the Caribbean heavily incorporates performance arts into religious ceremonies. Followers of *voudon* consider themselves people who “serve the spirits” (*loa*). Many *loa* originated and now live in West Africa, where the

**performance arts** Forms of art such as music, percussion, song, dance, and theater/drama that involve sound and/or stylized body movements.



ancestors of modern Afro-Caribbean peoples were enslaved during the era of the slave trade beginning in about 1500. *Voudon* temples are elaborately decorated with sacred objects, paintings, and symbolic representations of various *loa*, which show the devotion of the worshippers and make the temple attractive to the spirits. Through drumming, music, and energetic dancing, *voudon* worshippers induce the *loa* to leave their spiritual homes and take over the bodies of those who worship them. When the *loa* possess their human servants, the latter speak with the voices of the *loa*, wear the *loa*'s favorite clothing, eat their foods, drink their beverages, and generally assume their identity. Visiting petitioners with problems can ask questions of the worshipper/*loa*, who may answer with directions about what course of action to take. *Voudon* drumming, music, and dancing are so totally integrated into temple rituals that the religion is unimaginable without it.

Among many peoples, music, dance, and other forms of performance arts are essential elements of curing ceremonies. !Kung shamans (see Chapters 6 and 14) use percussion, song, and dance to induce the trance state they believe is necessary for curing sick people. The power to heal, !Kung believe, comes from a substance called *n!um*, which, when heated up by dancing and trance, allows shamans to draw sickness out of people. While women produce a definite rhythm by clapping and singing, the curers circle the fire in short, synchronous dance steps. The experience of music and dance causes the *n!um* inside their bodies to boil up into their heads, inducing trance. In this spiritually powerful state, shamans heal by placing hands on the sick, shrieking at the same time to drive out the affliction.

Music is essential to the healing process among many other African peoples. The Tumbuka-speaking peoples of northern Malawi combine singing, drumming, and dancing in all-night curing sessions. Some kinds of illness are caused by a category of spirits called *vimbuza*. *Vimbuza* are the powerful spiritual energy of foreign peoples and wild animals (especially lions). *Vimbuza* cause various kinds of illness and even death when they possess someone. Tumbuka believe that health requires a balance between bodily cold and hot forces (similar to the bodily "humours" of old Europe). When *vimbuza* enter the body, they create an imbalance between hot and cold forces, leading to the buildup of heat that is culturally interpreted as sickness.

Tumbuka diviner-healers (curers) both diagnose illnesses and direct elaborate healing ceremonies that include drumming, music, and dance. The most essential part of the curing ritual is a shared musical experience

in the context of a group gathering, with every individual present expected to contribute to the music making. Even patients themselves participate in the total experience by singing, clapping, and dancing. As the sick person dances to the accompanying rhythm of drums and music, the heat inside the person's body increases. This leads the possessing spirit to expend excess energy and cool off. By thus restoring the balance between hot and cold, the individual is cured, at least temporarily.

Steven Friedson, who worked among the Tumbuka, briefly summarizes the importance of music and performance to healing among just a few African cultures:

Africans approach healing through music and dance. Azande "witch doctors" eat special divinatory medicines, activated by drumming, singing, and dancing. In northern Nigeria among the Hausa, the sounds of the *garaya* (two-stringed plucked lute) and *buta* (gourd rattle) call the divine horsemen of the sacred city of Jangare to descend into the heads of *boorii* adepts, thus healing the people they have made sick. Similarly, the various *orisha* and *voudon* spirits of the Guinea Coast, called by their drum motto, mount their horses (possess their devotees). The resultant spirit-possession dance, though religious in nature, is in the first instance often a therapy for those afflicted by the same spirits. Spirit affliction is healed through music and dance in Ethiopia and Sudan, wherever *zar* cults occur ... Central, southern, and parts of Equatorial Africa have examples of the *ng'oma* type of healing complex, whose name ... points to the centrality of music in curative rites. (Friedson 1998, 273–274, references in the original deleted)

In the early 1980s, the authors of this book first heard about a medical practice that involves integrating music into the treatment of both biomedical and psychological disorders. At the time, we thought the field now called *music therapy* was a new mode of treatment and a new occupation. As the preceding examples illustrate, many other cultures have long recognized the connection between music and healing and have integrated the performance arts into their treatments.

Like other forms of aesthetic expression, comparative studies of performance arts are difficult and few. Alan Lomax's comparative studies of dance and song rank with the most ambitious. Lomax and his collaborators analyzed film footage of peoples from around the world, comparing their body movements in everyday activities with their dance movements. They found that dance movements were formalized repetitions of



<b>Body Arts</b>	Alterations to the physical appearance of the body, including, but not limited to, physical alterations, painting, tattooing, and scarification
<b>Visual Arts</b>	Material, tangible objects that are part of the material culture of a people, including—but not limited to—basketry, pottery, textiles, clothing, jewelry, tools, furniture, painting, masks, and sculpture
<b>Performance Arts</b>	Arts meant to be heard, seen, or personally performed, including music, song, dance, and theater

the movements found in daily life. Lomax further argued that the form of dance was correlated with the relative complexity of the society.

In his comparative study of songs, Lomax found that differences in song styles were also correlated with societal complexity. The songs of less complex peoples, such as egalitarian foragers, included more vocables (sounds, not words). Words were not enunciated as clearly in their songs, and there was more repetition of vocables and words. The songs of the most complex peoples included fewer vocables, less repetition, and more words, which were more clearly enunciated. Although Lomax's conclusions concerning the correlation between dance and song and relative cultural complexity have been questioned, there are some interesting parallels between his findings and those of Fischer on stylistic elements in ornamental designs.



## Art and Culture

Anthropologists are not interested in art simply for art's sake. As we have already seen with the examples of body, visual, and performance arts, art is embedded in a cultural context. Three of many features of this context are religion, gender, and identity.

### *Secular and Religious Art*

In our discussions of the various forms of art, we mentioned that certain artistic products are sacred and others are not. There are both sacred and secular designs, forms, dances, songs, music, and literature. This division between secular and sacred cuts across many forms of art and across most cultures.

In contemporary industrial society, the greatest artistic energies are expended in the creation of secular art, although such art may at times include religious themes. If, for example, you examine the works of the greatest Western painters, architects, and composers of the last

century, you will find that most of their work is secular. This was not always true. The great art of earlier periods was for the most part concerned with religion, partly because religious and political authorities so often sponsored artists and their creations. The pyramids and great temples of ancient Egypt were related to conceptions of the afterlife and other dimensions of the supernatural world. While visiting pyramids and great statues of the pharaohs, one must remember that the pharaohs were gods on Earth.

In classical Greece, the cradle of Western European artistic traditions, religion was a central focus for most of the greatest artistic accomplishments. The Parthenon in Athens was the temple of Athena. Most of the greatest Greek public statuary depicted gods such as Poseidon, Zeus, Apollo, and Venus. Much Greek drama had strong religious overtones and was associated with the god Dionysus. In Rome, secular art became more prominent. The great buildings were usually palaces and theaters, while public monuments honoring the triumphs of living or recently dead heroes filled Roman cities. In the Middle Ages, religion regained preeminence. The great buildings of the medieval and Renaissance periods were cathedrals, while the greatest artists of the time labored to fill these buildings with frescoes, mosaics, paintings, statuary, and other artistic works as well as music, song, and pageantry dedicated to the worship of God.

The 1700s saw an emphasis on reason and science, the Industrial Revolution, the rise of capitalism, and the beginnings of modern political democracy. Ever since, Western art has become increasingly secular. The largest buildings in our cities are no longer dedicated to religion, but to government, commerce, or athletics. Contemporary painters choose secular subjects, from realistic landscapes and buildings to abstract designs and cans of Campbell's soup. The most illustrious composers and performers today seldom produce or perform religious music, but focus on secular and, at times, even irreligious themes. For those of us who learned our culture in a society dominated by secular

art, it is important to remember that for most peoples and for most of human history, religion and religious art have been preeminent. The most elaborate artistic achievements of a great many peoples are associated with religious ceremonies: visual arts, music, dances, ornamentations, architecture, and their associated mythologies.

We have already discussed examples of the integration of performance arts like music and dance into African healing practices. Another people for whom art—both visual and verbal arts in this case—is part of curing rituals is the Navajo of the American Southwest. In Navajo belief, the most common cause of illness is the loss of harmony with the environment, often because of the person's violation of a taboo or other transgression. When illness strikes and a diagnosis is made, a Navajo "singer" (curer or medicine man) is called on to organize a complex curing ceremony.

In curing ceremonies (and there were traditionally hundreds of such ceremonies), the singer addresses and calls on the Holy People, who are spiritual beings believed by Navajo to have the power to restore sick people to harmony and beauty. Ceremonies usually occur in a hogan (house) at night, and in theory the procedures must be executed perfectly for the cure to work.

For the ceremony, the singer creates images of the Holy People out of sand, called sandpaintings. Navajo sandpaintings are visual representations of the Holy People that are created, used in a single ceremony, and then destroyed. Most sandpaintings are stylized scenes of events involving various Holy People that occurred in the mythological past. Each sandpainting is part of a ceremony that also includes other sacred objects (such as rattles and prayer sticks) and lengthy songs or chants recited by the singer. The songs/chants that are recited over the sandpainting and the patient may last for hours. Most songs/chants tell of the myths depicted in the specific sandpainting.

In their years of learning to become singers, Navajo singers must memorize the lengthy songs and chants they recite over sick people to restore their harmony with the world. Singers also learn to make precise sandpaintings that represent specific mythical scenes and events. To make the images, a singer, usually with the help of his family members and/or apprentices, collects and mixes sand and other materials of various colors, including white, red, yellow, black, and blue, with charcoal, corn pollen, and various plant materials. Pictures are created by carefully dribbling fine grains of sand through the fingers onto the prepared floor of the hogan.

There are literally hundreds of sandpaintings. Most ceremonies involve a combination of many sandpaintings used in association with particular chants. Because some are quite large and enormously detailed, they often take hours to create. But all must be exact representations of the ideal model of the mythical scene or event depicted. The images are stylized drawings of the Holy People, many of whom are depicted with weapons and armor. Most scenes represented in the sandpaintings are from particular myths familiar to the patient and audience.

Sandpaintings are made for the express purpose of inducing the Holy People to come to the hogan where the ceremony is held. The Holy People are attracted by their images in the sandpainting and, once consecrated with pollen, the sand images and the Holy People become one and the same and thus holy. This process of transforming the sand figures into actual spiritual beings is termed *transubstantiation* and is a commonly occurring feature of religious art. The very same idea is found in the Eucharist of the Roman Catholic Church, with the conversion of wine and bread into the "blood and body of Christ." During the ceremony, the patient is seated on the sandpainting itself, which is imbued with the power of the Holy People. The singer completes the transfer of power to the patient when he rubs the patient's body with the sand of the images of the Holy People. After each phase of the ceremony is finished, the sandpainting is destroyed and the sand carefully removed from the Hogan.

Navajo sandpaintings certainly are works of art. Some Anglos who have seen them think it is a shame to destroy such beautiful images that the singers and their helpers have worked so hard to create. But in the context of Navajo beliefs, sandpaintings are made for specific curing ceremonies held for particular patients. That is their purpose—not expressing the singer's creativity, making an artistic statement, celebrating Navajo culture, or publicly displaying the singer's talents. For Navajo, fulfilling that purpose requires that the paintings not be permanent.

Navajo sandpaintings and the singing of curers clearly have strong religious overtones, but the division between their secular and religious purposes is not always clear. If one travels in the Southwest they will see Navajo sandpaintings for sale. Many of these have depictions of the Holy People. However, they have not been consecrated with pollen. They are nothing but sand glued on a board. Religious symbolism is often used to decorate clothing and other secular items.

Religious considerations have other effects on secular art as well, frequently placing limits on secular artistic



expressions. The use of certain types of motifs or themes may be religiously forbidden. The Koran prohibits the use of human images, which are viewed as idolatry. Thus, many Islamic peoples extended this ban to include any pictorial representation of humans or animals. As a result, much of the art of Islamic peoples is devoid of naturalistic representations, focusing instead on elaborate geometric or curvilinear designs. The Shakers emphasized singing and dancing as important parts of their religious services but prohibited the use of musical instruments.

## Art and Gender

Gender differences are often reflected in body, visual, performance, and verbal arts. Colors and designs are sometimes considered male or female, most familiarly reflected in clothing and body decoration. Gender also influences who creates and performs certain types of visual, performance, and verbal arts. The BaMbuti Pygmies of the African rain forest have a ritual performance involving dance and music they call *molimo*. They view the forest as like their parent and, like any parent, the forest looks after its children—themselves. Therefore, when misfortune strikes, it must be because the forest is asleep. To wake up the forest, at night the women and children retire to their huts while the men make *molimo* music. Women are not supposed to know that the *molimo* is just a long, flutelike instrument stored in a local stream, but instead believe it to be some kind of forest animal. (In fact, women seem to know all about the *molimo*.)

As discussed in Chapter 11, men and women are usually involved in the production of different types of material items, and usually the individuals involved in production decorate the items as well. In many cases, the aesthetic qualities of the items are an integral part of the production process itself, as with the shape of a pottery vessel or metal tool, or the design in a blanket or a basket. In other instances, however, decorative arts are separate and distinct from the production of the basic item, and decorative artists may be defined by gender.

Among the Plains Indians, beadwork and quillwork were produced by women. The only men who produced beadwork and quillwork were *berdaches*, men who dressed and acted as women (see Chapter 11). Although both women and men painted hides, there were distinct differences in subject matter. Women painted only geometric designs. The hide containers called *parafleches* used for the storage of food and clothing were made by women and were painted only in geometric designs. Representational designs of people, horses, and other animals and supernatural beings were painted only by men. Tepees and buffalo

robes, though made by women, were painted by either men or women, depending on whether the design was to be geometric (by women) or representational (by men).

Some visual art objects are made for specific rituals or ceremonies. Initiation rites are usually held for only one sex (see Chapter 14). The art produced for them, therefore, is sometimes “sex-specific.” In many cultures of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, long bamboo flutes are played at male initiation ceremonies. Women are not supposed to know about the existence of the flutes. Many initiation ceremonies also include carved and painted masks, supposedly kept secret from women and uninitiated boys.

Performance arts are often carried out during religious ceremonies. Men have historically played the dominant role in most religions. Not surprisingly, in most societies, men dominate the performance arts associated with religion. For example, even though many of the Hopi kachinas (spirits) are female, in traditional kachina dances all dancers, even those impersonating female spirits, are men. In ancient Greek drama, the roles of women were played by men. In the West, women were not allowed to participate in certain performance arts long after they had become secularized. The role of Juliet, in the original production of Shakespeare’s play, was performed by a young boy because women could not be actors in Shakespeare’s time. It was not until the late seventeenth century that women could perform in the English theater.

## Social Functions of Art

Does art exist solely to satisfy the human desire for the aesthetic? Perhaps, but if so, why have humans expended such incredible energy in its creation? Perhaps art also has a critical role in human social life and cultural existence. Through the use of art, people can express their identities as members of particular groups, while at the same time demonstrating their individuality. Through the production, consumption, and use of art, we can express our personal individuality, our group identities (including ethnic affiliation), and even our social status.

### Individuality

Many of us attempt to express our individuality by creating art or displaying art, as shown by the widespread appeal of handmade goods produced by skilled craftspeople. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, the attraction of handmade over machine made goods has been their individuality. This individuality is not solely the result of the differing technical skill of the makers; also, the makers have

consciously tried to make every item unique by varying colors and designs. Thus, if one looks at Oriental rugs, Native American jewelry, pottery and baskets, Maya textiles from Guatemala, or wood carvings from New Guinea, rarely does one find two identical items. If they are identical, it is probably because they were produced for the commercial market.

Similarly, our clothing and houses express our individuality. Even though we usually conform to the norms of our society in clothing styles, most of us abhor uniforms, and thus we enhance our clothes in some manner to make them uniquely ours. In their dwellings, people also attempt to express their individuality. Although all Maori dwellings were carved and painted, different designs and images were used. Today in suburban North America, builders of subdivisions usually vary the houses by using a range of floor plans, building materials, and colors. Many residents of older neighborhoods, though, still think the new subdivisions lack character, style, and individuality.

### Social Identity

As well as displaying our individuality, art is a means of expressing social identity, publicly displaying what kind of person you are or which group of people you identify with. In the 1960s and early 1970s, many young people wore long hair, beads, and baggy clothes decorated with peace signs and upside-down flags. Some traveled the country in old Volkswagen minibuses or school buses that were handpainted in strange colors and designs. The minute you saw them, you knew they were “hippies.” Clothing styles, hairstyles, and other art forms are commonly used to indicate social group identity, from the black leather jackets painted with club emblems of motorcycle gangs to the shepherd crook spears and red sashes of the Cheyenne Dog Soldier society.

A widespread use of art to express social membership has to do with ethnic affiliation. In Chapter 17, we discuss ethnic boundary markers in more detail, but here it is important to note that art is one of the common expressions of ethnic identity. Clothing styles and decoration are important visual markers of ethnic identity. Plaid kilts are markers of Scots as much as beaded clothing and feather headdresses are of Native Americans. A woman in Guatemala wearing a *huipuli* is a Maya. If you see a man wearing a cowboy hat and boots in Europe, you can guess that he is probably an American tourist.

Ethnicity is expressed in more than clothing. The full range of artistic forms—body, visual, performance, and verbal arts—is employed to display one’s ethnic identity. Thus, we speak of ethnic art, ethnic dance, ethnic music,

ethnic songs, ethnic literature, and ethnic foods. Despite our use of the word *ethnic* in such contexts, ultimately, of course, all art is ethnic art because it is associated with a specific ethnic group and everyone is a part of some ethnic group. For various reasons, people value and pay premium prices for the art produced by ethnic groups other than their own.

From an anthropological perspective, much of the multicultural movement in contemporary North America—and particularly in colleges and universities—is really about understanding and appreciating “ethnic” forms of artistic expression. When Anglo-Americans talk about “other cultures,” often they are referring to African, Hispanic, Asian, and other “non-Anglo” Americans. When they “celebrate diversity,” often they are celebrating differences in literature and other forms of verbal art, interpreting graffiti as a legitimate art form, listening to African or Mexican music, eating South Asian or Vietnamese foods, and so forth. Overall, the multicultural movement has had a positive influence on intercultural tolerance and understanding. In fact, multiculturalism is part of what anthropologists have been trying to get across to their students for nearly a century. But perhaps more people ought to realize that appreciating multicultural diversity should mean far more than celebrating diversity in forms of artistic expression.

### Social Status

Finally, relative social status within societies is reflected in the use of art. As discussed earlier, body arts are frequently an indicator of social status. Other art forms also indicate status. In many ranked and stratified societies, the rights to use certain art forms may be the property of families or status groups. Only certain individuals have the right to wear or use particular colors or designs, sing particular songs, dance particular dances, and even tell particular stories. This control over the use or performance of particular artistic expression is a symbolic indicator of individual social status.

Similarly, in contemporary Western society, we use art to demonstrate our relative status. We display our status in our homes, automobiles, furnishings, and clothing, communicating to the world, “Look what we can afford to buy.” We also demonstrate our status in what we hang on our walls, read, listen to, and watch. In our consumption of visual, performance, and verbal arts, the evaluation, of course, is more subjective and difficult to measure. But for many people, opera, ballet, and classical music have higher status than comedy, square dancing, and country and western or rap music. Classical literature has higher status than romance novels, science fiction, and comic books.

The traditional visual arts of different people of the world are integrated into virtually every aspect of life, with some of the most important forms found in the everyday material items they make and use. Depending on the society, these artistic traditions find expression in clothing, pottery, basketry, and other furnishings of their homes. Although these material items may be elaborately decorated, for the most part these items are utilitarian, valued not just for their beauty but for their usefulness as well.

In the global economy, all goods and services have to compete for market share. Thus, as people become economically integrated into larger global markets, local traditional handmade goods must compete with mass-produced imported goods. Mass-produced aluminum, tin, ceramic, and plastic pots, pans, kettles, jugs, jars, plates, bowls, and cups compete with locally made pottery, basketry, hide, horn, and wooden items. Machine made cloth, blankets, canvas, plastic sheets, and mass-produced clothing compete with traditional woven textiles, bark cloth, felt, and handmade clothing. Both cost and quality are factors in this competition. For the most part, these imported items are more durable and more useful than locally made goods. Because traditional goods are labor intensive to produce, once a group becomes even marginally involved in a cash economy, the handmade items are no longer competitive in terms of costs. As a result, the global economy is resulting in rapid and dramatic changes in the material culture. Throughout the world, local, traditional, handmade goods are being replaced by mass-produced, machine made items. And, as people stop making their own material goods, many of the artistic traditions associated with making them are disappearing as well.

This is not a new trend. During the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe and North America, the same process occurred as machine made goods rapidly replaced locally made, handcrafted goods. In reaction, the so-called Arts and Crafts Movement emerged in the late nineteenth century, producing handcrafted furniture, pottery, and other goods.

An example of how quickly such a change can occur is found in northern India with the production of Varanasi saris. Varanasi (Banaras), in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, has been a center for textile weaving since the ancient period. Originally, the textiles woven here were cotton. During the Moghal (Muslim) period, however, the local people began weaving in silk and became famous for the production of elaborate brocade saris with intricate designs using various colors of silk and gold and silver thread. Highly valued, usually selling for \$150 to \$1,500 each, these saris have been traditionally prized as wedding gifts for brides and for formal wear for special events throughout northern India.

The production of Varanasi silk saris has been a cottage industry and a livelihood for more than 100,000 weavers

and their families. The vast majority of weavers work either independently in their own homes or in small shops for master weavers. Using only simple foot-powered looms and small punch cards as guides for designs, three weavers work together to produce a sari. The most elaborate of these designs are wedding scenes and royal processions with elephants and carriages. A normal sari is six yards long and takes the weavers 15 days to a month to finish, but saris with more intricate designs may take as long as six months to produce. Sari weavers are highly esteemed artists/craftsmen, despite the fact that they are usually Muslims, *datils* (“untouchables”), or OBC (“other backward castes”), the last being an official legal status in India. The Varanasi weavers have, by Indian standards, traditionally earned reasonable incomes, and many of the master weavers have been relatively wealthy.

In the mid-1990s, the Varanasi weavers began to find it increasingly difficult to sell their saris. Changes in government trade policies allowed the importation of Chinese silk yarn and machine made Chinese silk saris. Not only were the Chinese saris more durable than Varanasi saris, but the Chinese had copied traditional Varanasi designs and their saris were much cheaper. At about the same time, textile mills in Gujarat (western India) and in southern India began to produce machine made printed copies of Varanasi-style saris. To make the situation even more difficult for the Varanasi weavers, Western influences have had an impact on dress styles. Women, particularly in the more prosperous, high-tech regions of India, have adopted a more Western style of dress. As a result, over the last decade, competition from cheaper, machine made saris and a declining demand due to changes in dress styles have resulted in the impoverishment of many of the Varanasi weavers. No longer able to support their families as weavers and lacking any other marketable skills, many have committed suicide; some have become beggars or sell their blood or even their children to wealthy families. Others have joined a mass exodus to other cities to find work as day laborers, or to Gujarat or southern India to work in modern textile mills.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Does an object have to be handcrafted to qualify as art? Human considerations aside, does it really make any difference whether a “Varanasi sari” is entirely machine made in China or Gujarat, as long as it looks the same?
2. Does an object have to be “one of a kind” to qualify as art? Can one speak of mass-produced art?
3. Are the traditional ethnic and regional art forms of the world doomed to disappear? Is a homogeneous global art tradition going to replace them?



## Summary

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**1 Discuss the disagreement over whether art is or is not a cultural universal.** All cultures have artistic objects, designs, songs, dances, and other ways of expressing their appreciation of the aesthetic. The aesthetic impulse is universal, although cultures vary in their ways of expressing it and in the social functions and cultural meanings they attach to it. However, people raised in the Western tradition are inclined to think of art as something set apart from everyday life—as when we use the phrase “fine arts”—yet we all express ourselves aesthetically in many ways, including how we dress, decorate our houses, and eat our meals.

**2 List the various forms of body arts.** People around the world change their bodily appearance by such means as physical alterations, application of body paints, tattoos, and scarification. These decorations of the body are used for a variety of purposes, including beautification, expression of individual or group identity, display of privilege or social position, and symbolic indication of social maturity.

**3 Discuss the different forms of visual arts.** In the visual arts, humankind as a whole has shown enormous creativity in form, style, design, techniques, materials, and many other features. Ornamentation of tools, clothing, basketry, houses, and practically all other material objects is a universal practice.

**4 Discuss the different forms of performance arts.** Performance arts include the use of sound and

movement for both aesthetic and communicative purposes. In pre-industrial cultures, performances of music (including song and percussion), dance, and theater often involve audience participation, as they often do in the everyday lives of people everywhere. Often, performance art is tightly integrated into a people’s spiritual and religious life.

**5 Explain how art is integrated into our religious lives.** Perhaps many forms of art began as “sacred” in that they were connected to the appeal to or worship of spiritual beings. Certainly, the religious elements of artistic expression are important not only in the history of Western art but also in the artistic traditions of people the world over. In their complex curing ceremonies, Navajo singers used both visual arts (sandpaintings) and performance arts (chants/songs) in appealing to the Holy People. Distinguishing “sacred” and “secular” art seems like a simple thing, but objects with religious significance are often used for practical purposes.

**6 Explain how gender, identity, and social status are reflected in art.** Art is connected to other social and cultural elements such as gender, identity, and status. In many societies, certain arts and art forms are associated with women and others with men. Ethnic identity is commonly expressed in art and serves as ethnic boundary markers. Finally, within societies, relative social status is frequently expressed in the consumption of art.

## Media Resources

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**The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center**  
[www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other

material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 16 GLOBALIZATION



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## **The Development of Global Trade**

*European Expansion*

*The World and the Industrial Revolution*

## **The Emergence of the Global Economy**

*The End of Colonialism*

*Free Trade*

*Technological Changes*

## **Globalization: Social and Cultural Effects**

*Population Growth*

*Migration and Inequalities in the Global Economy*

*Multinational Corporations*

*Westernization?*

## **Consequences of Globalization and the Global Economy**



Mumbai, India, with Worli village slum in the foreground, reflects the contrast between poverty and wealth that is one of the consequences of globalization.



## Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn the following:

- 1 Globalization** started with Columbus and has progressed in three different stages.
- 2 The** first stage was the conquest of the Americas and the development of a global trade network involving the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Oceania.
- 3 The** second stage, beginning about 1800 with the Industrial Revolution, gave the European powers military dominance in the world, and allowed for the division of most of Africa, Asia, and Oceania into European Empires.
- 4 The** third and most recent stage is the emergence of an integrated global economy. The three major factors that have allowed for the development of the global economy are the collapse of the colonial empires, the development of free trade, and new technologies.
- 5 Globalization** and the global economy have directly or indirectly resulted in a rapid population growth, economic inequalities and immigration, multinational corporations, and the spread of Western or American cultural influences.

Until the economic recession, which started in 2007, few Americans had given more than passing attention to issues of globalization. During the 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century, the global economy resulted in what appeared as economic prosperity for the United States. We assumed that globalization was bringing or eventually would bring prosperity to the rest of the peoples of the world as well. Since 2007, we have discovered that our “prosperity” was built on ever-increasing debt owed to foreign creditors and that our economic base was eroding.

It was not until the 1980s that the term *globalization* first came into common usage. Today, although we hear and use the term almost daily, we might find it difficult to define. Globalization is not a thing or a product, but rather a process. **Globalization** refers to the worldwide changes that are increasingly integrating and remolding the lives of the people of the world. Most commonly, we speak of the *global economy* and think of globalization primarily in economic terms. Although economic changes are certainly the driving force behind globalization, it is having far more profound effects on our way of life than merely what we eat, what we wear, and how we make our living. It is having an impact on our political, social, and cultural institutions as well.

**globalization** The process of integrating the world’s peoples economically, socially, politically, and culturally into a single world system or community.

Globalization began 500 years ago, with the voyage of Columbus, and has had three stages of development. The earliest stage, the period from about 1500 to about 1800, saw the conquest of most of the Americas and the development of a global trade network, which eventually connected, directly or indirectly, every group of people in the world. The second stage, which started about 1800 with the Industrial Revolution, resulted in European military dominance in world affairs. It was during this period that the great European Empires in Africa, Asia, and Oceania were created. The third stage, which began to develop at the end of World War II, saw the development of global marketing of products and the emergence of an integrated global economy.



## The Development of Global Trade

Before C.E. 1500, the major world regions were relatively isolated from one another. Most contact was limited to societies that occupied adjacent territories. Trade was minimal, and the long-distance trade that existed between Europe and China or Africa seldom involved direct exchange between members of those societies. Trade was managed by intervening groups whose members acted as middlemen. Thus, although more informed Europeans, Asians, and Africans were aware of the existence of the others, their knowledge was extremely limited and rarely based



on firsthand contact. Although innovations in technology and cultural institutions spread from one population center to another, diffusion was slow because there was no direct contact.

Although the terms *Old World* and *New World* are ethnocentric, this distinction is useful from a cultural/historical perspective. The Old World—Europe, Africa, and Asia—did form a unit within which trade and contact, however tenuous and limited, allowed for the spread of technology and institutions, primarily from Asia westward to Europe and Africa. *New World* is a term usually applied only to the Americas, but it could just as well include Australia and most of Oceania because both of these regions were outside this exchange network before 1500. Thus, before European expansion, the world consisted of two broad geographical regions with peoples who for much of their history had developed technologies and lifeways in isolation from one another.

## European Expansion

Prior to the “discovery” of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Europe was not the most developed region of the world. China and the Mogul (Islamic) states of India were the richest economically and politically the most powerful countries in the world. Asia had a total population four to five times that of Europe. The populations of such soon-to-be-imperial powers as England, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands were insignificant in comparison with those of China or the Mogul states. Even the Aztec Empire in Mexico may have had a population equal to the total population of these four European countries.

The advantage that Europeans had over most other peoples was their military technology. Guns, crossbows, iron weapons, armor, and horses gave them significant advantages over the stone-tool military technologies of the peoples of the Americas and Oceania. To a lesser degree, Europeans also enjoyed a military advantage over most peoples of Africa. The same was not true in Asia: On land, European armies enjoyed no technological advantage. Only in naval warfare were the Europeans superior to the Asian states.

These factors influenced the nature of European expansionist policies during the early period and caused the histories of contact with Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania to differ significantly. With few exceptions, such as the conquest of the Americas, European expansion during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries consisted of the development of maritime trade networks. Because this expansion took such different forms from one

region to the next, we examine the history of contact region by region (see Figure 16.1).

### Conquest of the Americas

In 1492, Columbus found a new world inhabited by numerous peoples, who still had only an advanced stone-tool technology. Initially, the Spaniards were disappointed in their new discoveries because they failed to find the immense treasures of the Indies they were expecting. On the island of Hispaniola, where they first settled, there were no vast riches, and Spanish settlers quickly turned their attention to the development of sugarcane plantations and cattle ranches.

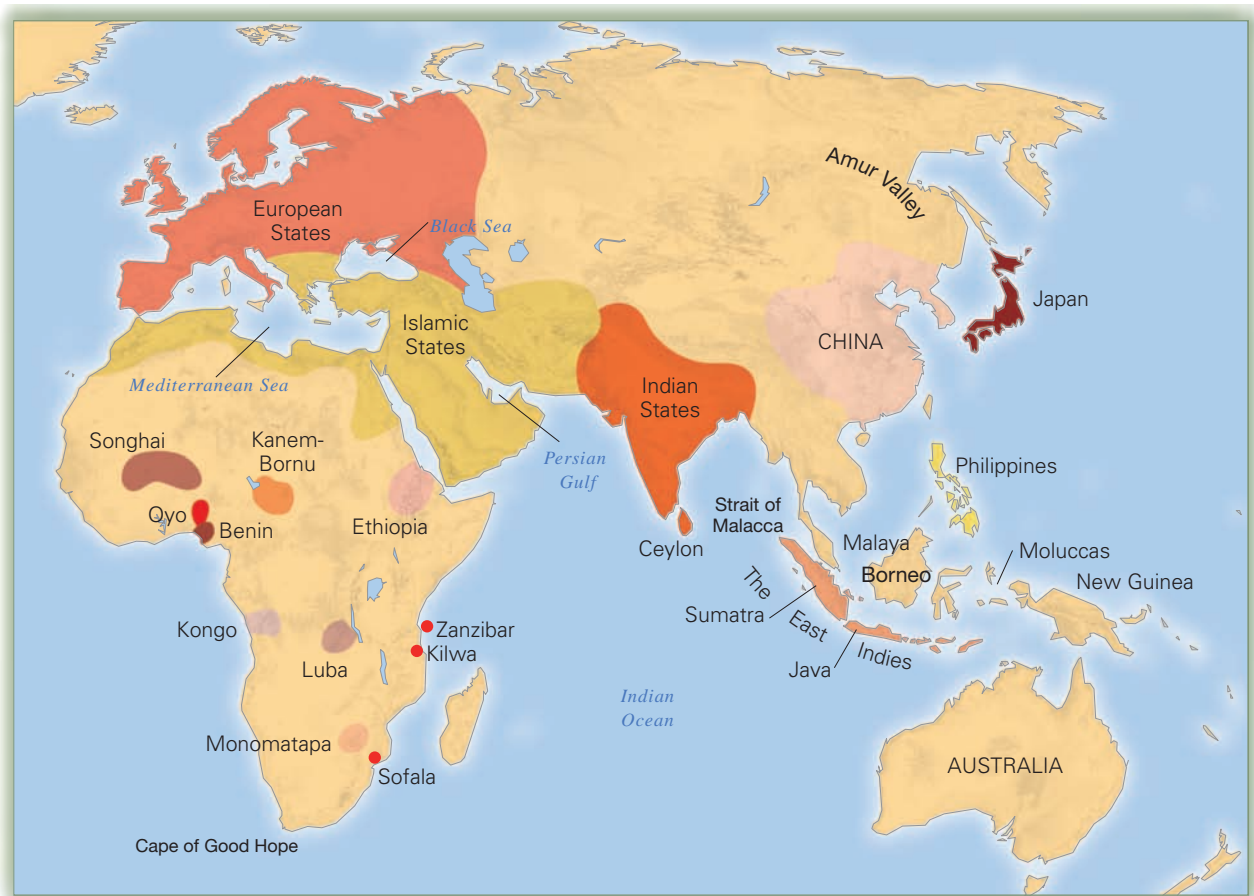
In 1519, the Spanish landed on the coast of Mexico; by 1521, they had completed the conquest of the Aztec Empire. Aztec gold and silver sent back to Spain encouraged the migration of others to search for still more wealth and plunder. Between 1532 and 1534, a Spanish military expedition conquered the Inca Empire and took the wealth of Peru for Spain. By the late 1500s, Spanish expeditions had explored much of the Americas and had located and conquered every major Native American state. In little more than half a century, the Spaniards had conquered the richest and most populous portions of the Americas: the West Indies, Mesoamerica, and Peru.

The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494, divided the non-Christian world between Spain and Portugal. The easternmost part of South America, Brazil, fell into the Portuguese portion. The coastal regions of Brazil were well suited for sugarcane plantations. Starting in 1500, Portuguese settlers began colonizing Brazil, and by 1550, small settlements were scattered along most of the coast.

The Spanish and Portuguese were able to conquer large portions of the Americas in a surprisingly short time. As the Spanish demonstrated in their conquests of the Aztecs and Incas, their military superiority was so pronounced that their small armies numbering in the hundreds were able to vanquish well-organized native armies whose troops numbered in the thousands.

The main period of conquest and territorial expansion had ended by 1600, and Spanish settlers turned their attention to exploitation of the West Indies, Mesoamerica, and Peru, where they developed silver and gold mines, ranches, and plantations. The Portuguese contented themselves with coastal sugarcane plantations in Brazil.

The cultural impact of the Spanish and Portuguese was most pronounced in those regions directly under their control. Existing native political organizations were either replaced or modified and integrated into a colonial government. European technology and livestock



**Figure 16.1** Major States and Regions of Europe, Asia, and Africa (ca. 1500).

were introduced—iron tools, plows, cattle, horses, sheep, and so forth—as existing economic systems were altered to meet European needs. Indian labor was used in the mines and on the plantations and ranches that were developed. Missionaries flooded the Americas seeking converts. Temples were replaced by Christian churches. In some regions, such as Mexico and Peru, native peoples managed to maintain their languages and Indian social and ethnic identity, but even these societies were given a veneer of Christian customs and beliefs. Even Native American peoples beyond direct European control were affected. Old World crops, domesticated animals, and metal tools in limited numbers were diffused to these autonomous peoples. In some regions, the introduction of European metal weapons and animals, such as the horse, revolutionized native societies.

As important as these material elements were in altering Native American culture, they were not the only causes of change. Old World diseases such as smallpox, measles, influenza, bubonic plague, diphtheria, typhus,

cholera, malaria, and scarlet fever were also introduced by early Europeans. Isolated as they had been, the peoples of the Americas had no natural immunities to these diseases. Because these illnesses spread well in advance of European contact, it is impossible to estimate with any exactness the size of native populations before that contact. The massive population decline caused by European diseases is best documented in regions under direct Spanish and Portuguese control. Father Bartolome de las Casas reported that there were 1,100,000 Indians 14 years of age or older on Hispaniola; even the most conservative estimated a native population of 100,000. Regardless of the original figure, by 1535 only 500 Indians were left on Hispaniola. In Mexico, the decline was also severe. One study places the contact population at 25,200,000 in 1519; with a decline to 16,800,000 by 1532; 2,650,000 by 1568; and 1,075,000 by 1605. Although these estimates are open to question, there is no doubt that Native American societies suffered severe population declines after European contact.

Conversion of native peoples to Christianity was one of the primary interests of the Spanish in the Americas.



© Gerrick Bailey

From the very beginning, the Spanish and Portuguese were heavily dependent on Indian slave labor to work their mines and plantations and to perform other menial tasks. As the native populations decreased, the land and mine owners faced a labor shortage. New sources of human labor had to be found to fill the expanding vacuum.

Awareness of the rapid and dramatic decline in the Native American population is critical to understanding not only the history of the Americas during the past 500 years but the histories of Africa and Europe as well. The population decline of the Native Americans created a vacuum that was filled by the massive migration of Old World peoples. Because neither Spain nor Portugal sent a sufficient number of emigrants to offset the declining Native American population, another source of labor had to be found. This was the genesis of the African slave trade. Starting in the 1490s, ever-increasing numbers of African slaves were sent to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. By the eighteenth century, these colonies had more individuals of African ancestry than of European ancestry.

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, other European powers—England, France, and the Netherlands—began to contest Spanish and Portuguese dominance of the Americas. For the most part, these countries occupied portions of the Americas outside the limits of Spanish and Portuguese control: some of the small islands in the West Indies and the Atlantic coast

of North America. The Native American populations in this region had already suffered the devastating effects of Old World disease and were of little interest to northern Europeans as a source of labor. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese to the south, northern European settlers were primarily interested in the land the Indians occupied, and they considered Native Americans to be a hindrance and a danger to their settlements, not an economic resource. As these northern European settlers pushed their frontiers into the interior, Native American populations were evicted and forced west.

As early as 1619, English colonists in Virginia were purchasing African slaves. The number of African slaves in the French, English, and Dutch West Indies and in English North America steadily increased during the 1600s and 1700s, paralleling the pattern of growth in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies.

Although relatively few Native Americans were enslaved in the northern European colonies, their labor was used indirectly. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, the French, English, and Dutch quickly established trading networks in the interior regions, exchanging cloth, metal tools, guns, and other items of European manufacture for hides and furs. By the late 1700s, most of the Native American societies in North America had regular trade contact with these Europeans. By the end of the eighteenth century, virtually every Native American society had been affected by European expansion. Many had already



become extinct. Others were under the direct political and economic control of European colonial governments. Even those societies that had been able to retain their autonomy had seen their populations sharply reduced through disease or warfare and their lifestyles changed by the introduction of European material goods and technology. Few, if any, “pristine” societies were left in the New World.

### *Sub-Saharan Africa*

Portuguese explorers first made contact with sub-Saharan Africans in 1444 and 1445. Trade quickly followed, and Portuguese explorer-traders steadily expanded farther south down the west coast of Africa. In the 1470s, they reached the “Gold Coast” and found the area so rich in gold that in 1482 they erected the first of what would become a series of coastal forts to protect their interests from other European powers. By 1488, Portuguese explorers had reached the Cape of Good Hope, the southern extremity of the African continent. Between 1497 and 1499, Vasco da Gama successfully sailed to India and back by way of the Cape. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had established the basis for a trading empire that soon stretched along the coast of Africa to India, China and Japan.

In 1482, the Portuguese discovered one of the largest states in Africa, the Kongo kingdom, near the mouth of the Congo. The Portuguese developed friendly relations with the Kongo, and in 1490 missionaries and various artisans were sent there. The missionaries soon converted the king and many of the people. The capital of the kingdom was rebuilt on a European model, renamed Sao Salvador, and many younger Kongo went voluntarily to Portugal for formal education.

Although gold and ivory were the primary trade items, early Portuguese traders dealt in other commodities as well: slaves, sea lion oil, hides, cotton cloth, and beeswax. Slaves eventually emerged as the most valuable trade item of the African coast, and it was the slave trade that led other European countries to challenge Portuguese control.

Slavery and the slave trade existed in portions of Europe before European expansion. On the Iberian Peninsula in Spain and Portugal, slavery knew no racial or religious boundaries: Slaves could be black or white, Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. The number of slaves in Spain and Portugal was extremely limited, however. During the early 1500s, the market for African slaves in the New World grew rapidly.

The magnitude of the African slave trade cannot be determined with any exactness. We know that the slave

trade grew steadily during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reached its zenith during the last decades of the eighteenth century, and ended in about 1870. Estimates of the number of African slaves sent to the Americas range from about 10 million to about 50 million, but the actual number was probably closer to 10 million. Likewise, estimates of the number of slaves taken to the Americas during particular centuries vary. Estimates for the sixteenth century range from 250,000 to 900,000; for the seventeenth century from 1,341,000 to 2,750,000; and for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from 6 million to 11 million.

The Portuguese were the first major traders of African slaves in the Americas. In the earliest period of the trade, the slaves who were brought to America had already been slaves in Africa. However, as the demand for slaves increased, the Portuguese turned to raiding to acquire them. As early as 1575, Portuguese mercenaries and African “allies” began systematically to stage slave raids throughout much of central Africa.

In the late 1500s, the English and French began competing for a share of the African slave trade and marketing slaves in the Spanish colonies. During the early 1600s, with the establishment of French, English, and Dutch colonies in the West Indies, even more traders attempted to tap this lucrative trade. French, English, Dutch, Swedes, and Danes obtained slaves along the west coast of Africa. For the most part, these new traders concentrated on West Africa, where they established their own fortified trading stations and drove the Portuguese out of many posts. The French, English, and Dutch were not challenging the Portuguese only in Africa; they were also competing for the Asian trade. To reach Asia, they had to circumnavigate Africa, and they needed ports. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company established a colony of Dutch farmers at the Cape of Good Hope to supply their ships.

By the late 1700s, the French, English, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish controlled ports scattered along the western coast and much of the eastern coast of Africa. Most of these posts were manned by only a handful of Europeans. Actual European settlements were few and small; the main settlements were the Portuguese colonies in Angola and Mozambique, and the Dutch colony at the Cape. Few Europeans had ever penetrated the interior, and little was known of the peoples of interior Africa. Yet, at the same time, the European presence in Africa had produced far-reaching effects on the lives of all Africans through the slave trade and through the introduction of New World food crops.

Slaves were acquired through raiding and warfare, usually in exchange for guns supplied by the Europeans.

The introduction of New World crops greatly changed the lives of many of Africa's farming peoples.



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In Africa, the gun trade and the slave trade were inextricably linked. By the early eighteenth century, about 180,000 guns were being traded annually, and by the end of the century, that figure had climbed to between 300,000 and 400,000.

The slave-for-gun trade shifted trade networks and disrupted the existing balance of power among African societies. Some groups, primarily coastal peoples in contact with Europeans, faced the choice of becoming slave raiders and acquiring guns or falling victim to those who opted for raiding. As slave-related warfare escalated, new states sprang up, and there was a concurrent decline in many older states. In West Africa, the power and influence of the old states of Sudan declined. The Songhai Empire disintegrated, and Kanem-Bornu weakened considerably. At the same time, along the coast of West Africa, many small kingdoms and city-states—such as Oyo, Aboney, Ashanti, and Benin—were undergoing rapid expansion, which can be traced to slave traffic. In west central Africa, the Kongo kingdom refused to be involved in the slave trade and disintegrated because the Portuguese supported and encouraged the development of slave-raiding states. Lunda was the largest and most important of these new states.

At the same time Africa was undergoing this dramatic escalation in warfare, New World crops brought to the continent by Europeans dramatically changed African farming. During the early 1500s, the Portuguese introduced corn, manioc, sweet potatoes, pineapples, peanuts,

papayas, and some lesser crops. The introduction of these new crops, particularly corn and manioc, greatly increased the productivity of farming in Africa. In the savannas and grasslands, corn produced higher yields than native cereal crops, and in the tropical forest regions, manioc was superior to existing starchy crops. Some researchers have suggested that the introduction of corn resulted in a population explosion that minimized the demographic impact of the slave trade.

Thus, the Europeans' quest for slaves caused an escalation in warfare that resulted in major losses in population and significant restructuring of African political power. However, the Europeans also introduced new crops that increased and expanded African farming. Although we cannot describe exactly what happened, we can say with certainty that the population of Africa underwent major changes. Basil Davidson (1969, 235) provides an excellent summary of the situation in Africa at the end of the eighteenth century: "By 1800 or soon after there were few regions where many polities, large or small, old or new, had not clearly felt and reacted to strong pressures of transition. Widely varying in form and power though it certainly was, the impact of change had been constantly and pervasively at work."

### *Europeans in Asia*

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach Asia by sea. In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed on the coast of

India. The Europeans soon learned that Asia offered a situation quite different from what they had confronted in the Americas and Africa. The population of Asia far surpassed that of Europe, and Asia was divided into numerous highly developed and militarily powerful states. In economic terms, Asia was a self-sufficient region with only limited interest in outside trade. Although Asia offered such desirable goods as silk, cotton textiles, spices, coffee, tea, porcelain, and so forth for trade, the Europeans had little to offer in exchange other than gold and silver bullion.

Da Gama encountered difficulty trading Portuguese goods in India, but eventually he managed to trade away his cargo. The Portuguese quickly realized that the only significant role they could play in the Asian trade was as middlemen in the inter-Asian trade, particularly between the Far East (China) and India. During the early and mid-1500s, the Portuguese established a series of fortified trading ports extending from India to China. Asian goods flowed through these ports to Europe in exchange for silver and gold coming from the Americas. This trade was extremely limited; during the 1500s, the trade between Europe and Asia averaged only 10 ships annually. Of greater economic importance was that an ever-increasing percentage of the lucrative trade among Asian peoples themselves was carried by Portuguese merchant ships.

The same treaty that gave Portugal a portion of the Americas (Brazil) gave Spain a portion of Asia (the Philippines). In 1564, the Spanish founded Manila (Philippines). Unlike the Portuguese trade that flowed westward around Africa, Spanish ships sailed between Manila and Acapulco, Mexico. From Acapulco, goods were transported over land to Vera Cruz, and from there shipped to Spain.

It was not until after 1600 that other European powers began to compete for the trade with Asia. The earliest of these new competitors were the Dutch, who in 1602 organized the Dutch East India Company. By the mid-1600s, the Dutch had established bases in the East Indies (modern-day Indonesia) and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka). With fewer ships and less capital, the English were at a disadvantage relative to the Dutch during the first half of the seventeenth century. Early English attempts to establish trading bases in Asia failed. Their first success came in India (Madras) in 1639. By 1665, they had Bombay, and in 1691, Calcutta.

While Western European maritime powers were active on the southern and eastern coasts of Asia, Russia was expanding by land across northern Asia. By 1637, the Russians had reached the Pacific coast of Asia, and by the 1690s, they were trading with China.

On the whole, the initial European influence on Asian society was not significant. European territorial holdings were small, usually little more than port cities. Europeans had little effect on Asian economic life; they were little more than a small, parasitic group attached to an Asian economic system.

## *The World and the Industrial Revolution*

The Industrial Revolution began during the waning decades of the eighteenth century with the production of machine-woven cotton textiles in England. By the early nineteenth century, industrialization included steel production and was spreading to other European countries and the former English colonies in North America, now the United States. The Industrial Revolution dramatically changed the relationship between European peoples and the other peoples of the world. The technological advances associated with industrialization rapidly elevated European peoples to a position of military, political, and economic dominance in the world.

As a result, European peoples redrew the political map and restructured the world economy to meet the needs of their new industrial economy. This new European economic system required overseas sources of raw materials as well as markets for finished goods. Technological advancements resulted in the construction of larger and faster ships, which meant that maritime commerce was no longer limited to high-cost luxury goods. The development of railroads opened the interiors of the continents by lowering the cost of transporting goods to the coastal ports.

During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, global trade and cultural exchange had developed. The nineteenth century saw the beginning of a global economy based on regional economic specialization and the production of commodities for export. As in the earlier period, the effects of this change varied from one portion of the world to another.

### *The Americas*

The Americas were the first region to experience this changed relationship because they were more closely tied politically and economically to Europe. Just as the Industrial Revolution was beginning in Europe, a political revolution was starting in the Americas. From the English-speaking colonies this revolution spread to the Spanish-speaking portions of the Americas. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, most areas of mainland America were independent of European political domination. These



independence movements did not change the status of Native Americans, however, because the new countries were dominated by Euro-Americans or, in the case of Haiti, African Americans.

Although these new countries had achieved political independence, they maintained strong economic ties to Europe and quickly became the major sources of raw materials as well as markets for industrializing Europe. The West Indies and the United States supplied cotton for the textile mills of England, and the Americas—both the English- and Spanish-speaking countries—served as the earliest major market for finished cotton textiles. The growing European need for raw materials stimulated economic development and territorial expansion of settlements throughout the Americas.

With the initial emphasis of the Industrial Revolution on producing plantation crops, such as cotton and sugar, the African slave trade escalated to unprecedented proportions. Of all the African slaves brought to the Americas, the vast majority came between 1750 and 1850. As industrial centers developed in the northeastern United States and as mining, grain farming, and ranching expanded throughout the Americas during the nineteenth century, the need for slave labor declined. In 1833, slavery was abolished in the British West Indies, and by the 1880s, slavery had been abolished throughout the Americas. As the importation of African slaves declined, the migration of Europeans to the Americas increased. In 1835, there were about 18.6 million individuals of European ancestry in the Americas, compared with 9.8 million people of African ancestry. By 1935, the population of Euro-Americans had jumped to 172 million, whereas the number of African Americans had risen to only 36.5 million.

In 1775, the area of Euro-American and African American settlement in North America was, for the most part, limited to the region east of the Appalachian Mountains. Within a century, however, the territorial limits of these settlements had been pushed across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. During the period of expansion, Native American populations had been quickly defeated militarily and confined to small reservations. A similar pattern of territorial expansion occurred in South America. The grasslands of Argentina initially attracted few European settlers. In 1880, the territorial limits of Euro-American settlements were about the same as they had been in 1590. In the late 1800s, however, Euro-American ranchers swept through the pampas and Patagonia, virtually eliminating the Indian population. By the early 1900s, autonomous or semiautonomous Native American societies were found only in the

Amazon basin and in a few scattered and isolated pockets in other portions of the Americas.

### *Sub-Saharan Africa*

The initial impact of European industrialization on Africa was an intensification of the slave trade. During the mid-nineteenth century, as the slave trade declined, European economic interest in Africa changed. Africa had potential as both a supplier of raw materials for industrial Europe and a market for finished goods. This economic potential could not be realized under existing conditions because the slave trade and resulting warfare had destroyed the political stability of the entire region. If the economic potential of Africa was to be realized, political stability had to be reestablished, transportation systems developed, and the economies restructured to meet European needs. These goals were accomplished through direct military and political intervention by European countries, primarily England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal, who proceeded unilaterally to divide up the peoples and resources of Africa. As late as 1879, European powers claimed only small portions of Africa. The Portuguese had the coastal areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. The British had Cape Colony, Lagos, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. The French had only Gabon, Senegal, and a few coastal ports. Twenty years later, virtually all of sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, was under direct European rule. With some exceptions, the imposition of colonial control was accomplished with relatively little bloodshed.

As colonial authority was established, the usual policy was to institute a tax system. Taxation of native populations served a dual purpose. The revenues generated were frequently sufficient to cover the cost of the colonial administration and troops. In addition, native populations were forced either to produce marketable exports or to work for European-owned plantations or mines to raise the money for taxes. Thus, taxation forced Africans into the European economic network.

Although exploitation of native populations characterized all the European colonies in Africa, it reached its height in the Congo basin. In 1885, King Leopold of Belgium claimed the Congo as “Crown lands,” meaning that they belonged to him personally not Belgium, and organized it as the Congo Free State. He then sold concessions to companies, which received sole rights to all land and labor within given tracts of land. Africans were forcibly conscripted to work on the plantations and in the mines under armed guards. The labor conditions in the Congo were some of the most brutal and

exploitative in world history. Between 1885 and 1908, when protests from other European powers caused the Belgian government to claim control from the king, as many as 8 million Africans were killed, or about half the total population of Congo.

By the early part of the twentieth century, the authority of Europeans had been established throughout Africa. Gold, silver, copper, diamonds, palm oil, rubber, cacao, and other raw materials were flowing back to Europe, while Africa became an expanding market for European manufactured goods. Few Europeans immigrated to Africa, and in most regions, the presence of Europeans was limited to a handful of government administrators, soldiers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs.

### Asia

The basic pattern of European political and economic expansion in Asia was similar to the pattern in Africa. However, the magnitude of the population and the already highly developed economic system in Asia tempered the European impact. The Industrial Revolution had resulted in major advances in European military technology, which shifted the balance of power in favor of the Europeans. For the first time, they could successfully challenge even the largest and most powerful Asian states. This change became evident during the mid-1800s. China had successfully resisted making trade concessions to European powers. In the Opium War with England (1839–1842), and in a second war with England and France between 1856 and 1858, China saw its navy and army badly defeated and was forced to make humiliating land and trading concessions. During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the British East India Company steadily expanded its territorial control in India through manipulation of internal political rivalries and limited localized wars. The crushing of the Sepoy Mutiny (1857–1858) ended any question about English political dominance of India.

By the end of the nineteenth century, most of Asia had been brought under the control of European colonial governments. England had India, Burma, Malaya, Sarawak, Hong Kong, and Ceylon. The French held Indochina, and the Dutch had extended their control over the Dutch East Indies. Although still politically independent, China, Nepal, Afghanistan, Thailand, Persia (Iran), and most of the Middle Eastern countries were so strongly dominated by various European powers that some historians have called them *semicolonial regions*. Japan stood alone as the only Asian state that truly retained its autonomy.

During the late nineteenth century, as European political control spread over Asia, the economy of the

area was steadily modified by various means to meet the needs of industrial Europe. Although Europeans owned and operated plantations, mines, and various industries in some areas, the principal instruments for changing the existing economies were taxes and duties. Taxation encouraged the production of cash crops for export, whereas import and export duties encouraged the production of some goods and commodities and discouraged the production of others. Native industries that would directly compete with European goods were discouraged.

The degree to which the local economy was changed differed greatly from region to region. In some regions, large-scale developments for the production of critical cash crops were associated with massive relocations of populations to supply labor. Such changes were most characteristic of, but not limited to, territories within the British Empire. Ceylon became a tea-producing colony, whereas Malaya focused on rubber, Burma on rice, and Bengal (India) on jute (hemp for rope). To increase production, additional labor was frequently needed. Indians and Chinese were recruited to work on the rubber plantations in Malaya. Tamil speakers from southern India provided the labor on the tea plantations of Ceylon. Rubber, tea, and hemp flowed to Europe, and Indian immigrants in Burma increased rice production ninefold, a surplus that was in turn shipped to India, Malaya, Ceylon, and other plantation regions within the empire to feed the workers.

These changes in the political and economic life of Asia occurred despite the relatively small number of Europeans in Asia. For example, in India during the mid-1920s, Europeans numbered only about 200,000 administrators, soldiers, and civilians, compared to a native population of about 320 million—a ratio of 1:1,500.

### Oceania

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, French, Russian, and English naval expeditions explored the Pacific, charting and describing the major islands and island groups. These men were soon followed by merchants, colonists, and whalers. In one way, the history of Oceania during the nineteenth century parallels the history of the Americas during the first three centuries after European discovery. The total population of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australia was estimated at several million at the time of contact. Disease and warfare quickly reduced the population of much of Oceania during the nineteenth century.

In 1785, the English established a penal colony in Australia and laid the foundation for the Europeanization

of portions of Oceania. The pattern of white settlement expansion in Australia and New Zealand during this period closely followed that of European settlement and occupation of the United States and Canada. Native populations declined because of disease and warfare, while European settlements expanded, occupying an ever-increasing portion of the land. Surviving native populations were eventually limited to small reserve areas. During the nineteenth century, the population of native Australians declined from about 300,000 to only 60,000. In New Zealand, the native Maori were only slightly more successful in resisting. Numbering only about 100,000 in 1800, by the 1840s the surviving 40,000 Maori were a minority population confined on small reserves.

Aside from Australia, Polynesia (including New Zealand) was the region most affected by Europeans. During the nineteenth century, the indigenous population of these islands declined from 1,100,000 to only 180,000. In 1779, the native population of Hawaii numbered between 300,000 and 400,000. By 1857, only 70,000 native Hawaiians remained. Missionary-entrepreneurs from the United States were able to secure lands for plantations, and as the native population declined, they began importing laborers from Asia to work the fields. This influx of Europeans and Asians reduced the native Hawaiians to a minority population before the end of the nineteenth century. There were major exceptions to these patterns, however. Although the native populations of Samoa and Tonga declined, there was no significant influx of Europeans, and the native populations of these islands eventually recovered.

The islands of Micronesia also suffered from a population drop during the nineteenth century, declining from about 200,000 to about 83,000. However, these small, scattered islands had little to attract large numbers of Europeans. Micronesians were mostly left on their own.

The pattern of contact differed significantly from island to island in Melanesia. The indigenous population of New Guinea was too vast to be displaced by Europeans. The same was not true in Fiji and New Caledonia. The native population of Fiji decreased from 300,000 to 85,000, and New Caledonia's native population declined from 100,000 to a low of 27,000. In Fiji, English entrepreneurs secured land for sugar plantations and began importing laborers from India, until by the twentieth century the Indians constituted a majority of the population.

In the 400 years following 1492, the world was dramatically changed. By 1900, European political domination was complete and the global trade network was well established. Global trade allowed for the exchange

of technologies, including domesticated plants and animals, between the various peoples of the world. It also exposed the world's peoples to different ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices. Except for the peoples of the Americas and Oceania, however, the changes did not erode the basic economic, cultural, and social autonomy of most of the world's peoples. Although many societies became extinct, many new societies had come into existence. New technologies, ideas, beliefs, and practices had, for the most part, been adapted and integrated into preexisting economies and cultures. Global trade had dramatically changed the lives of most of the world's peoples, but it had not significantly lessened social and cultural diversity. There had been migrations of peoples, both voluntary and forced, but direct contact between peoples was minimal in comparison with contemporary standards.



## The Emergence of the Global Economy

Over the past 60 years, the process of globalization has entered a new and different phase. A global economy has started to evolve. In its essence, the global economy is simple: the creation of a global market and the integration of peoples and communities into this market. **Global trade** involved the exchange of goods between political defined regional markets. In the **global economy**, labor, goods, and services are bought and sold on the global market.

We can readily see some effects of the global economy. The price we pay for a loaf of bread or a gallon of gasoline in the United States is determined in large part by the world price for wheat and oil. Similarly, the price we pay for a Ford is no longer influenced only by competition from General Motors, but by Japanese and European auto manufacturers as well. Foreign imports not only place American companies in competition with foreign companies but also put American workers in direct competition with their foreign counterparts. American farmers, oil producers, businesspeople, and

**global trade** The direct or indirect exchange of goods and products between peoples from all regions of the world.

**global economy** The buying and selling of goods and services in an integrated global market.



workers are now finding they have to compete on a global market for the prices they can charge for their goods, services, and labor. This has both good and bad points. It has resulted in cheaper prices in the United States for many manufactured goods and services. However, it has also meant the loss of jobs, as companies, in order to compete, have closed their domestic manufacturing plants and offices, laid off their relatively high-paid American workers, and either moved the manufacturing plants overseas or outsourced manufacturing to foreign companies.

### *The End of Colonialism*

As we have discussed, before World War II, the world economic system was dominated by European-controlled colonial empires. The British, French, and Soviet (or Russian) empires were the largest. However, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy also had overseas possessions. Global trade existed, but there was no integrated global economy. These empires had been created for the economic enrichment of the “home country” or colonial power. The colonial powers were primarily interested in politically controlling the peoples of their colonies while economically exploiting their resources. Colonies were the economic monopolies of the home country. Thus, India, South Africa, Kenya, and the other British colonies served as monopolized sources of raw materials for English factories as well as protected markets for English manufactured goods. Economic development within the English colonies was directed toward the increasing the production of raw materials needed by English factories and eliminating the production of local goods that would compete with goods made in England. A similar relationship existed between the home country and the colonies of other colonial powers.

Although the precise number varies depending on how one defines an “independent” or “autonomous” country, at the beginning of World War II, there were at most only about 60 politically independent countries in the world. Following the war, the colonial empires began to disintegrate. Independence movements had already started in many colonial areas prior to the war, and the war had devastated the economies of many of the colonial powers such as England, France, and the Netherlands. Needing to rebuild their home economies, they lacked the resources to suppress the independence movements in their colonies. At the same time, because of ideological opposition to colonialism, United States began pressuring European countries to grant independence to their colonies. There was another reason: U.S. companies wanted direct access to the resources and

markets of colonial Africa and Asia. As a result, between 1946 and 1980, 88 new countries were carved out of the old colonial empires and given political independence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia during the 1990s resulted in the creation of 18 additional countries. Today, there are about 200 independent countries, about three times the number that existed prior to World War II.

With the end of colonialism, the peoples of Africa and Asia had the freedom to manage their own economic affairs. These “new” countries could now sell their products on the global market and purchase imported goods, services and commodities from any country they wished. Even more important, these former colonies could now establish local industries to compete with those of the industrialized powers of Western Europe and North America.

### *Free Trade*

The collapse of the empires did not immediately result in the development of the global marketplace, but was only a necessary precondition for its emergence. Every country, newly independent or not, still had import duties and tariffs to protect its local economy. A fully integrated global economy required the elimination of these economic barriers so that goods, commodities or services produced in one country could be sold in another without any economic penalties, regulations, or restraints.

In 1948, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed between the United States and 22 countries. This agreement eliminated duties and tariffs on a range of specific items. In four decades that followed, six other negotiations or “rounds” of talks were held. Each of these rounds concerned tariffs on specific items or issues and usually involved increasing numbers of countries. The Uruguay round, which involved 141 countries and ended in 1986, created the World Trade Organization (WTO). The earlier agreements had just been between countries that were signatories to the agreements and contained no provisions for resolving any disputes. This changed with the creation of the WTO, a permanent agency of the United Nations with offices in Geneva, Switzerland that has authority to adjudicate disputes (see discussion in Chapter 12). However, it is important to realize that only 153 countries belong to the WTO and that not all goods, services, and commodities are covered by these various agreements. In addition to the WTO, there are also several regional trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

Container shipping has greatly lowered the cost of shipping of manufactured goods and has played a key role in the development of the global economy over the past 30 years.



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between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and the European Union (E.U.) which involves 27 countries in Europe, which provide for even less restrictions on the flow of trade between these countries.

Although we have a global economy, many trade issues and barriers still exist. Every one of the 200 or so countries in the world still has regulations concerning imports and exports as well as its own labor laws, environmental laws, and other business regulations. Regulation of the economy is one of the primary concerns of government. In a fully integrated and operative global economy, however, there can be no local or national differences. The World Trade Organization is in the process of attempting to negotiate the total elimination of all import and export laws and controls as well as any other laws that inhibit the free flow of goods, services, and commodities between countries.

### *Technological Changes*

The third critical change was the development of new technologies associated with production, transportation, and communications. Today, we can extract more raw materials and produce more manufactured goods and commodities using only a fraction of the human labor required prior to World War II. At the same time, the cost of shipping raw materials, food, and manufactured goods, as well as the time in transit, has been dramatically reduced.

The key element in the global economy is the maritime industry because 90 percent of world trade is carried by oceangoing ships. Since the end of World War II, ships have become bigger, faster, and more efficient in loading and unloading cargos. Supertankers, which may be as long as 1,200 feet, can carry 500,000 tons of oil. Bulk carriers, for transporting iron ore, coal, and other raw materials, have gotten larger. But possibly the most important change has been the development of container ships.

Fifty years ago, cargo was loaded and unloaded piecemeal. Starting in the late 1950s, some shippers began loading cargo in 20- and 40-foot boxes, or containers. The containers were loaded at the factory, sent via truck or train to the port, and loaded directly onto the ship by cranes. This greatly increased the speed of loading and unloading. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, container shipping became the norm, and new cargo ships were being designed and constructed to carry standardized containers. A ship that took 10 days to load or unload piecemeal can now be loaded or unloaded in less than a day. Container shipping not only dramatically increased the speed with which goods could be shipped but also drastically reduced labor costs. Container ships require smaller crews and many fewer dockworkers. Today, more than 3,000 container ships carry most of the world's manufactured goods.

Between 1980 and 1999, the cost per unit of marine transportation actually decreased. Today, it costs only about 2 cents per gallon to ship crude oil from the Middle East to the United States. The shipping costs of

manufactured goods from Asia to the United States or Europe are similarly low: \$10 for a TV set that will sell for \$700, \$1.50 for a \$200 DVD/CD player, and \$1 for a \$150 vacuum cleaner.

The best single indicator of the growth in world trade is not dollar value but shipping tonne-miles, or tonnes of goods carried multiplied by distance. Since 1965, world shipping has more than quadrupled from less than 6 trillion tonne-miles to 27.5 trillion tonne-miles in 2004.

The past 30 to 40 years have been a time of rapid change in information and communications technology. Communications satellites, personal computers, cell phones, and other new technologies have revolutionized our communications systems and our abilities to store, access, and analyze information. Today letters, messages, photos, music, videos, and even whole databases can be sent or accessed, while products can be bought or sold and money transferred 24 hours a day, instantaneously, to or from any part of the world via the Internet. In terms of communication, it does not make any difference whether the other company or branch office of a company is on the other side of town or the other side of the world. In fact, small companies advertise their merchandise on web pages and sell to customers throughout the world via e-mail. Today, we can literally create and operate a global business from a home office. Effective communication is a key element in business, and without the Internet, an integrated global economy could not exist. Technological advancement in transportation and communications has not merely made the world smaller; for many purposes, it has made geography irrelevant.

## Globalization: Social and Cultural Effects

Globalization and the emergence of the global economy has already dramatically affecting the lives of virtually everyone in the world. However, the global economy is recent and still rapidly evolving. Thus, the direct and indirect consequences of globalization are yet to fully emerge. Here we are going to limit the discussion to four potentially important issues: population growth; migration and inequalities; multinational corporations; and Westernization.

### Population Growth

Over the past 60 years, the world's population has grown rapidly, from 2.5 billion to over 6.6 billion. This is one

subject on which all of the world's political leaders can agree and cooperate. Contagious diseases do not recognize national boundaries are thus a collective global concern. As we have witnessed in recent years, diseases such as the HIV virus, bird flu, and swine flu can today quickly spread throughout the world. At the end of World War II, the World Health Organization (WHO) was created as part of the United Nations to address global health concerns. Working with private and government health organizations and agencies, the WHO defined issues and attempted to direct resources to specific health problems.

In addition, the WHO has developed programs to eradicate epidemic diseases. In 1946, malaria was a major health concern throughout most of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. In India alone, it was estimated that 800,000 people a year died from the disease, while globally several million people died annually. Malaria is an insect-borne disease spread from one infected human to another by *Anopheles* mosquitoes. Using DDT, the WHO launched a program in 1948 to eliminate malaria by eradicating mosquito populations. By the 1960s, widespread use of DDT had dramatically reduced the death rate from malaria. In the mid-1960s, India reported no deaths from the disease, and at one time it was thought that malaria might be eliminated altogether. However, the discovery that DDT had numerous environmentally destructive side effects led to limitations on its use as a pesticide. This, together with the evolution of a new DDT-resistant *Anopheles* mosquito, ended the hope of eliminating malaria. Even though the malaria program was not totally successful, tens of millions of lives have been saved.

Smallpox has been a major health problem since ancient times. This virus, spread by human hosts either through the air or by touch, can kill up to 40 percent of an infected population. In the 1960s, there were on average between 10 million and 15 million cases a year, and 2 million deaths from smallpox. In 1967, the WHO launched a vaccination campaign designed to eliminate smallpox. In 1980, after three years during which no new cases were reported anywhere in the world, the WHO was able to announce that the smallpox virus had been eradicated.

In addition to the malaria and smallpox programs, the WHO continues to work to improve health conditions by assisting in the development of health care delivery systems throughout the world. As a result, infant mortality rates have declined dramatically and life expectancies have increased in virtually every part of the globe. The programs of the WHO have been the primary factor in population growth from 2.5 billion to over 6.6 billion people over the past 60 years.



During the Middle Ages in Europe, the canon courts of the Catholic Church declared usury, or charging interest on loans, to be un-Christian. Thus, Christians were prohibited from charging interest, and banking in medieval Europe was in the hands of Jews. During the late Middle Ages, Italian Catholics began founding banking houses, and by clever semantics were able to circumvent the church laws against usury. An individual would be loaned money, interest free, for an unrealistically short period. When the loan was not repaid within this stated time, which it seldom was, the bankers charged “damages.”

The Islamic religion also prohibits usury. However, Islam differs in a number of significant ways from Christianity. The Koran is not only a book of religious teachings but also a codified legal system called *sharia*. Courts in traditional Islamic countries use the Koran as the basis for legal rulings, functioning as what are sometimes called *Islamic courts*.

The law courts in much of the Arab world—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates—are Islamic courts. Thirty years ago, this fact had little international significance. Relatively poor, these countries had little need for financial transactions and banking institutions. With the discovery of oil and the rapid development of this region starting in the 1960s, however, a need for such institutions quickly developed. A number of European and American banking houses, such as Citibank and Chase Manhattan, opened Middle Eastern branches. Not only did they manage the vast flow of dollars changing hands through the sale of oil and the purchase of imports, but they also began loaning money to local Arab entrepreneurs who organized companies to profit from this economic boom.

Like the medieval Italian bankers, lenders in the Middle East developed semantic ways of circumventing the Islamic prohibition against usury. The word *interest* was never used in loaning money. Instead, these banks charged Islamic borrowers “administrative fees” or “loan initiation discounts.” By 1986, it was estimated that the various world banks had between \$8 billion and \$9 billion in loans to Saudi Arabian companies alone. This system worked well as long as oil

income kept rising and all parties made handsome profits. In the 1980s, the price of oil began to decline, however, and in early 1986, the price collapsed, falling from \$28 a barrel to (at one point) less than \$10 a barrel.

As their income from oil plunged, governments began to slow payments to local contractors and suppliers. Arab companies with a cash flow problem quickly fell behind on loan payments to banks. Many Arab businessmen suddenly rediscovered their religion. A flood of Arab companies and individuals quickly took the banks to court, charging them with usury. These courts correctly found the banks guilty of usury under Islamic law.

In the summer of 1986, a number of international banks cut back on their Middle Eastern operations. Citibank reduced the size of its offices in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates; Chase Manhattan closed its Jordanian branch. International and Middle Eastern bankers quickly proved as adaptive as the medieval Italians. There was a rapid growth of “Islamic banks.” Initially most Islamic banks were local, some were branches of large international banks, while others were associated with international banking houses. By scrupulously avoiding charging *riba*, or interest, and operating as *modarabs*, or “money managers,” Islamic banks were able to provide profits for their investors while meeting the banking needs of the region. The financial instrument employed by these banks is called a *sukuk*, which is similar to a bond.

The recovery of the oil industry in the late 1980s and the increasing need for capital for development projects stimulated the growth of Islamic banks. Today, there are about 300 Islamic banks and financial institutions worldwide, with over \$300 billion in assets. Still there are problems. Many conservative Muslims question the legitimacy of *sukuks*. Also most Islamic banks are relatively small, given the regional demands for capital. In 2001, the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI) and in 2002 the International Islamic Financial Market (IIFM) were established. The purpose of these nonprofit organizations is to standardize trading rules and regulations and to provide needed capital for economic development in Islamic countries through Islamic banking institutions.

Although health conditions among all peoples have improved, birthrates differ widely. The most striking differences are between the developed and undeveloped worlds. The birthrates in the developed countries of Western Europe, North America, and Japan have dropped dramatically. In the most extreme cases, some of these countries, such as Italy and Japan, now have negative growth rates, meaning that their populations will soon start to decline.

In sharp contrast are the birthrates of the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and most of Asia. The populations of these regions are increasing at a rate averaging almost 2 percent per year or more. In the next half-century, it is projected that the population of India will increase by more than 500 million, while that of neighboring Pakistan will jump by almost 200 million. In 1950, Nigeria, the largest country of sub-Saharan Africa, had a population of only

31 million; by 2000, that population had grown to 123 million. Even given a projected decline in the birthrate, it is still estimated that by 2050, Nigeria will be home to more than 300 million people.

The regional differences in growth rates are rapidly changing the geographical distribution of the world's population. If we compare population changes in the developed and underdeveloped countries and limit our study to only the period from 1950 to 2025, we can see in Table 16.1 how significant the change will be.

**TABLE-16-1** Population Changes

	1950	2025
<b>Developed countries</b>	33.1%	15.9%
<b>Undeveloped countries</b>	66.9%	84.1%

Source: Adapted from Robbins, (1999, 148).

By 2025, the population of the developed countries of the world will constitute only about one-sixth of the world's population. The rapidly growing majority of the world population is both impoverished and non-Western in cultural heritage.

## Migration and Inequalities in the Global Economy

The economic rewards of the global economy are unequally distributed among the world's peoples. Some countries and some regions have benefited far more than other. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of all of the world's countries in 2009 equaled an estimated \$70 trillion. Of this amount the combined GDP of the U.S. and Canada, the 27 countries of the European Union and Japan amounted to over \$34 trillion. With a total population of only 925 million, or less than 15 percent of the world population these 30 countries are responsible of almost half of the global GDP. If we examined the GDP's of the approximately 170 remaining countries we would find even greater disparities if look at on a per capita basis. Although the economies of some of these countries, such as China, South Korea, Singapore, India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia are benefiting from the global economy many, if not most, of the countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia are not participating in this new prosperity. If looked at on an individual basis, inequalities in income and wealth within all countries is increasing. The global economy is making the rich richer. In 1960, it was estimated that the richest 20 percent of the world's population had

30 times more income than the poorest 20 percent. By 1999, this ratio had risen to 74:1 and was still increasing. It is not just that many people in the world are not sharing in this new wealth; their standards of living are actually declining. Since 1980, per capita incomes in more than a third of the countries of the world have declined. Today, 1.2 billion people—one-fifth of the world's population—are attempting to exist on incomes of less than \$1 per day. The distribution of the world's wealth has become so skewed that the total assets of the three richest individuals in the world exceed the annual income of the poorest 600 million, while the richest 200 individuals in the world have wealth that exceeds the annual income of the poorest 2.4 billion people. The problem is not just that a significant wealth gap exists between the rich and poor of the world, but that the gap is increasing.

If we look at the global economy and population growth by country, we discover that an inverse correlation exists between economic prosperity and population growth. Generally speaking, the most economically prosperous countries and regions of the world usually have low population growth rates, whereas countries with rapid population growth are most commonly associated with the poorer countries or regions. In Chapter 18, we discuss some of the reasons for this inverse correlation.

Sub-Saharan Africa in many ways typifies the problems of the underdeveloped regions of the world. The people of this region are basically dependent on agriculture. Relative to their population, they have limited marketable natural resources and little industry. Not only do these countries have poorly developed infrastructures in educational, transportation, and communication, they lack the financial resources to develop them. With the highest birthrate in the world, sub-Saharan Africa has already reached the crisis point. For the past two decades, the populations of these countries have grown much faster than their economies. Increasing populations have resulted in an overuse of agricultural resources and a deterioration of the land base. Since the early 1960s, per-capita food production has dropped by 16 percent. As a result, today the people of this region are more than 20 percent poorer in economic terms than they were in the mid-1970s. It is estimated that about 40 percent of the region's population live on less than \$1 per day and are chronically undernourished. In the next 50 years, it is estimated that this population will grow by an additional 1 billion people. Similar, although not as severe, conditions exist in much of Latin America and Asia. Economic development cannot keep pace with population growth, and already impoverished people are becoming even poorer.

The greatest movement of people in human history is already under way. This migration is taking two forms. First is rural-to-urban migration, which is occurring in every country in the world. Second is the migration of people from poorer countries to wealthier countries. Just before World War II, about 50 percent of the total population of the United States and Europe was urban, compared with only about 8 to 10 percent for Africa and Asia and 25 percent for Latin America. Today, about 75 percent of Americans and 70 percent of Europeans are city dwellers. The urban populations of Asia and Africa have jumped to between 25 and 30 percent, and in Latin America the urban population has increased to more than 60 percent. The growth rate of urbanization has thus been highest outside Europe and North America. In fact, the world's most rapidly growing cities are located in underdeveloped nations. Although most cities in the underdeveloped world lack the large industrial complexes capable of employing the great masses of people migrating into them, their small-scale industries, transportation services, and government jobs, though limited, still offer greater economic opportunities than do the increasingly overcrowded rural regions.

Whereas most migration has been within countries, the growing trend is toward international migration. The United Nations estimates that 191 million people, or about 3 percent of the world's population, now live in a country other than the one in which they were born. Many argue that this is a conservative figure.

As their industrial economies expanded during the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany and France began to actively recruit foreign workers from Turkey and North Africa. In the 1950s, England began experiencing an influx of West Indians from its possessions in the Caribbean. In the 1960s, a wave of Pakistani and Indian immigrants also settled in England. Other Western European countries experienced a similar phenomenon. Today, almost 10 percent of the population of Western Europe are recent immigrants.

Since World War II, about 25 percent of American population growth has been the result of immigration. From only about 300,000 per year in the 1960s, the number of legal immigrants to the United States has jumped to about 1,000,000 per year with a proportionally ever-increasing number from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Although Europe and North America have been the primary destinations for most international migrants, other regions with high incomes, labor shortages, or both have experienced major influxes of immigrants. Many of the oil-rich Arab countries—Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—have recruited

foreign workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt, and from among Palestinian refugees. Indeed, in some of the smaller of these countries, foreign workers outnumber native Arabs. For example, foreign workers constitute almost 60 percent of the population of Kuwait.

Over the past 20 years, international immigration patterns have changed. Whereas in the past most immigrants to the developed countries were from Latin America, East Asia, or South Asia, the numbers of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and the former republics of the Soviet Union are growing. Although in recent decades the United States and the countries of Western Europe have increased their legal immigration quotas in all categories, the numbers of individuals wanting to immigrate have increased far more rapidly.

The borders of the developed countries of the world are being overwhelmed by increasing waves of illegal immigrants who will take any risk to escape from their world of hopeless poverty. Most of the estimated 12 million to 20 million illegal immigrants in the United States are from Latin America; however, they come from all parts of the world. Although the problem of illegal immigration in Western Europe is not so great, it is a growing problem. It is estimated that there are between 3 million and 3.5 million illegal immigrants in Western Europe, and this number is growing by 500,000 a year.

Other developed countries are also facing the problem of growing populations of illegal workers; Japan about 250,000, Korea about 200,000, and Australia about 60,000. However, the country with proportionally the greatest problem is South Africa, which in spite of a high unemployment rate, has an estimated 4 million illegal's of a total population of 43 million.

If the economic inequalities of the global economy are not corrected, and the economies of the underdeveloped countries are not dramatically improved, the rate of immigration will only increase. Other than to say that the social and cultural consequences of increasingly ethnically mixed populations are going to vary, it is impossible to predict what is going to result. In Chapter 17, we will discuss ethnicity and ethnic issues.

## **Multinational Corporations**

Traditionally, we have thought of corporations, like individuals, as having national identities. Ford, General Motors, and General Electric are “American” companies. These companies are incorporated in the United States, their stocks are traded on the New York Stock Exchange, and their corporate headquarters are in the United States. Companies such as these are increasingly manufacturing



Illegal migrants are an increasing problem in the more developed countries of world. Here illegal African and Asian immigrants demonstrate for rights in Paris.



and selling products throughout the world. Globalization is eroding the link between corporations and their countries of origin. A **multinational corporation** is one that has most of its employees, produces and sells most of its products or services, and generates most of its gross revenues outside the national boundaries of its “home” country.

Nokia, a Finnish company known primarily for its cellular phones, is an example of a multinational corporation. Just prior to the collapse of technology stocks in 2000, Nokia had the highest capitalization value (the total value of its stock) of any company in Europe. In 1987, Nokia produced the original handheld portable telephone. The 1990s was a period of rapid growth for the company as it maintained its position as the major producer of cell phones in the world. Today, Nokia markets products in more than 130 countries, has research and development projects and programs in 15 different countries (including the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Germany, and England), and produces components and assembled products in 10 different countries (the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Malaysia, China, South Korea, Japan, Hungary, Germany, and England).

**multinational corporation** A corporation that has most of its employees, produces and sells most of its products or services, and generates most of its gross revenues outside the national boundaries of its “home” country.

Products assembled from component parts illustrate the problem of determining the national origin of goods in the global economy. Nokia has six major suppliers: Philips Electronics, a Dutch company, produces their speakers in Austria and display screens in China; Sanyo Electric, a Japanese company, produces their barrier (a component of a phone) in Mexico; Hitachi makes its power amplification modules in Japan; Infineon Technologies makes its semiconductor chips in Germany; and R.F. Micro Devices and Texas Instruments produce their radio frequency integrated circuits and digital signal processors in the United States. Today, most Nokia products are designed by non-Finnish engineers and technicians, manufactured and assembled in countries other than Finland, and sold in 130 countries in the world, in order to produce wealth and profits shared by investors from all parts of the world.

Multinational corporations are qualitatively different from domestic companies in that their financial interests are not directly dependent on the economy of their home country and its citizens. Their leadership, owners and managers, make corporate decisions in terms of the global economy, not the local economy. Some of the possible consequences of the emergence of multinational were discussed in Chapter 12.

## Westernization?

There is little disagreement that globalization is having broad effects on the culture of the world’s. Overt signs

of Western cultural influence are increasingly evident in the daily lives of the world peoples. The architecture of the new commercial buildings in almost every city in the world is Western. The technology used, regardless of where it is manufactured, is basically Western in design. The same is true of the daily clothing styles worn by the people. In the larger cities of the world, we find Starbucks, McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Holiday Inn, and other global chains. Certainly, Western cultural influences are pervasive in the world today. Drawing on the ideas of sociologist Peter Berger, we are going to discuss three of the major sources of Western influence; the global corporate community, the global academic community, and the global media.

The global corporate community is an integrated community of the multinational corporations well as local companies that produce and market products globally. To be fully integrated into the global economy, the business models and structures used by these corporation and companies have to be compatible, meaning that they have to be "Western." To be fully successful the owners, executives and managers of these companies and corporations have to think alike, internationally not nationally; speak a common language (usually English); make use of the same technologies; and share basically similar values, norms, dress, and lifestyles. Since this cultural corporate culture is Western in origin, culturally non-Western individuals have to become acculturated into the system. Samuel Huntington, a political scientist, has termed this global corporate culture the "Davos Culture," after the city in Switzerland where more than 2,000 of the world's most powerful business leaders and political leaders, together with a small select group of academics and journalists, meet annually to informally define and discuss global problems. These individuals serve as the cultural role models for the millions of other individuals in the world who aspire to become part of the global economic and social elite. As many scholars have pointed out, implicit in the global economy is the Western capitalist market model and these individuals are the advocates for more fully integrating all of world's peoples into this system. However, integration into this system does not come without a price. The capitalist market model strongly rewards individual, as opposed to collective or communal, economic actions. Thus, increased integration into the global economy serves to disrupt the traditional patterns of economic and social cooperation found in most societies. As a result, existing cultural institutions are destabilized as prevailing norms and values of these societies are brought into question.

The global academic community consists of those individuals who collectively control, expand and disseminate

knowledge. At the center of this community are the colleges and universities integrated through international exchanges in students, faculties and lecturers, as well as international professional organizations, journals, and websites. The institutional structure of these institutions is basically Western in terms of academic degrees and degree programs. The research methodologies taught and used as well as the theoretical issues addressed are basically Western. Although far more heterogeneous in their individual beliefs, lifestyles, behaviors, and ideas than the members of the global business community, there is a core set of Western derived cultural ideals to which to most to some degree adhere. Through their involvement and that of their students in public and private foundations, organizations, and agencies, they are the activists in promoting democracy, feminism, human rights, multiculturalism, and environmental issues throughout the world. On one hand, they actively promote Western derived cultural alternatives for peoples whose social and cultural institutions are disrupted by increased involvement in the global economy. At the same time, they form the core of the active opposition to many of the policies of the global business community.

The most pervasive and persuasive source of Western cultural influence is the global media by which we mean television, movies, radio, and the Internet. Unlike the business and academic communities whose cultural influences are more indirect, the media reaches not just into the most remote communities in the world, but into the very homes of many of these individuals. While much of the media programming is local, Western derived programming in entertainment and news is the most dominant. This is particularly true in movies and television which is by far the most influential media in that one can both see and hear dramatization of cultural alternatives. Film is the major marketing device of the global corporate world, in that they expand the material wants of world's peoples. In addition, film presents—usually in an appealing manner—Western behavioral alternatives to peoples whose social and cultural institutions have been disrupted. Finally, film has been a major factor in global migration. To impoverished peoples in Latin America, Africa, Asia and elsewhere, film presents the image of a better life, if only they can migrate to the United States and Europe.

The non-Western peoples of world are not going to become fully "Westernized" or "Americanized." Globalization is not going to result in a homogeneous world culture. While the changes taking place in these societies are dramatically altering their lives, they will adapt to these changes while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness.

We often hear the phrase “What’s good for General Motors is good for America.” There is certainly some truth in this statement. General Motors was the largest automobile manufacturer in the world, and the United States was the largest automobile market in the world. The automobile industry is a core component in the U.S. manufacturing base. In 2008, Toyota replaced GM as the world’s largest auto manufacturer. In 2009, China became the world’s largest automobile market, and GM filed for bankruptcy. The decline in GM and American auto manufacturing is only one indicator of a broader shift of manufacturing and service industries from the United States and Western Europe to Asia.

In 1987, historian Paul Kennedy published *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. In his study, he examined the rise and fall of the great European countries and their Empires since 1500. He argues that political power is based on the relative economic wealth of the country and that declines in power, both political and economic, were the result of involvement in wars which they could not afford. As early as 1987, he argued that economic power was shifting from the United States, Russia (the Soviet Union), and Western Europe to China and Japan. In 1998, Andre Gunder Frank published *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asia Age*, in which he argues that the economic center of the world before Columbus was Asia. After 500 years of European conquest and domination, the economic center of the world is again shifted back to Asia. For different reasons, Kennedy and Frank have reached similar conclusions.

Before 1970, Japan was the only industrialized country in Asia that directly competed economically with the United States and Western Europe in terms of heavy industry, steel, ship building, and machinery. In the 1970s, this began to change

as western corporations began outsourcing expensive labor intensive jobs to other countries in Asia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to produce consumer goods for export to the United States, Western Europe, and the rest of the world. Although it varied from country to country, at first the goods produced were primarily textiles, apparel, footwear, and plastics; later, some countries expanded into consumer electronics. More recently, some of these countries have expanded exports to include medical technology, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, steel, motor vehicles, ships, heavy machinery, and software services. India and China, the two most populous countries in Asia, initially lagged behind the smaller countries in their involvement in the global economy. It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that they began emerging as significant participants. As economic competitors with the United States and Western Europe, India and China are different. India has focused on information technology, while China has developed an ever increasingly diversified manufacturing economy.



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The global economy has resulted in Western companies outsourcing jobs to countries with lower salaries. No country has benefited more than China.

In the 1950s, India began developing a series of National Institutes of Technology. In science and engineering, these universities were equal to any in the world. Having the advantage of being fluent English speakers, the 170,000 graduates of these institutions have made India a center of information technology (IT) on par with the United States and Europe and competitive throughout the world. In 1995–1996, Indian software exports amounted to \$734 million. By 2000–2001, India was providing software and services to more than 1/3 of the Fortune 500 companies (multinational corporations) and their export value had jumped to \$6.3 billion. Since 2001, information technology software and service revenue in India has continued to grow rapidly. In 2010, in spite of the global



recession, Indian IT exports will exceed \$50 billion, or 1/3 of the total value of Indian exports. In spite of still being a relatively poor agriculture country, India has established itself as a key and central participant in the global economy. In 2008, Prime Minister Singh, noting that India was greatly expanding the number of its institutions of higher education, stated that “I believe it is India’s destiny to become a knowledge power.” There is little doubt that India’s role as a global provider of IT software and services is going to expand greatly in the future.

Although China’s population is slightly larger than India’s, 1.3 billion vs. 1.1 billion people, geographically, China is about three times larger than India. Thus, China has a greater and more diverse resource base. Until 1978, the Chinese economy was a centrally controlled, internally focused economy. Acting on the phrase “no matter if it is a white cat or a black cat, as long as it can catch mice,” Deng Xiaoping began reforming the economy of China by focusing on the development of a market-oriented economy and the manufacturing of consumer goods for export. At first, China focused on textiles, apparel, and footwear, but soon started producing electronic equipment. Although still exporting textiles, apparel, and footwear, today China also exports an ever wider array of products, such as machinery, data-processing equipment, steel, and medical equipment. Today, China is the largest exporting country in the world, with almost \$1.5 trillion in exports in 2008.

In 1970, the United States was by far the wealthiest country in the world with a gross domestic product of approximately \$1 trillion, or about \$5.5 trillion in 2009 dollars. By 2009, the GDP had risen to about \$14 trillion. During the same period, the national debt rose from \$389 billion, about \$2 trillion in 2009 dollars, to over \$12 trillion. In 1970, the United States had a favorable balance of trade, exporting over \$2 billion more in goods and service than it imported. The last year in which the United States had a trade surplus was 1975. Although the trade deficit has varied from period to period, it has steadily grown larger, peaking in 2006 at \$760 billion. The recent recession caused it to drop to only \$380 billion in 2009. The greatest trade imbalance is in China, which now accounts for 16.4 percent of U.S. imports. The only way to pay for a trade imbalance is to finance it with borrowed money.

Determining the debt of United States is complex. First, there is the national debt, then state, local, corporate, and individual debt. The national debt falls into two categories: privately held debt and intergovernmental debt, such as the

Social Security trust fund. In 1970, one could truly say of the national debt that it was “money owed to ourselves” since the owners of these government securities were almost exclusively Americans. The same was true of other debt as well. Today that is not true. Of the \$12 trillion in National debt, \$4 trillion is intergovernmental and \$8 trillion is privately held; of that \$8 trillion, in December 2009, \$3.689 trillion, or almost half, was foreign held. The largest foreign holders of public debt is China—about \$900 billion—followed by Japan with about \$750 billion. However, even larger than the national debt is that of state and local governments, corporations, and individuals, which total in excess of \$30 trillion; about \$10 trillion is owned by foreign holders. Causes of these two forms of debt are different. The \$8 trillion in privately held national debt can be fully attributed to excessive military spending, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the cumulative interest on these debts. However, the \$10 trillion in foreign held debt of states and local governments, corporations, and individual is the cumulative effect of trade deficits over the past 35 or so years.

Unfortunately, comparable economic data on Western Europe is not readily available. However, there are some recent Europe Union (E.U.) data that are relevant. The trade balance for the E.U. was negative in 2005, but only by \$13 billion. In 2007, exports amounted to more than imports in the E.U. (about \$29 billion) and by 2009 had jumped to \$51 billion. But trade balances with non-E.U. countries varies greatly, with many countries running deficits. The same is true for foreign debt. Some countries have huge debts, much of which is owned by foreign holders in other E.U. countries. If the E.U. was a single country, it would have the largest GDP (\$14.5 trillion) of any country in the world, with the U.S. (\$14.2 trillion) a close second. China (\$8.7 trillion) would be a distant third, with Japan (\$4.1 trillion) fourth, and India (\$3.3 trillion) fifth. However, it is not a question of where these economies were in 2009, but rather the direction in which they are going. Robert Fogel (2010) argues that by 2040, the Chinese economy will constitute 40 percent of the world GDP, while E.U. shares will drop to only 5 percent, and the U.S. to 14 percent.

Globalization and the global market place have resulted in a massive transfer of wealth and technology, from primarily the United States, but also from Europe, to Asia. Will this trend continue? Are Kennedy and Frank both correct? Are Fogel’s estimates overly pessimistic?



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Muslims pray outside the Mosque in the Barbes Rochechouart district of Paris.

## Consequences of Globalization and the Global Economy

Globalization is multifaceted, and its effects and consequences are far-reaching. The global economy is creating an increasing economic interdependence of the world's people, not just in technology, manufactured goods, and clothing, but in food as well. The global economy is producing tremendous new wealth, while at the same time producing poverty and an increasingly skewed distribution in wealth. The global economy is resulting in the greatest migration in human history, which is changing the ethnic mix of all the world's cities, especially the cities of Western Europe and the United States. In Western Europe today, one sees increasing numbers of people from Africa, the Middle East, and all parts of Asia. In the United States, we see increasing numbers of people from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and from Latin America as well. The global media are marketing tools attempting to sell to the world not only material goods

but also Western (primarily American) lifestyles, values, and beliefs. Some argue that, whether intended or not, the global media now serve as a means of Western cultural propaganda that is threatening and eroding the cultural traditions of the non-Western peoples of the world.

Globalization has made the world smaller and geography no longer relevant. The oceans of the world no longer separate us or protect us. The problems of one region of the world quickly become the problems of another, and the problems of the Middle East have become the problems of America.

Recent events have raised numerous questions concerning globalization. Is the Western world, led by the United States, attempting, through its control of the global economy and world media, to impose its cultural values, norms, and beliefs on the other peoples of the world? How widespread is the resentment of Western domination, not just in the Middle East but in other regions of the world? If this is a growing problem, what can or should be done about it? In the next chapter, we examine the question of increasing ethnic conflict.



## Summary

**1 Globalization started with Columbus and has progresses in three difference stages.** The earliest stage was global trade. The first phase, the time of European expansion and exploration, lasted from about 1500 to 1800. The second phase, during which European empires were created in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, began in about 1800 and lasted until the end of World War II. The third phase has been the emergence of an integrated global economy.

**2 The first stage was the conquest of the Americas and the development of a global maritime trade network.** The age of European expansion and exploration began with the discovery of the Americas by Columbus in 1492. During the three centuries that followed, Europe dramatically changed the world. The Spanish and later the Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch invaded the Americas, conquering or displacing most of the native peoples and gaining control of most of the land and resources. At the same time, these same European peoples were establishing a global maritime trade network that soon brought all of the peoples of the world into contact with one another, directly or indirectly. This global trade network resulted in the exchange of technology, food crops, domesticated animals, diseases, and even people. By the late 1700s, the culture of virtually every people in the world had been to some degree affected by this exchange.

**3 The second stage, beginning about 1800 with the Industrial Revolution, gave the European powers military dominance in the world and allowed for the division of most of Africa, Asia, and Oceania in the European Empires.** The Industrial Revolution, starting in about 1800, changed the nature of European contact with non-Western peoples from trade to colonialism and political domination. The nineteenth century was a time of European imperial expansion, as the countries of Europe began claiming the lands and peoples of Africa, Asia, and Oceania. By 1900, the European powers began restructuring the economies of their colonial possessions to meet European needs. The period of Europe's ever-increasing political and economic control continued until World War II.

**4 The third and most recent stage is the emergence of an integrated global economy. The three major factors that have allowed for the development of the global economy are the collapse of the colonial empires, the development of free trade, and new technologies.** The most recent and current stage of globalization is the global economy. This stage began to develop about 50 years ago, at the end of World War II. Three major factors were involved in the emergence of the global economy. First, the collapse of the existing colonial empires allowed the countries of the world to trade directly with one another. Second was the development of free trade, meaning that goods, commodities, and services could be marketed across national boundaries without being subject to duties, tariffs, or other restrictions. The third was the development of new technologies in transportation and shipping, making it possible to move goods and people faster and at greatly reduced cost, and information and communication which allows people in different parts of the world communicate with each instantaneously. Together, these new technologies have made geography irrelevant.

**5 Globalization and the global economy have directly or indirectly resulted in a rapid population growth, economic inequalities and immigration, multinational corporations, and the spread of Western or American cultural influences.** Globalization and the emergence of the global economy have directly or indirectly had far reaching effects on the peoples of the world. Four important effects are: (1) in large part due to the efforts of the World Health Organization, the population of the world is growing rapidly. In the last 50 years, world population has jumped from 2.5 billion to 6.6 billion. (2) An inverse correlation has developed between economic development and population growth. This has resulted in the great migration world history as people are moving from rural areas to cities and from impoverished countries to wealthier countries. (3) Economically powerful multinational corporations have emerged which are able to operate outside the regulatory control of any single country. (4) Because of their domination of the global business and academic communities and the global media, Western and American cultural influence is pervasive in the world.



## Media Resources

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### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other

material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 17 ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT



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## **Ethnic Groups**

*Situational Nature of Ethnic Identity*

*Attributes of Ethnic Groups*

*Fluidity of Ethnic Groups*

*Types of Ethnic Groups*

## **The Problem of Stateless Nationalities**

### **Responses to Ethnic Conflict**

*Homogenization*

*Segregation*

*Accommodation*



A city sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, Jerusalem has been and is a major source of ethnic/religious conflict in the world.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 1 **Define** ethnic group.
- 2 **Explain** what we mean when we say ethnic identity is situational.
- 3 **Explain** the attributes of ethnic groups.
- 4 **Describe** the different levels of ethnic identity.
- 5 **Explain** why ethnic conflict is so prevalent in the world today and describe an “artificial county.”
- 6 **Explain** ethnic homogenization.
- 7 **Elaborate** on the meanings of ethnic segregation and ethnic accommodation.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many people thought we had entered a new, safer, and more peaceful era. But instead of peace, we are now faced with growing conflicts that are becoming ever more violent and destructive. In the past decade or so, several million people have fallen victim to wars, while tens of millions more have joined the ranks of refugees. Central governments exist in name only in parts of Africa and Asia. Large regions of many of these countries are under the control of rebel armies and outlaw groups. Concerns increase about nuclear proliferation and biological warfare. Concerns are also increasing about terrorist groups and their growing capabilities for destruction. New phrases like *ethnic cleansing*, *failed state*, *global terrorism*, and *rogue state* have become part of our vocabulary. It is not just that conflict is a problem—it is a growing problem. Most, but not all, of these conflicts are ethnic conflicts.

Globalization has changed the nature of ethnic conflict. In the not too distant past, ethnic conflicts were limited to particular geographical regions or countries. With vastly improved transportation and communications systems, however, together with increasing international migrations of peoples and the emergence of ethnically mixed urban populations, conflicts are no longer geographically localized. Ethnic groups may strike their enemy anywhere in the world. Associated with this increased capability, the tactics of ethnic guerrilla warfare also changed—from targeting primarily opposing armies and paramilitary groups to the increased targeting of civilian populations. The first evidence of this change came in 1972, when the Irish Republican Army began bombings in London. The

following year, the Black September Organization, a Palestinian militant group, killed 11 Israeli athletes competing in the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany. Since the 1970s, many other groups have become involved in such attacks. In 1985, Sikh separatists allegedly bombed an Air India flight between Montreal and London. In 1995, Basque separatists began attacking targets, not just in the Basque provinces but throughout Spain. In 2002 and again in 2010, Chechen rebels attacked civilian targets in Moscow, almost 1,000 miles from Chechnya.

Globalization has also resulted in the emergence of higher and a more ominous level of ethnic identity and conflict, which Samuel Huntington (see the Globalization box) calls *civilizations*. A civilization consists of a large number of otherwise linguistically and socially distinct ethnic groups who share a common, usually religious, cultural tradition that unites them in opposition to members of ethnic groups from other civilizations. By the beginning of the twentieth-first century, an Islamic identity in opposition to a Western (Judeo-Christian) identity has begun to emerge. Al-Qaeda, with members drawn from a wide variety of Islamic ethnic groups and countries, sees Islamic peoples collectively involved in a struggle with Western peoples in general—thus their terrorist attacks on New York City, Washington, London, and Madrid. The U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, with the military support of other, primarily Western countries, have served to validate Al-Qaeda’s assertions in the minds of many Islamic peoples, while also establishing in the minds of many Western peoples the belief that they are in conflict with the Islamic world.





## Ethnic Groups

Over the past few decades, the terms *ethnic* and *ethnicity* have become part of our everyday vocabulary, as have the terms *ethnic food*, *ethnic vote*, *ethnic conflict*, *ethnic clothes*, *ethnic neighborhood*, and *ethnic studies*. In the 1960s, anthropologists began studying ethnicity as a distinct social phenomenon, and since that time literature on ethnicity has proliferated. Part of the increased scholarly interest in ethnic groups came as a result of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's study of ethnic groups in New York City. They found that "in the third generation, the descendants of the immigrants confronted each other, and knew they were both Americans, in the same dress, with the same language, using the same artifacts, troubled by the same thing, but they voted differently, had different ideas about education and sex, and were still, in many essential ways, as different from one another as their grandfathers had been" (1963, 13). These findings contradicted the idea of America as a melting pot. Ethnic differences were far more resilient and significant than had been believed.

What is an ethnic group? First, it is necessary to realize that all peoples, not just minority populations, have an ethnic group identity. In essence, an **ethnic group** is a named social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or ancestry. Members of the ethnic group see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups. Ethnic group identity has a strong psychological or emotional component that divides the people of the world into opposing categories of "us" and "them." In contrast to social stratification (discussed in Chapter 13), which divides and unifies people along a series of horizontal axes on the basis of socioeconomic factors, ethnic identities divide and unify people along a series of vertical axes. Thus, ethnic groups, at least theoretically, cut across socioeconomic class differences, drawing members from all strata of the population.

Before discussing the significance of ethnic differences and conflicts in the modern world, we need to examine the varying dimensions of ethnic group identity, including (1) the situational nature of ethnic group identity, (2) the attributes of ethnic groups, (3) the fluidity of ethnic group identity, and (4) the types of ethnic groups.

### Situational Nature of Ethnic Identity

One of the more complicated aspects of ethnicity is that an individual's ethnic group identity is seldom absolute.

A person may assume a number of different ethnic identities, depending on the social situation. For example, in the United States, an individual may simultaneously be an American, a Euro-American, an Italian American, and a Sicilian American. The particular ethnic identity chosen varies with the social context. When in Europe or among Europeans, the person would assume the identity of American, in contrast to German, French, or Italian. In the United States, the same individual might assume the identity of Euro-American, as opposed to African American or Native American. Among Euro-Americans, the person might take the ethnic identity of Italian American, as opposed to Irish American or Polish American. When among Italian Americans, the individual might be identified as Sicilian American, as opposed to an Italian American whose family came from Rome, Naples, or some other region of Italy.

The situational nature of ethnic identity demonstrates what some have called the **hierarchical nesting** of identity. A particular ethnic group forms part of a larger collection of ethnic groups of like social magnitude. In turn, these ethnic groups may collectively form still another higher level of ethnic identity, which may be nested in yet another higher level. Thus, ethnic identity does not simply divide the world into categories of "us" and "them" but into varying, hierarchically ranked categories of "us" and "them."

### Attributes of Ethnic Groups

Two main attributes help to define and identify an ethnic group: an origin myth or history and ethnic boundary markers.

#### Origin Myth

Each ethnic group is the product of a unique set of social and historical events. The common or shared historical experiences that serve to unite and distinguish the group from other groups and give it a distinct social identity constitute the group's **origin myth**. By *myth*,

**ethnic group** A named social group based on perceptions of shared ancestry, cultural traditions, and common history that culturally distinguish that group from other groups.

**hierarchical nesting** Occurs when an ethnic group is part of a larger collection of ethnic groups, which together constitute a higher level of ethnic identity.

**origin myth** The collective history of an ethnic group that defines which subgroups are part of it and its relationship to other ethnic groups.

we do not mean to imply that the historical events did not really happen, or that the group is not what it claims to be. We mean only that these particular experiences serve as the ideological charter for the group's common identity and provide the members with a sense of being different from other people. Origin myths play an integral part in creating and maintaining ethnic group identity: They define and describe the origin and collective cultural historical experiences of the group.

Not all historical events are equally important; origin myths make selective references. Wars and conflicts are frequently emphasized because they clearly distinguish “us” from “them.” The origin myth imbues the group's members with feelings of distinctiveness and, often, superiority in relation to other groups. What makes an origin myth so powerful is that mythic themes and concepts are embedded in virtually every aspect of the people's popular culture: stories (written and oral), songs, dances, games, music, theater, film, and art. So pervasive are these mythic images in everyday life that members of the group learn them passively rather than consciously. Thus, all members of the group are well versed in the basic tenets of the group myth, and in the minds of most, these ideas become an unquestioned “truth.” In larger, more sophisticated groups, the origin myth also takes the form of a written, purportedly objective history formally taught in schools. American history as taught in elementary and high school is not merely the objective, political history of a particular nation-state; it is also the story of the American people. Thus, it serves as the officially sanctioned origin myth of the American ethnic group. Similarly, English, French, Japanese, and Russian history as taught in their schools is the “authorized” origin myth of those groups.

When you realize that history as taught in schools is, in fact, the collective origin myth of the group, you realize the significance of including or excluding a particular subgroup of the population. Using American history as an example, we can see how historical events play a critical role in the emergence and definition of a distinctively American ethnic identity. Among these events are the landing of the *Mayflower*, the American Revolution, the Civil War, the westward expansion, and the world wars. Certain historical groups, such as cowboys and cavalry, are used as embodiments of American ideals and identity. Americans are the

descendants of the various peoples who collectively participated in these and other group-defining events. Thus, it is not surprising that every American subgroup is sensitive to its portrayal in these events. To African Americans, it is important that American history, as taught in the public schools, acknowledges that the first man to die in the American Revolution was an African American, that African Americans fought as soldiers in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, that a high percentage of cowboys were African Americans, and that African American cavalymen played an important part in winning the West. Similarly, public acknowledgment and recognition that their groups were active participants in some, if not all, of the major events of American history are equally important for Polish Americans, Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Chinese Americans, and other immigrants in a nation of immigrants. It is inclusion in the collective origin myth that truly legitimizes a people's status as members of the group.

### *Ethnic Boundary Markers*

Every ethnic group has a way of determining or expressing membership. Overt factors used to demonstrate or denote group membership are called **ethnic boundary markers**. Ethnic boundary markers are important not only to identify group members to one another, but also to demonstrate identity to and distinctiveness from nonmembers. Because these markers distinguish members from all other groups, a single boundary marker is seldom sufficient. A marker that might distinguish one ethnic group from a second group may not distinguish it from a third group. Thus, combinations of markers are commonly used. Differences in language, religion, physical appearance, or particular cultural traits serve as ethnic boundary markers.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, speech style and language are symbols of personal identity: We send covert messages about the kind of person we are by how we speak. Language, therefore, frequently serves as an ethnic boundary marker. A person's native language is the primary indicator of ethnic group identity in many areas of the world. In the southwestern United States, Hopi and Navajo members are readily distinguished by their language alone. However, just because two populations share a common language does not mean they share a common identity, any more than the fact that two populations speak different languages means they have two distinct identities. For example, the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks of what was Yugoslavia speak dialects of Serbo-Croatian. They are, however, distinct and historically antagonistic ethnic groups. Conversely, a person

**ethnic boundary markers** Any overt characteristics that can be used to indicate ethnic group membership.

may be Irish and speak either Gaelic or English as a native language. The German government grants automatic citizenship to all ethnic German refugees from Eastern Europe, but a difficulty in assimilating these refugees is that many speak only Polish or Russian. Thus, one does not have to speak German to be an ethnic German.

Like language, religion may serve as an ethnic boundary marker. The major world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, encompass numerous distinct groups, so that religious affiliation does not always indicate ethnic affiliation. But, in many cases, religion and ethnic group more or less correspond. The Jews may be categorized as either a religious or an ethnic group. Similarly, the Sikhs in India constitute both a religious and an ethnic group. In still other situations, religious differences may be the most important marker of ethnic identity. As we mentioned earlier, the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks speak the same language; the most important distinction between these three groups is that the Serbs are Eastern Orthodox, the Croats are Catholic, and the Bosniaks are Muslim. Conversely, the Chinese ethnic identity transcends religious differences. A person is still Chinese, or Han, whether he or she is a Christian, Taoist, Buddhist, or Marxist atheist. However, Chinese Muslims, called Hui, are one of the officially recognized 56 ethnic groups of China.

Physical characteristics, or phenotypes, can sometimes indicate ethnic identity. It is impossible to identify Germans, Dutch, Danes, and other northern European ethnic groups by their physical characteristics. A similar situation is found in those regions of the world in which populations have been in long association with one another. Thus, physical characteristics do not distinguish a Zulu from a Swazi, a Chinese from a Korean, or a Choctaw from a Chickasaw. However, with the massive movements of people, particularly over the past few hundred years, physical characteristics have increasingly emerged as a marker of ethnic identity. Members of the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia—Malays, East Indians, and Chinese—are readily distinguishable by their physical appearance. The significance or lack of significance of physical characteristics in ethnic identity may also vary with the level of ethnic identity we are considering. The American identity includes almost the full range of human physical types. However, at a lower level of identity—Euro-American, African American, and Native American—physical characteristics do serve as one marker of ethnic identity. Yet within these groups, physical characteristics alone cannot be the only

marker. Some Native Americans physically look like Euro-Americans or African Americans, and some African Americans might be identified as Euro-Americans or Native Americans on the basis of their physical appearance alone.

A wide variety of cultural traits, clothing, house types, personal adornment, food, technology, economic activities, or general lifestyle may also serve as ethnic boundary markers. Over the past 100 years, a rapid homogenization of world material culture, food habits, and technology has erased many of the more overt cultural markers. Today, you do not have to be Mexican to enjoy tacos, Italian to eat pizza, or Japanese to have sushi for lunch. Similarly, you can dine on hamburgers, the all-American food, in Japan, Oman, Russia, Mexico, and most other countries. Cultural traits remain, however, the most important, diverse, and complex category of ethnic boundary markers. For the sake of brevity, we limit our discussion to one trait—clothing (see Chapter 15).

Clothing styles have historically been the most overt single indicator of ethnic identity. In the not too distant past, almost every ethnic group had its own unique style of dress. Even today, a Scottish American who wants to publically indicate his ethnic identity can wear a kilt, and a German American may wear his *lederhosen*. Similarly, on certain occasions, Native Americans wear “Indian clothes” decorated with beadwork and ribbonwork. These are not everyday garments, and they are worn only in social situations in which people want to emphasize their ethnic identity. In many regions of the world, however, people still wear ethnic clothes every day. In highland Guatemala, clothing, particularly women’s clothing, readily identifies the ethnic affiliation of the wearer. Guatemalan clothing styles actually indicate two levels of ethnic identity. If a woman wears a *huipil*, a loose-fitting blouse that slips over the head, she is a Native American. Non-Native American women, called *Ladinas*, dress in Western-style clothes. The style, colors, and designs on the *huipil* further identify where a particular woman is from: Nahuala, Chichicastenango, Solola, or one of the other hundred or so Native American communities in highland Guatemala.

### Fluidity of Ethnic Groups

Ethnic groups are not stable groupings. Ethnic groups vanish, individuals and even communities change ethnic identities, and new ethnic groups come into existence.





The dress of this woman not only identifies her as a Maya Indian but also indicates that she is from the town of Nabaj in Guatemala.

During the past 500 years, numerous ethnic groups have vanished. Massachusetts, Erie, and Susquehannock were not originally place names but the names of now-extinct Native American ethnic groups. Still other ethnic groups in Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas have vanished as well. Extinction of an ethnic group seldom means biological extinction, though. In most cases, the members of one group are absorbed into the population of a larger group. The Tasmanians of Australia are typical of what happened to many smaller ethnic groups. Numbering at most 5,000 when the British began colonizing the island of Tasmania in 1802, the population was so ravaged by wars and massacres that only a handful survived by 1850; the Tasmanians as a viable ethnic group had ceased to exist. In 1869, the last full-blooded Tasmanian man died, and in 1888, the last full-blooded Tasmanian woman died. Even today, however, mixed-blood descendants of the Tasmanians can be found among the Australian population.

Both individuals and communities can move between ethnic groups. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French Protestants, called *Huguenots*, fled persecution in France and settled in large numbers

in England and the English colonies in North America. These people quickly became absorbed into the English population. Over the past 200 years, Americans have absorbed numerous immigrant populations.

**Ethnogenesis** is the emergence of a new ethnic group. Ethnogenesis usually occurs in one of two ways: (1) a portion of an existing ethnic group splits away and forms a new ethnic group, or (2) members of two or more existing ethnic groups fuse to form a new ethnic group.

Probably the most common cause of ethnogenesis is the division of an existing ethnic group. At one time, the Osage, Kansa, Omaha, Ponca, and Quapaw Indians of the central United States were a single ethnic group. The origin myths of these peoples tell how at different times portions broke away, until there were five distinct groups. In the 1700s, small groups of Creek Indians began moving south into Florida, where they eventually developed a distinct identity as the Seminole. Similarly, as Bantu-speaking peoples spread throughout central and southern Africa, they became separated, and new ethnic groups formed. As the Spanish Empire in the Americas disintegrated during the early 1800s, new regional ethnic identities (such as Mexican, Guatemalan, Peruvian, and Chilean) began to emerge among the Spanish-speaking peoples in that region. In 1652, the Dutch began settling near the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. These people eventually developed their own distinctive dialect of Dutch, called *Afrikaans*, and their own identity, Boers.

In other cases, members of two or more ethnic groups fuse and a new ethnic identity emerges. In England, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes fused and became known as the English. The original Euro-American ethnic group was not the result of a split among the English people, but rather a fusion of English, Dutch, German, Scots, Irish, French Huguenots, Scotch-Irish, and other European settlers residing on the coast of North America. Most African American groups in the Americas are the result of the fusion of numerous distinct African groups. Inter-marriage between French traders and Native Americans in Canada resulted in the emergence of the Metis. Similarly, in South Africa, the Cape Coloured, people of mixed Dutch and Khoikhoi ancestry, are socially and politically distinct from both whites and Africans.

### Types of Ethnic Groups

From our discussion and examples so far, it should be apparent that the term *ethnic group* covers a range of

**ethnogenesis** The creation of a new ethnic group.



<b>Civilizations</b>	Groupings of nationalities on the basis of a shared or common cultural historical tradition. In most cases, this shared cultural tradition takes the form of religion.
<b>Nationalities</b>	Ethnic groups who collectively own, or feel that they own, a specific geographical region, or homeland, in which they have exclusive rights
<b>Subnationalities</b>	Ethnic groups whose identities are nested within that of a larger national identity
<b>Transnational groups</b>	Ethnic communities geographically separated from their homeland and live among members of another nationality

social groupings. In general, ethnic groups fall into two main categories: national and subnational.

A **nationality** is an ethnic group that has a feeling of **homeland**, a geographical region over which they collectively have exclusive rights. Implicit in this concept is the assumption of an inherent right to political autonomy and self-determination. In contrast, **subnationalities** lack the concept of a distinct and separate homeland and the associated rights to separate political sovereignty and self-determination. A subnational group sees itself as a dependent and politically subordinate subset of a nationality.

Although it is easy to define the difference between ethnic nationalities and subnationalities, sometimes it is far more difficult to classify particular groups. The ethnic groups in the United States demonstrate some of the difficulties in classification. With some ethnic groups, there is no doubt: Italian Americans, German Americans, Polish Americans, Scottish Americans, and Irish Americans are all subnational groups. At a higher level of identity, the same is true for African Americans. None of these groups has a concept of a distinct and separate geographical homeland within the United States. Hence, they are subnational groups that, together with many other groups, collectively constitute the American ethnic nationality.

For other ethnic groups within the United States, their status is not as clear. What is the status of Native American groups such as the Navajo, the Hopi, the Cheyenne, and the Cherokee, to name only a few? These groups have a concept of homelands within the United States. They also have histories quite distinct from those of other Americans. In recent years, they have been asserting increased political autonomy and self-determination within their reservations or what were their reservations. Although there is disagreement, many Native American individuals and groups still consider themselves distinct nationalities. The U.S. government recognizes most American Indian groups as national groups with collective legal and political rights.

No other ethnic groups in the United States have officially recognized governments and limited rights of self-determination. There is also some question about the ethnic status of Spanish-speaking people in the southwestern United States. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California were part of Mexico, when the United States acquired this region through military conquest. Most of the native Spanish-speaking people in this region think of themselves as Mexican American or Spanish American, a subnational group. There is, however, a group who sees themselves as “Mexicans” living in a land that is rightfully part of Mexico, a region they call Atzlan.

The distinction between nationality and subnational ethnic group is important because of their different political implications. As we shall see, the demands of subnational groups for equal rights and treatment have long been a source of conflict. However, these groups compete within the existing political framework. In contrast, the demands of nationalities for independence and sovereignty in a region carved out of an existing country create a political time bomb.

Globalization has increased our awareness of two additional levels of ethnic identity. Today, more than 190 million people live in a country they were not born in. Among these immigrants is a special category: transnationals. **Transnationals** are members of an

**nationality** An ethnic group that claims a right to a discrete homeland and to political autonomy and self-determination.

**homeland** A geographical region over which a particular ethnic group feels it has exclusive rights.

**subnationalities** A dependent subgroup within a larger nationality that lacks the concept of a separate homeland and makes no claim to any inherent right to political autonomy and self-determination.

**transnationals** Members of an ethnic community living outside their country of origin.

ethnic community who live outside their country of origin and homeland. What distinguishes transnational communities from other immigrant communities is that they feel that their true “home” is still where they came from regardless of where they live. Many transnationals are war refugees; others have come as guest workers, some legally and many illegally. In many cases, they have moved as immigrants and are even citizens of the new country. Although there have always been such communities, eventually either most disintegrated or their members returned home. Today, thanks to improvements in transportation and communications technology, these geographically dispersed families and groups can remain in contact with and socially function as part of their home communities. Using the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, text messaging, and long-distance phone service, they can remain in close, even instantaneous, contact with family and friends in the regions and countries in which they originated. Air travel means they can return “home” quickly if necessary in case of illness or for family weddings and other important social events. Marriages are even arranged between transnationals and spouses in their home communities. Many transnationals own houses in two countries and, when possible, acquire dual citizenship and even take an active role in the politics of both countries. There are countless numbers of such communities in the world today, such as the Pakistanis and Indians in Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, England, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere; and the Afghani communities in Pakistan, Australia, Iran, England, and the United States. Most of these transnational communities are found in the developed countries of Western Europe and North America, but almost every country in the world has some.

Globalization and the increasing contact and conflict between different peoples have also resulted in the growing significance of a level of identity that transcends nationality: civilization. A **civilization** is a grouping of a number of different nationalities on the basis of a shared cultural historical heritage that collectively distinguishes them from other like groups. Thus, we speak of Western civilization, as opposed to Islamic, Hindu, or Chinese civilization. (See the Globalization box for a discussion of civilizations.)

**civilization** A form of complex society in which many people live in cities.



## The Problem of Stateless Nationalities

It is difficult for most Americans to understand the causes and bitterness of ethnic conflict in other parts of the world. We think of *nationality* and *nation* as one and the same. An American is any person who is a citizen of the United States. Most of us think of ourselves primarily as Americans and only secondarily as Irish, Italian, or Japanese Americans. This mindset about the meaning and significance of ethnicity is due mainly to our history as a nation of immigrants—with the exception of Native Americans, most immigrants renounced their claims to their national homelands when they came to the New World. For the most part, the ethnic groups in the United States are subnationalities, not nationalities. Thus, from our common perception, a Russian is a person from Russia, a Nigerian is a citizen from Nigeria, and so forth. Equating country of origin with ethnic nationality, we view ethnic conflicts in other regions of the world as comparable to conflicts between subnational groups within the United States. We think ethnic problems within a country are the result of some combination of social, political, and/or economic discrimination—resolvable and reparable by reforms—and we minimize their political significance. However, armed ethnic conflicts are not between subnational groups, but between distinct nationalities.

The ethnic conflicts in Northern Ireland and in Israel and Palestine have proved particularly bitter. In 1922, after several centuries of British colonial domination and periodic rebellions by the native Irish, the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland) was established. Not all of Ireland was given independence, however. In the seventeenth century, to control the Irish, the British evicted Irish farmers from the northernmost portion of the island and colonized the region with Scottish Presbyterians, who became known as the Ulster-Scots, or *Scotch-Irish* in the United States. The Ulster-Scots did not identify themselves as Irish and had no desire to become part of an independent Ireland. Recognizing the wishes of the Ulster-Scots, at independence the British partitioned the island. The northern six counties became Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom. Many Irish did not and do not accept the legality of this partitioning of Ireland. To them, Northern Ireland is part of the Irish homeland and thus should be part of the Republic of Ireland. In 1968, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a secretive guerrilla army that is illegal in the Republic of Ireland,



In late September 2001, as the U.S. military prepared to invade Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden, Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister of Italy, remarked in a speech to his parliament that he hoped “the West will continue to conquer peoples, like it conquered Communism.” The Arab League demanded an apology. Just three days earlier on BBC television, Dr. Ghazi Algosabi, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United Kingdom, had warned, “We are worried that this has turned from a war against terrorism, which we support wholeheartedly and with no reservation, into a war of America or the West against Islam.” The subsequent invasion and occupation of Iraq have only added to these fears.

In 1996, Samuel P. Huntington, one of America’s foremost political scientists, published his widely read book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. In this study, he argues against the position held by many Western and non-Western scholars and writers that the global economy and Westernization go hand in hand and that Western civilization is, as V. S. Naipaul once asserted, the “universal civilization.” Huntington suggests that the “Westernization” of the world’s people is for the most part superficial. Although other peoples may have adopted many of the overt trappings of Western culture, in their core beliefs and values non-Western peoples have not changed. Thus, in terms of cultural traditions, people have been and still are highly differentiated.

Significant conflicts in recent world history have been what Huntington terms “Western civil wars”: wars between competing Western rulers, nation-states, and ideologies. The Cold War, a conflict of Western ideologies, was the last of these “civil wars.” According to Huntington, the Western world, by which he means western (Protestant and Catholic) Europe together with the United States and Canada, is now at the height of its political, economic, and military power in the world. Even though the old colonial empires are gone, the West still collectively exercises political and economic control over the world’s peoples through the United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In global political affairs, “world community” has become a euphemism to give legitimacy to the actions, frequently military, of the West. Through the control of the IMF and other similar institutions, the West still controls and manipulates global economic growth and development for its own benefit. Relative to the non-Western world, the IMF has been compared by Georgi Arbatov to “neo-Bolsheviks who love expropriating other people’s money, imposing undemocratic and alien rules of economic and political conduct and stifling economic freedom” (Huntington 1996, 184). With the United States as the only remaining military superpower, the West has aggressively pursued a policy of limiting the development

of advanced military technology, particularly nuclear weapons, in the non-Western world.

The world has become divided between the West and the rest. Huntington argues that increasing contact between peoples is not serving to lessen cultural differences, but rather to make people more acutely aware of those cultural factors that divide them. People will increasingly identify with others of like cultural heritage. The result will be, according to Huntington, a “political” realignment based on cultural heritage, or “civilizations” as he calls them. The process of de-Westernization is beginning as non-Western peoples try to rid themselves of Western cultural influences. Although de-Westernization is most apparent in the fundamentalist religious movements in Iran, Algeria, and other portions of the Islamic world, it is taking root in many other parts of the non-Western world as well. To Huntington, religious traditions indicate fundamental cultural differences between peoples, and religion forms the cultural core of what he terms “civilizations.” He sees the world coalescing into seven or eight “civilizations,” which he identifies as Western (Protestant–Catholic), Slavic–Orthodox (Christians), Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Latin American, and possibly African.

Huntington does not see the coalescence of civilizations as replacing existing ethnic identities or ending internal conflicts. He does, however, see these various civilizations increasingly competing with one another, and the boundaries separating these civilizations becoming the “fault lines” along which future conflicts will occur. The intensity of the wars in Bosnia was thus not the result of mere competition between three rival ethnic groups, but rather the result of conflict between three competing civilizations: Western (the Croats), Slavic–Orthodox (the Serbs), and Islamic (the Bosniaks). Ethnic and ideological wars will be superseded by wars between civilizations, and Huntington sees the most imminent of these clashes as between Western and Islamic civilizations.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Huntington’s proposal is highly speculative, and many of his assertions can be questioned. He does, however, present some alarming ideas concerning the nature of future conflicts in the world. Is this present time of rising nationalism and political fragmentation only the prelude to a global political realignment of people based on opposing cultural traditions?
2. Will new supra-ethnic identities emerge as the most potent political forces in the world?
3. Will the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the retaliatory invasions by the United States of Afghanistan and Iraq prove to be isolated events in human history, or will they be the prelude to a clash between Western and Islamic civilizations?

began waging a guerilla war with the objective of reunifying Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Bombings, ambushes, and assassinations claimed more than 2,200 lives before the IRA announced in 2005 that it would end its military operations. Several splinter groups have still not agreed, and sporadic bombings and shootings still occur. The news media frequently report the problems in Northern Ireland as conflict between the British and the Irish or between Catholics and Protestants; in reality, it is neither. The root of the problem is the conflicting claims of two rival and hostile nationalities: the Irish and the Ulster-Scots. The Ulster-Scots have emerged over the past 400 years as a distinct nationality who claim the northern part of Ireland as their homeland. In contrast, the Irish see the area as an integral and inalienable part of the Irish homeland.

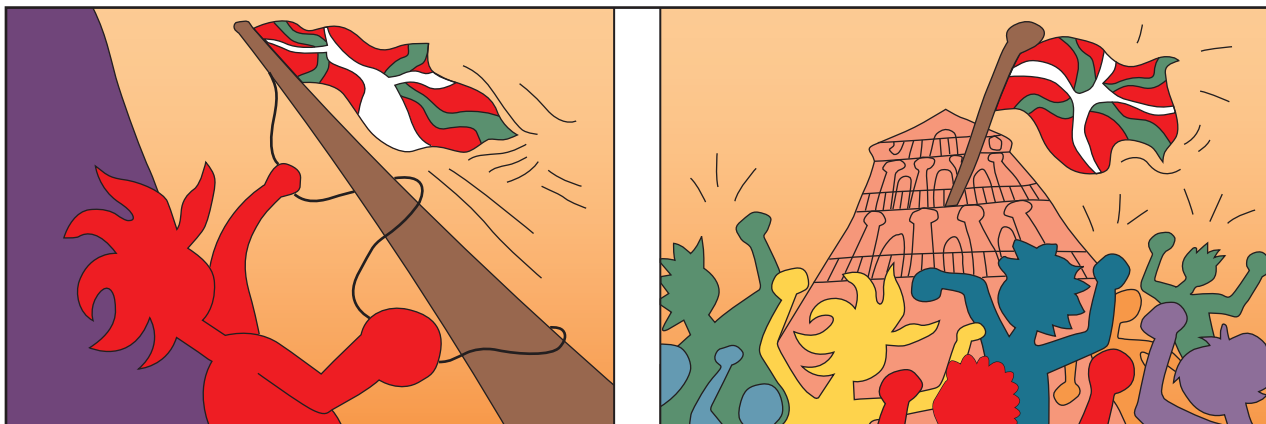
After an absence of almost 2,000 years, the Jews began returning to their historic homeland in Palestine in 1882. During the early twentieth century, Jewish settlements in Palestine grew, and in 1948, the Jewish settlers proclaimed the state of Israel. In the war that followed, the Arab League, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq were defeated and the Israelis gained control over most of the area west of the Jordan River and the Sinai. Periodic fighting continued, however. The 1967 War resulted in the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip but has not brought an end to the fighting. For the past 60 years, conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has been constant, varying only in the intensity and the nature of violence. The problem is similar to the problem in Northern Ireland: Two nationalities—Israelis and Palestinians—claim the same geographical region as their legitimate homeland. Although some progress

has been made recently toward peaceful settlements of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and between Israelis and Palestinians, such agreements are tenuous. These situations remain volatile. In Israel and Northern Ireland, it is impossible to resolve the conflict to the total satisfaction of both nationalities.

These two conflicts vividly illustrate the strength of nationalist sentiments. In both cases, we see groups of educated, rational human beings willing to sacrifice their lives and economic well-being in unending conflicts for what they consider their nationality's legitimate rights.

Such conflicts are more common in the modern world than most of us realize. The world is divided into about 200 countries, but there are 3,000 to 5,000 distinct ethnic nationalities. As a result, the populations of most countries encompass many distinct nationalities. China officially recognizes 56 distinct nationalities. Some estimates are as high as 300 ethnic nationalities in Indonesia. Ethiopia has at least 70 nationalities. Only a handful of countries are peopled by members of a single nationality and are thus ethnically homogeneous.

The ethnic nationality problem is further complicated because current political boundaries frequently divide members of a nationality and their historic homelands. For example, Hungarians are found not only in Hungary but also in the adjacent portions of Romania and Serbia. Somalis live not only in Somalia but also in the adjacent Ogaden portion of Ethiopia. The world is filled with ethnic groups who do not fully recognize the legitimacy of "their" central government and who aspire or may potentially aspire to political sovereignty (see Figure 17.1).



**Figure 17.1** Nationalist organizations use various means to communicate their message of separation. These cartoon panels showing the Basque flag are from a booklet distributed by Basque separatists in northern Spain.

For the most part, nationality problems were not created by the nationalities themselves. The current political boundaries for most of the world are legacies of European colonialism and expansion. In 1884–1885 at the Berlin Conference, European leaders sat at a table and with pens and pencils drew lines on a map of Africa, dividing the resources and peoples of that continent among themselves. Through this agreement, the English, French, Germans, Belgians, Portuguese, and other European powers assumed sovereignty over lands they had never traveled and over peoples who had never seen a white man. Nor was Africa the only continent to have boundaries imposed by Europeans. The national boundaries of most of the world were drawn by Europeans for their own interests, with little regard for the interests of any indigenous peoples or the boundaries of the ethnic groups affected. As a result, most European colonial possessions were a polyglot of ethnic groups, many of whom had long histories of hostilities toward one another. Sometimes the land and people of an ethnic group were divided between two or more European colonies. To make matters worse, colonial powers frequently moved people from one colony to another to supply labor. For example, the British settled Indian laborers in Burma (Myanmar), Malaya (Malaysia), Fiji, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Trinidad, and British Guiana (Guyana).

The end of the colonial period did not end the ethnic conflicts in the world. As European powers granted independence to their colonies, they made little attempt to redefine political boundaries. In most cases, these newly independent countries had precisely the same boundaries and ethnic composition as the former colonies. Because these political divisions were imposed by European military power, some scholars have termed the former colonies **artificial countries**. In most cases, the basic colonial administrative and governmental structure was maintained after independence; the major departure from the colonial period was that native officials replaced European officials. However, not all ethnic groups were equally represented in these new governments, and most former colonies quickly came under the domination of one or two of the more powerful ethnic groups. Thus, in many instances, European domination was replaced by domination by one or another “native” ethnic group. With this in mind, the political problems endemic in much of the former colonial world become more comprehensible. (See A Closer Look for a discussion of ethnic conflicts in Iraq.)

What was once British India is a prime example of ethnic problems in the postcolonial period. Consisting

of several hundred distinct ethnic groups as well as major religious divisions, India did not exist—and never existed—as a unified country before British domination. As independence approached in the 1940s, hostilities between rival Muslim and Hindu factions became so intense that British officials decided that a unified, independent India was impossible. They decided that India had to be divided into two countries: India (predominantly Hindu) and Pakistan (predominantly Muslim). The British drew the borders of these new countries. The problem was the lack of clear geographical boundaries separating these groups; in many regions, the populations were mixed Hindu and Muslim. An East Pakistan and a West Pakistan were carved out on either side, separated by 1,000 miles of what was to be India. After the official announcement of the boundaries, massive migrations began as millions of Muslims and Hindus found themselves on the wrong sides of the borders. These migrations were stimulated by extremists on both sides, who massacred Muslims living in what was to become India and Hindus in what was to be Pakistan. Some estimate that as many as one million people were killed in these riots. The granting of actual independence to the two countries in 1947 made the situation worse because neither side was satisfied with its geographical boundaries. The new Indian army occupied the largely Muslim region of Kashmir, and war quickly broke out. The first India–Pakistan war ended in 1949, with most of Kashmir occupied by India.

The creation of two separate states out of British India addressed—but did not solve—only one of the region’s ethnic/religious problems. The day before independence, the Naga people in India’s easternmost Assam province declared an independent Nagaland. This Naga secessionist movement is still active; for more than 60 years, periodic bloody clashes have occurred between Naga rebels and Indian authorities. More recently, a Sikh separatist movement emerged, demanding an independent homeland in Punjab. The violent tactics of the Sikh nationalists resulted in the Indian army attacking the holiest Sikh religious shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, in 1984. Later that year, two Sikhs assassinated Indira Gandhi, the prime minister of India, causing more violence between Sikhs and Hindus. In 1990, violence again broke out in Kashmir, which continues today. Muslim leaders are

**artificial countries** Multinationality countries created by external powers; usually applied to former colonies.



The conflict in present-day Iraq can be understood only in the context of the region's history. Although the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, ancient Mesopotamia, is one of the ancient "cradles" of civilization, it is also a region that has had an extremely turbulent political history. In the third millennium B.C.E., it was the center of Sumerian civilization, and during the second millennium B.C.E., the ancient city of Babylon dominated the region. Later, it was at times part of the Assyrian, Persian, Seleucid, Roman, Parthian, Sassanid, Umayyad, and Ottoman empires, to name only some. In spite of the long history of the region, modern-day Iraq is a recent creation, established by the British following World War I out of three provinces or *wilayat* of the defeated Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Like many regions long dominated by outside forces and with modern political boundaries drawn by others, Iraq lacks any meaningful sociopolitical cohesion uniting its population. Modern Iraq is an "artificial country."

The native population of Iraq is divided into three main ethnic/religious groups: Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Shiite Arabs. Of the three groups, the Shiite Arabs are by far the largest, constituting about 60 percent of the total population. The Kurds and Sunni Arabs each number about 20 percent. In addition, there are some smaller ethnic/religious groups: Assyrians, Turkmen, and Arab Christians. About 120,000 Jews lived in Iraq until after the war of Israeli independence, when most immigrated to Israel.

Speaking an Indo-European language, the Kurds are one of the ancient indigenous peoples of the region. Distinguished by dialect differences and highly fractionalized into numerous localized tribal groups, they live primarily in mountain agricultural communities. Kurdish communities are found in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Numbering between 22 million and 25 million people, the Kurds are the largest stateless nationality in the world. Although the Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslims, some tribes are Shiite, and a few still practice Yazdani, the pre-Islamic Kurdish religion. Occupying the more mountainous northeastern portion of Iraq, the 3.5 million Iraqi Kurds identify more strongly with Kurdish populations living in adjacent countries than with Arab Iraqis.

Although the Arabic-speaking people of Iraq make up about 80 percent of the population, they are far from a unified group. The Arab population of southern Iraq is overwhelmingly Shiite, while the region of central Iraq around Baghdad is predominantly Sunni. The Sunni and Shiite represent the two major divisions in the Islamic world.

In A.D. 632, the Prophet Muhammad died with no clearly defined manner in which a new successor could be chosen. Some Muslims believed the Prophet's successor

should be chosen from the family of the Prophet. Ali ibn Abu Talib, usually referred to simply as Ali, the cousin of Muhammad and the husband of his only surviving child, Fatima, was the choice of this group. However, most leaders of the new religion thought that the position should be open to others, and Abu Bakr was selected by them to be the first caliph. In the decades that followed Abu Bakr's selection, by conquest and proselytizing, Islam spread rapidly beyond the Arabian peninsula—west into Egypt and North Africa and north into Syria and Iraq. Disputes broke out between the various leaders over the control of the lands being conquered. In C.E. 656, Uthman, the third caliph, was murdered by the son of the first caliph, Abu Bakr. A crisis quickly developed when factional leaders were unable to agree on a successor to Uthman. Many supported Ali, who was now governor of Iraq, but others supported Muawiyah, a cousin of Uthman and governor of Syria. Among the supporters of Muawiyah was Aisha, a widow of the Prophet Muhammad.

The armies of Ali and Muawiyah met on the Plains of Siffin, in what is today Iraq. The battle was indecisive, and Ali attempted to arbitrate their differences peacefully. In 661, Ali was murdered while at prayer in the mosque Al Kufah (Kufah) and buried in nearby Najaf. Muawiyah was able to convince Ali's oldest son, Hassan, to give up any claim to the caliphate, and Muawiyah was declared caliph and established what was to be called the Umayyad Dynasty, with its capital at Damascus (Syria). Shortly after Hassan had renounced his claim, he died. Some say he died of natural causes, others say he was poisoned. The death of Ali and then Hassan served to strengthen the opposition of Ali's supporters against Muawiyah.

In 680, Muawiyah died and was succeeded as caliph by his son, Yazid. Hussain, the second son of Ali, refusing to recognize Yazid, led a revolt. Yazid sent an army against them. On October 10, 680, Hussain and 200 of his followers were killed at Karbala (Iraq) and Hussain's head was sent to Yazid.

The killing of Hussain and his followers created a schism in the Islamic religious community that has lasted until today. The followers of Ali and Hussain became known as the Shiite, with their main shrines at Karbala and Najaf in Iraq. The followers of Yazid became known as the Sunni. Today, only about 16 percent of the Islamic peoples in the world are Shiite, and only in Iraq, Iran, and Bahrain do they constitute the majority of the population. The vast majority, about 83 percent, of the Islamic peoples are Sunni.

Important theological differences exist between Shiites and Sunnis. Possibly the most significant difference concerns spiritual leadership and the concept of Imam, or religious

leader. Among the Sunni, any righteous and knowledgeable Muslim can act as an Imam, leading prayers and interpreting the Holy Koran. Even the highest-ranking Imams are not and cannot be considered divinely inspired. To suggest such would be considered heresy. For important senior leadership positions, Sunni Imams are usually appointed by political leaders, not chosen by other Imams. In contrast, Shiites believe that the “Twelve Imams,” the earliest divinely inspired followers of the Prophet Mohammed, stay in spiritual contact with their followers through the living Imams. The highest-ranking Shiite Imams are called Ayatollahs. The position of Ayatollah is based on agreement of the other Ayatollahs. Shiites further believe that the Ayatollahs (which means “shadow of Allah”) receive guidance from the Twelve Imams, and thus their actions in temporal and spiritual matters are divinely inspired.

Although Arab Shiites and Sunnis speak the same language, follow the same cultural traditions, and frequently reside in the same cities and towns, they always live in two socially distinct and separate communities. Conversions from one sect to the other are rare, as are marriages between members of the two sects. Marriage, birth, and death rituals take place within the framework of one or the other of the communities. Frequently, the division between the Shiite and the Sunni communities assumes the same level of sociopolitical significance as ethnic differences.

Under Ottoman Turkish rule, the region now known as Iraq consisted of three separate *wilayat* or provinces: Mosul in the north, which was predominantly Kurdish; Baghdad in the central area, in which the Sunni population was concentrated; and Al-Basrah in the south, where mainly Shiites resided. Soon after the outbreak of World War I, Turkey allied itself with Germany. Quickly moving forces out of India, the British succeeded in capturing Basra and by the fall of 1915 most of the south. In 1917, they took Baghdad, and the following year Mosul. At the peace conference of 1919, the three provinces were made British mandate territories under the supervision of the League of Nations.

At first Iraq, under the British, was to consist of only the provinces of Baghdad and Al-Basrah, the Sunni and Shiite Arab regions. In accordance with the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, the province of Mosul was to be part of a new autonomous Kurdish state that was also to include the Kurdish portion of Turkey. However, in May 1920, fearing continued British control, the Sunni and Shiite communities and leaders joined forces in an armed uprising that failed. The next year, 1921, the new Iraqi government was organized. An individual from Saudi Arabia, Faisal, was named king, and a constitutional monarchy

was established with a council of ministers under a British high commissioner. Meanwhile, the Sultan of Turkey was overthrown by Turkish nationalists, who reoccupied the Kurdish portion of eastern Turkey, scrapping the Treaty of Sevres. Recognizing that the area around Mosul contained large oil reserves, which they desired to control, in 1923, the British unilaterally merged the Kurdish province of Mosul with the new Iraq Kingdom. Two years later, the League of Nations approved this change.

The status of Iraq as a British mandate continued until 1932, when Iraq became fully independent and a member of the League of Nations. Although King Faisal was a pan-Arab nationalist, he was not from Iraq, and most local Arabs considered him a foreigner imposed on them by the British. Neither King Faisal nor the government as created by the British had any legitimacy in the minds of the various peoples of Iraq. The Sunni, though smaller in numbers than the Shiite, were better educated. Under the Ottomans, Sunni had filled most of the administrative positions in the regional government. This continued under the British and in the new Iraq government. The Shiite were not pleased by what they viewed as Sunni domination. The Kurds were also unhappy that an autonomous Kurdish state had not been created. There were also problems between the various Arab tribal leaders as well as between pan-Arab and Iraqi nationalists. In addition, the new country faced a wide range of economic problems. With full independence achieved, King Faisal died in 1933, leaving his throne to his 21-year-old, Western-educated son, Ghazi. In 1939, Ghazi was killed in an automobile accident, leaving as his successor a 3-year-old son, Faisal II. A cousin of the new king was named as regent.

Under the “rule” of Ghazi and Faisal II, the government of Iraq quickly degenerated into political bickering and infighting between various tribal leaders, Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, pan-Arab nationalists, Iraqi nationalists, communists, socialists, military officers, and others. In 1948, Iraq joined the other Arab countries in sending troops to fight against Israel. The defeat of the Arab League and the continued pro-British and pro-Western position of Faisal II and his ministers resulted in a coalescence of the various anti-Western factions in Iraq. As a result, in 1958, a military coup took place, Faisal II was killed, and a republic proclaimed.

The coup and the creation of a republic did not succeed in bringing political stability to the country. During the 1960s and 1970s, still more military coups and rapid changes in political leadership took place. The only constant during this period was that the leaders were all anti-West and pro-Soviet Union. In 1961, Mustafa al-Barzani, with backing from Iran, initiated a Kurdish separatist rebellion. This period

## ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES IN IRAQ *(continued)*

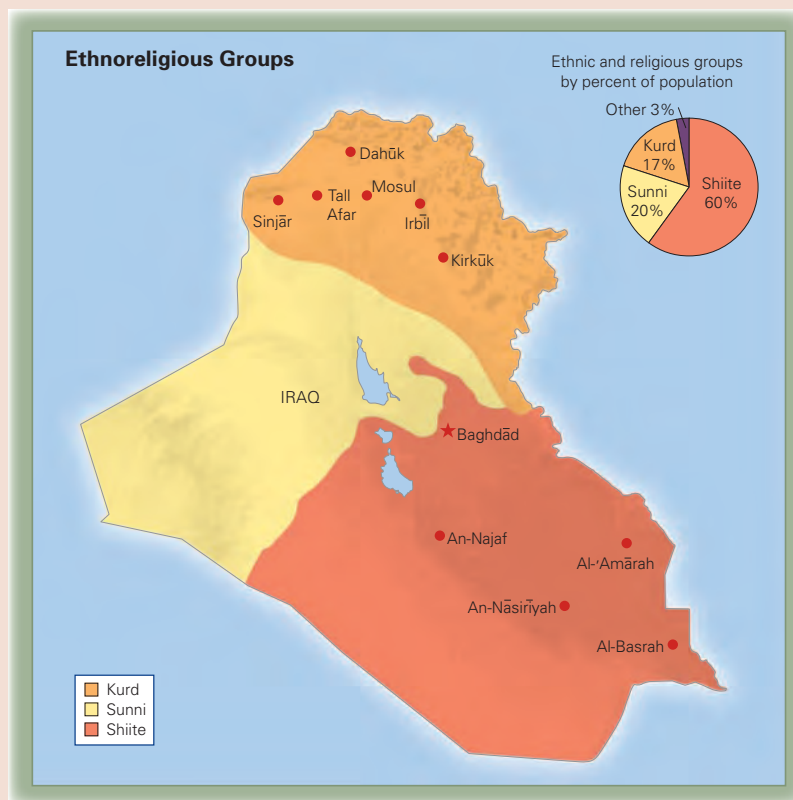
of fighting lasted until 1977, when the Iraqi government agreed to give the Kurds greater local autonomy and recognized Kurdish as an official language. The 1960s and 1970s were also a period of increasing oil production and revenue, as well as greater dependence on civilian and military technology from the Soviet Union.

In 1979, two significant events occurred in the region: Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq, and the Shah of Iran was overthrown and the Islamic Republic of Iran was created under the control of Shiite clerics. The following year, the Iran–Iraq War started with the Iraqi invasion of southern Iran. There appear to have been multiple reasons Hussein ordered the invasion. First, he wished to settle some important border disputes. Second, he feared that the success of the Shiite clerics in Iran would encourage the Shiite majority in Iraq to attempt a similar revolution. Finally, by exploiting the long-standing antipathies between Arabs and Iranians (Persians), Hussein could use the war to help solidify his control over Iraq. The eight years of often-bloody warfare that followed almost

bankrupted the two countries while accomplishing little in resolving the border disputes. The Shiite Arabs in Iraq did support the national war effort, however, and the war enabled Hussein to gain a virtually dictatorial control of the country through the military.

During the war with Iran, with weapons supplied by Iran, the Kurds in the north once again revolted. After the war with Iran ended in 1988, Hussein moved against the Kurdish-controlled areas in the north. Nerve gas and mustard gas were dropped on the Kurdish-held cities. Altogether an estimated 200,000 Kurds died in these attacks, but Kurdish guerrillas were able to hold out in some areas.

Iraqi leaders had long claimed that Kuwait should be part of Iraq. In August 1990, the Iraqi army invaded and quickly occupied the country. The United Nations condemned the occupation of Kuwait and ordered the Iraqi army to withdraw by January 15, 1991. When they did not, an allied army led by the United States militarily drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait. The allied army, however, did not attempt to invade and



**Figure 17.2** The Regions of Iraq Occupied by the Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Shiite Arabs.



occupy Iraq. Instead, a ceasefire was announced in February, and in April the United Nations imposed restrictions on Iraq.

Hoping to remove Hussein, then U.S. President George W. Bush encouraged both the Kurds and the Shiite Arabs to revolt. Responding to Bush's call, in 1991 the Kurdish separatists launched a major attack against the Iraqi-held towns, while almost simultaneously Shiites revolted in the cities and towns of the south. The Iraqi army responded quickly with counterattacks both in the north and in the south. Lacking any meaningful military support from the United States, Shiite irregulars in the south were routed, with tens of thousands either killed or executed. Similarly in the north, the Kurds were routed, with almost a million refugees fleeing to Turkey. Only the imposition of a "no fly" zone in the north by the United States saved the Kurdish separatists from destruction and allowed them to maintain an autonomous region in the mountainous north.

With the defeat of the Iraqi army and the occupation of Iraq by American and coalition forces in 2003, the United States finds itself in an even more difficult situation than Britain did in 1919. The United States is involved in a complex, bloody, multisided war involving a wide range of hostile armed groups, each with different objectives. Each of the

three major ethnic/religious groups—the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites—is hostile to the others. And, within each of these three ethnic/religious groups are a number of rival factions hostile to the others. The Kurdish groups are in basic agreement on wanting an autonomous region within Iraq, if not an independent Kurdistan. The Sunni and Shiite groups are divided into a complex array of rival factions of nationalists, sectarian zealots, and Islamic fundamentalists. Finally, there is Al-Qaeda, with people drawn from throughout the Islamic world, engaged in a jihad (holy war) against the United States and variously allied with different local factions. All of these groups are in the process of positioning themselves for the internal struggle that they think is going to emerge after the United States and Coalition forces leave Iraq. Finding a workable political solution to these internal problems is going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. The only "stable" government Iraq has had during the past 85 years was headed by Saddam Hussein, and he was able to stay in power only by keeping Iraq on a war footing and using his army to impose draconian measures to suppress any internal dissension. Nevertheless, the oil reserves of Iraq are far too important to the global economy to allow Iraq to descend into anarchy.

demanding either a separate nation or unification with Pakistan. In addition, there are active separatist movements among the Bodo, Gorkha, Tripari, and Tamil. As if India's problems with its religious/ethnic minorities were not sufficient, the Hindu extremists are becoming increasingly hostile to non-Hindu minorities. Pakistan has also experienced ethnic difficulties. Both parts of Pakistan were Muslim, but there were major ethnic differences between the two. East Pakistanis were predominantly Bengalis; West Pakistan was more heterogeneous ethnically but dominated by the Punjabi. Although West Pakistan had a smaller population, the capital was located there after independence, and the Punjabi gained dominance in the government and the military. In West Pakistan, a separatist movement was started by the Baluchi, who sought an independent Baluchistan, soon after independence. However, the first major conflict emerged with the Bengalis in East Pakistan. Although the Bengalis were economically exploited and discriminated against, it was not until the government attempted to impose the Urdu language in the schools of East Pakistan that the situation came to a head. In 1971, the East Pakistanis revolted and, after a short but bloody war aided by India, succeeded in establishing the state of Bangladesh.

The separation of Bangladesh did not end the ethnic problems of present day Pakistan. The government and the military are still controlled by Punjabi, who constitute about 45 percent of the population. There are active nationalism movements among both the Balochi and the Sindhi peoples. However, the greatest potential internal ethnic threat in Pakistan is with the Pushtun, who constitute over 15 percent of the population concentrated along the border with Afghanistan. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the Pushtun have politically dominated Afghanistan. It is a de facto Pushtun state. The present border was created by the British in 1893 and inherited by Pakistan in 1947. The border politically divides the Pushtun peoples, about one-third live in Afghanistan and two-thirds in Pakistan. Neither the Pushtun nor the government of Afghanistan fully acknowledges this border. A tribal people known for the military prowess neither the British nor the Pakistani governments have even attempted to bring them under their direct political control. Nor has Pakistan, like the British before them, attempted to fully control the border. Following the British pattern, the Pushtun tribal areas in Pakistan along the border are designated as either Federally

Administered Tribal Territories or Provincially Administered Tribal Areas. These areas are and have been politically autonomous. During the period of Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, many Afghan Pushtuns took refuge among the Pushtuns in Pakistan. From bases in these areas, Pushtun leaders organized and equipped the Pushtun mujahedeen militias to fight the Soviets. In the civil wars that followed the Soviet withdrawal, the Taliban, an ethnically Pushtun religious political movement, gained control of most of Afghanistan and gave sanctuary to Al-Qaeda, a Pan-Islamic group who had supported them in their war with the Soviets. On September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda staged their attack on the World Trade Center. In response, the United States and its allies attacked Afghanistan. Defeated, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda took refuge in the Pushtun tribal areas of Pakistan. It is from these bases in the Tribal Areas that the Taliban are now staging their attacks on U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. If the Taliban are able to operate with impunity from their bases in Pakistan, the conflict in Afghanistan can continue indefinitely. Under pressure from the U.S. the Pakistani army is staging limited attacks on Taliban bases and the Taliban are responding with terrorist attacks in Pakistan. At this time, the vast majority of Pushtun tribal groups are either neutral or anti-Taliban. The fear is that if the Pakistani Army invades the tribal areas, it would result in the Taliban becoming a Pushtun nationalist movement, which would greatly increase the scope and complexity of the present conflict.

British India was by far the largest and most ethnically complex of the former European colonial possessions. Similar secessionist movements have taken place and are still occurring throughout the old colonial world: Nationalist separatist movements are active in southern Sudan, the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Burma, Burundi, Congo, and Indonesia—to name just a few. Certainly, it is facile to lay all the blame on colonialism for these and other conflicts in the postcolonial era. But it is undeniable that violence between ethnic nationalities, each believing its political and territorial claims are legitimate, is one of colonialism's most unfortunate and long-lasting legacies.

Not all ethnic conflicts are confined to the old colonial world, however. For example, the Kurds (who live in the mountainous regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria) have had an active separatist movement since the 1960s. At different times, they have fought the Turks,

the Iraqis, and the Iranians (see A Closer Look). In 1950, China invaded and occupied Tibet, a region that the Chinese consider part of China. A Tibetan revolt in 1959 was crushed, but Tibetans still seek political autonomy under the Dalai Lama, their spiritual leader.

Recently, some of the most violent ethnic conflicts have been in Europe and the former Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, Yugoslavia disintegrated as the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia proclaimed their independence. Yugoslavia was reduced to only two of the former six republics: Serbia and Montenegro. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Serbs found themselves living in Croatia and Bosnia. Supported by the Serb-controlled Yugoslavian army, Serb nationalists in Croatia and Bosnia rebelled, took control of regions in both republics, and demanded unification with Serbia. With more than 100,000 dead and more than one million homeless, the war in Bosnia has been the bloodiest and most destructive war in Europe since World War II. In 1995, the Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs reached an agreement. Fighting stopped, and NATO troops occupied zones between the warring factions.

Ethnic conflict spread to the Kosovo province of Serbia in 1998, when the Albanian majority in the province organized the Albanian Liberation Army and called for an independent Kosovo. Attempts by the Serbs to crush the rebellion resulted in armed intervention by NATO forces in 1999 and the military occupation of the province. In 2000, ethnic conflict spread to Macedonia as Albanian nationalists rebelled against Macedonian control of their regions of the country. NATO peacekeepers are today in Macedonia. The question remains whether long term workable political solutions can be found for the ethnic problems in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

This is only a sampling of armed nationalist conflicts. Nationalist movements are difficult to defuse. In most cases, the recognized national governments lack the military resources to defeat them. Even when a government has overwhelming resources, such as the British in Northern Ireland, guerrilla wars are difficult to win decisively. As a result, few separatist movements have been extinguished. In some cases, the central governments have either disintegrated or lost control over most of the country. In other cases, the central governments have adopted policies of geographical containment and lessening of direct conflict. A graphic example of this approach is in Western Sahara, formerly Spanish

Sahara. In the early 1970s, Spain committed itself to a policy of independence and self-determination for its colony. However, in 1976, before independence was achieved, Morocco occupied the northern portion of the region, claiming it was historically part of Morocco. In 1979, Morocco occupied the southern portion of the region. The Spanish did not resist the Moroccan occupation. But the local Sahrawi population rejected Moroccan domination, formed the Polisaria Front, and started a guerrilla war. Unable to defeat the guerrillas but unwilling to withdraw, the Moroccan government partitioned the region with a 2,500-kilometer-long sand “wall” equipped with electronic devices to detect movements; the purpose of the wall was to separate the portion Morocco controlled from the area it did not control. In 1989, the Moroccan government agreed to a referendum sponsored by the United Nations, but as of 2010, the future of Western Sahara was yet to be resolved.

Almost yearly the number of unresolved ethnic conflicts increases and the number of peoples and regions affected widens. There are about 150 ongoing armed conflicts in the world today, and the majority of these conflicts may be classified as nationalist movements. Central governments as a whole have been unsuccessful in achieving complete military victories over separatist groups, but nationalist separatist groups themselves seldom have been successful in achieving political victories.

Bangladesh was recognized by the United Nations only because it was a *fait accompli*, backed by the overwhelming military support of India. In contrast, the United Nations was extremely slow to extend recognition to Slovenia and Croatia. Only when it appeared that Yugoslavia might militarily intervene did the United Nations act, and then only in hopes of preventing a war. The recent problems of chaos and starvation in Somalia have been limited to the southern portion of the country. When the central government of Somalia disintegrated in 1991, the leaders in the north declared their independence and established their state of Somaliland. Although Somaliland is politically stable, it has yet to be granted recognition by any country. The United Nations and the Organization of African Unity have taken the position that northern and southern Somalia will “remain” united, and they act as if no government exists in the north.

One may well ask why separatist movements are seldom extended official recognition. In Chapter 1, Article 1, of the Charter of the United Nations, the right of a people to self-determination is recognized.

The United Nations, however, also recognizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of existing states. Thus, recognition of a secessionist group would be considered intervention in the affairs of a sovereign state. Other governments have also pledged not to recognize separatist states. In 1964, the Organization of African Unity adopted the policy that “the borders of African States on the day of independence constitute a tangible reality,” and thus they firmly oppose any changes in the political boundaries of Africa. The real, unstated reason is that almost every country in the world has one or more minority nationalities that either have or potentially may develop an independence movement. Thus, existing countries make both formal and informal agreements to maintain the current political status quo.



## Responses to Ethnic Conflict

How do countries respond to internal ethnic conflicts? The most obvious solution is to divide the country, giving the members of each dissatisfied nationality their own land and independence and allowing them to establish their own country or merge with another country. Peaceful solutions to ethnic questions are rare, however. As Burma, India, and many other countries have shown, governments would rather fight a long, destructive, and inclusive war than officially recognize the independence of a rebellious nationality. Governments take this stance partly because they fear setting a precedent. As a result, most ethnic conflicts have been resolved—and future solutions will probably have to be sought—within the existing political structure. Historically, such internal responses to ethnic issues have taken three forms: (1) ethnic homogenization of the population through the elimination of rival ethnic groups, (2) segregation of ethnic groups, and (3) political accommodation of ethnic groups.

### Homogenization

**Ethnic homogenization** is the process by which one ethnic group attempts to eliminate rival ethnic groups

**ethnic homogenization** The attempt to create a single ethnic group in a particular geographical region.



within a particular region or country. Historically, ethnic homogenization has taken one of two main forms: ethnic cleansing or assimilation. The term *ethnic cleansing* entered our vocabulary in reference to the warfare in the republics of what was formerly Yugoslavia. **Ethnic cleansing** is the physical elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups from particular geographical areas. It involves genocide and/or relocation.

**Genocide** is the deliberate and systematic attempt to physically destroy the members of the rival population. The objective may be the total destruction of the group, the reduction of their numbers, or a stimulus for the surviving members of the group to migrate. The process is the same: the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children of the targeted ethnic group. Today, when we think of genocide, we think of the recent events in Sudan, Bosnia, or Rwanda or the killing of millions of Jews and Gypsies by the Germans during World War II, but genocide has been a recurrent event in human history. Only the magnitude of the killing has varied. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, thousands of Native Americans were massacred by the Guatemalan army. The Turks instituted a policy of systematic killing of Armenians during the early years of the last century. During the colonial period, the English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Belgians, and Germans were periodically guilty of genocide. Incidents of genocide are found even in American history, beginning with the slaughter of the Pequots in Connecticut in 1637 and ending with the massacre of more than 150 Sioux at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890. Genocide has been and still is a far too common response to ethnic conflict and rivalry.

**ethnic cleansing** The elimination or removal of an unwanted ethnic group or groups from a country or a particular geographical region; usually involves genocide and/or relocation of the population.

**genocide** The deliberate attempt to eliminate the members of an ethnic category or cultural tradition.

**relocation** The forced removal of the members of a particular ethnic group from one geographical region to another.

**assimilation** The merging of the members of one ethnic group into another, with the consequent abandonment of the former group's identity.

**forced assimilation** The social absorption of one ethnic group by another ethnic group through the use of force.

**Relocation** is the forced resettlement of an unwanted ethnic group in a new geographical location. The forced relocation of the target population may be either in conjunction with genocide, as in the Darfur region of Sudan, or separate from it. Sometimes the unwanted group is forced outside the boundaries of the country, becoming what today we term *refugees*. In other cases, an ethnic group is forcibly moved to a new area within the boundaries of the state, where it is assumed that they will pose less of a problem.

At the outbreak of World War II, the Soviet Union was home to several million ethnic Germans who had settled in Russia during the eighteenth century. In 1924, a separate German autonomous republic within Russia was established along the Volga River for the so-called Volga Germans. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin, fearing that the ethnic Germans might join the invaders, ordered all of them moved from Russia and Ukraine to Kazakhstan, Siberia, and other remote areas.

After World War II, the boundaries of much of Eastern Europe were redrawn. That portion of Germany located east of the Oder River was given to Poland, and seven million German residents were forcibly evicted. At the same time, Czechoslovakia evicted almost three million resident Germans from their homes. After independence, many East African countries expelled many East Indians who had settled there during the colonial period. In American history, Native Americans were regularly relocated as the frontier moved west. The largest and best known of these relocations occurred in the 1830s, when the Five Civilized Tribes were forced to move (along the so-called Trail of Tears) from their homes in the southeastern states to what is today Oklahoma. Most indigenous tribes of the United States experienced similar resettlement programs. In Bosnia and Croatia, the main objective of all the combatants had been the relocation of the other ethnic populations. The killings, rapes, and destruction were the tactics used to force them to abandon their homes.

**Assimilation** is the social absorption of one ethnic group by another dominant one. Assimilation may be total, in which the ethnic identity of one group is lost, or partial, in which one ethnic group assumes a subordinate identity. Assimilation may be either forced or passive. In **forced assimilation**, the government adopts policies designed to deliberately and systematically destroy or change the ethnic identity of a particular group. The ultimate objective is the absorption of the group into the dominant ethnic group. A key target of a forced assimilation policy is the elimination of ethnic

boundary markers: language, religion, modes of dress, and any cultural institution that readily distinguishes the population. If these boundary markers are destroyed, the group loses much of its social cohesiveness. For example, until recently, the Bulgarian government pursued a policy designed to assimilate its Turkish population. Turks were not free to practice their Islamic religion, and they were forced to speak Bulgarian in public and adopt Bulgarian names.

One of the best examples of forced assimilation was the Indian policy of the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Federal policy attacked Native American ethnic identity from several directions. Reservation lands, which were owned communally, were broken up, and the land was allotted (deeded) to individual members of the tribe in order to destroy community or village life. Many ceremonies such as the Sun Dance and the peyote religion were made illegal. Traditional or hereditary tribal leaders were not recognized, and tribal governments were either dissolved or reorganized along an American political model. People who worked for the government were commonly forced to cut their hair and wear “citizen’s” (Western-style) clothes. Native American children were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools, where they were forbidden to speak their native language, had their hair cut, were made to dress in citizen’s clothes, were taught Euro-American technical skills, and were indoctrinated with Euro-American Christian values and attitudes. As the head of the Carlisle Indian School said, “You have to destroy the Indian to save the man.” Canada and Australia established similar policies for the assimilation of aboriginal peoples.

Assimilation need not be the result of a conscious official policy to solve an “ethnic problem” by incorporating the population into the cultural mainstream. Another form, called **passive assimilation**, occurs without any formal planning or political coercion. Unless strong social barriers prevent assimilation, social and economic forces frequently result in more dominant ethnic groups absorbing members of less powerful groups with whom they are in contact. The dominant ethnic group does not necessarily have to be the largest, but it must be the most socially prestigious and economically powerful group. Many of the governments in Latin America have historically followed a *laissez-faire* policy toward Native American groups. Guatemala has not had a policy of forced assimilation. In Guatemala, the primary differences between Ladinos and Native Americans are not biological but social

and cultural, and people who are technically identified as Native Americans are socially and economically discriminated against. As a result, more ambitious and educated Native Americans frequently have abandoned their native languages, dress, and lifestyles (ethnic boundary markers) and re-identified themselves as Ladinos. During the past 100 years, the Native American population in Guatemala has decreased from about 75 percent of the total population to less than 50 percent; passive assimilation is the primary cause of this decrease.

History shows that there are other ways of managing ethnic differences. People do not have to resort to ethnic homogenization; they can either segregate or accommodate other ethnic groups.

## Segregation

The political, social, and economic **segregation** of different ethnic groups has a long history in human society. In these situations, the dominant ethnic group does not attempt to eliminate the group, but rather places legal restrictions on the actions of the members of the group. In most cases, they have no political rights. They may not be permitted to own land, or they may own land in only certain restricted areas. Marriage between them and members of the dominant group may be prohibited. They may also be restricted to certain economic occupations. Not only is there no attempt to assimilate them into the dominant ethnic groups, but legal restrictions maintain their ethnic identities.

There are two major reasons such ethnic relationships develop: (1) the dependent ethnic group performs a needed economic role, or (2) the dependent ethnic group is so powerless that it presents no threat, economic or political, to the dominant society. The Jews and Gypsies in Europe are examples of groups that survived as segregated ethnic groups. Jews were merchants and craftspeople at a time when most Christian Europeans were farmers. Thus, the dominant society was economically dependent on them. Gypsies, on the other hand, were a small, powerless group that presented no threat to the dominant society.

**passive assimilation** The voluntary social absorption of one ethnic group by another ethnic group.

**segregation** The enforced separation of ethnic groups, in which the dominant ethnic group places legal restrictions on the actions of the members of the other group.

<b>Ethnic homogenization</b>	The elimination of ethnic difference within a region or country
<b>Ethnic cleansing</b>	The physical elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups
<b>Genocide</b>	The elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups by killing the members of the group or groups
<b>Relocation</b>	The elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups by physically moving them outside the boundaries of the region or country
<b>Assimilation</b>	The elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups through the process of destroying their social identity
<b>Forced</b>	The process of destroying the social identity of an ethnic group by eliminating their ethnic boundary markers
<b>Passive</b>	The process of destroying the social identity of an ethnic group through conscious or unconscious social and economic discrimination and “voluntary” elimination of ethnic boundary markers
<b>Segregation</b>	The physical separation of an ethnic group and the imposition of social and economic restraints that limit their contact with other ethnic groups
<b>Accommodation</b>	The creation of a balanced political relationship between two or more ethnic groups, with each allowed to maintain its own social identity and cultural traditions

African Americans performed critical agricultural labor in the American South. After the Civil War and the end of slavery, the southern states passed so-called Jim Crow laws, which placed political, social, and economic restraints on African Americans. These new laws kept African Americans from threatening the continued political and economic dominance of Euro-Americans, while allowing Euro-American farmers and landowners the continued use of their labor. In contrast, government officials segregated Native Americans from the general population by placing them on reservations where their actions could be controlled. It was not until 1924 that U.S. citizenship was extended to all Native Americans, and not until 1948 that Native Americans living on reservations were allowed to vote in state and local elections in Arizona and New Mexico.

### Accommodation

An alternative to ethnic homogenization or segregation is some form of political **accommodation** that formally recognizes and supports the ethnic and cultural differences of the population. Accommodation takes many forms. One form is to adopt a strategy of official recognized ethnic pluralism. For instance, Canada has two

main nationalities: Anglo-Canadians (English speaking) and French Canadians (French speaking). Both English and French are formally acknowledged as official languages. Although Quebec is the only province in which French Canadians are the majority, French speakers are found throughout other provinces. Within Quebec, French is the official language. Belgium also has two major national groups: the Flemish (Dutch speakers) and the Walloons (French speakers). Both Flemish and Walloon are the official languages of Belgium, although internal political divisions are officially either Flemish or Walloon. The capital, Brussels, is officially bilingual. Czechoslovakia was also officially bilingual—Czech and Slovak.

However, many countries are home to more than two main nationalities, none of which are dominant. Yugoslavia had eight major nationalities: Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Hungarians, and Albanians. The largest of these groups, the Serbs, constituted only about one-third of the population. Recognizing the long history of hostility and conflict between these groups, after World War II, Marshall Josip Tito, the head of their liberation army and Prime Minister, adopted an ambitious scheme to try and give each group its own region of political control and autonomy. Separate republics were established for the Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Montenegrins, and Macedonians. Although no separate republic was created for the Bosniaks (Muslims), they were the largest group in the ethnically mixed republic of Bosnia. The

**accommodation** The creation of social and political systems that provide for and support ethnic group differences.



Albanians and Hungarians were given autonomous provinces within the republic of Serbia. Yugoslavia was organized as a confederacy, with a relatively limited central government and with a great deal of local autonomy given to each of the republics.

However, in most countries, one nationality constitutes the majority of the population and politically and economically dominates the smaller nationalities within its borders. For various reasons, some countries have created a limited number of regional enclaves and given these minorities some degree of political autonomy within this enclave. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union created a large number of internal “autonomous” ethnic political units called republics, okrugs, and oblasts. The degree of internal autonomy varied with category. Republics had the most autonomy and could have its own official language. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of the republics became independent countries; however, many of the smaller ones were incorporated into modern Russia. China also has “autonomous” ethnic areas; the five largest—Tibet, Guangxi, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang—are “autonomous regions.” In addition, there are more than 100 smaller “autonomous prefectures” with some ethnic groups occupying several geographical scattered prefectures. As we have discussed, along its border with Afghanistan, Pakistan has what it terms Tribal Areas for the Pushtun. In these tribal areas, the Pushtun are governed by their traditional institutions with virtually no interference from the central government. In 1998 and 1999, the United Kingdom allowed for the creation of regional parliaments for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. With its predominantly Inuit population, Denmark made Greenland an autonomous region in 1979. In 2009, Greenland adopted Kalaalligut (an Inuit language) as its official language. Canada established Nunavut, a separate territory for the Inuit, in 1999. In addition to French and English, Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun, two Inuit languages, are the official languages of the territory. The Philippines established an autonomous region in 1989 for the Muslims on Mindanao. Indonesia established Aceh as an autonomous area in 1999. Panama has a number of autonomous areas for Native American groups. In 1952, the United States granted “commonwealth” status to Puerto Rico, and in the 1970s following a policy of self-determination, began extending increased autonomy to the over 350 federally recognized native tribes. These are just some of the ethnic autonomous areas of the world. However, it is important to note that the degree of “autonomy” differs greatly from one to another.

## Results

Having looked at the various means by which people have responded to ethnic differences, we can now examine the results. What are the results of ethnic cleansing? No American can deny that ethnic cleansing does not work. In most regions of the United States, one need only look about them. How many Native American faces do you see? Yet America was once entirely Native American. American Indian peoples were massacred and the defeated survivors driven steadily westward to lands considered less desirable. Today, most Native Americans live in the western states.

Setting aside the moral issues, ethnic cleansing is seldom a permanent solution. Except for very small groups, rarely has one ethnic nationality been successful in destroying another. Even though it may be greatly reduced in number, the targeted group usually survives. The history of genocidal attacks by the other group becomes an integral part of the origin myth of the victimized group and thus serves to strengthen—not weaken—their identity. Genocide also creates hatred and distrust between groups that can persist for centuries after the actual event and make future political cooperation difficult, if not impossible.

Relocation also produces mixed results. As in the case of genocide, the forced removal of a people becomes part of their origin myth and strengthens their cohesion and identity. Among the Cherokee of both North Carolina and Oklahoma, the Indian Removal of the 1830s has become a defining element of their ethnic identity. Removal of a people from their homeland in no way negates their claims to the lands they lost. Four hundred years after the Irish were evicted from Northern Ireland, the Irish Republican Army is fighting to reclaim this portion of the lost Irish homeland. The Jews were expelled from Jerusalem in the first century C.E. and dispersed over Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Yet, in the past century, the Jews have returned to Israel to reclaim their homeland. The collective memory of a nationality is long. Old wrongs are seldom forgotten, and lost homelands are never truly relinquished.

Assimilation—whether passive or forced—is not always effective either. There is no question that throughout history, smaller groups have been absorbed by larger groups, but assimilation is usually a slow and uncertain process. As we discussed, over the past 100 years in Guatemala, Native Americans have slowly declined as a percentage of the total population. We might therefore assume that passive assimilation has proved

effective in this case. However, considering absolute rather than relative population, we find that the Native American population actually increased from one million to about four million during the same period. The main problem with passive assimilation, then, is that population growth often creates new members as fast as or faster than members become assimilated.

Another problem is that people are not willing give up their ethnic identity; if they did, forced assimilation would not be necessary. The forced assimilation policies in the United States were unsuccessful in regard to Native Americans. Loss of language, material culture, and other cultural institutions that functioned as ethnic boundary markers did not destroy ethnic identity or group cohesiveness because new cultural institutions and ethnic boundary markers emerged to replace the old. From a population of only about 250,000 in 1890, the Native American population of the United States has risen to more than two million today, and their major political demands are for greater tribal self-determination. So genocide, relocation, and forced or passive assimilation may be effective to a greater or lesser degree, but none of these practices, under most circumstances, truly resolves ethnic problems. More often, they postpone the formulation of workable policies and are even counterproductive—they worsen rather than alleviate conflicts. Besides these “pragmatic” considerations, genocide and forced assimilation are so morally abhorrent that few modern governments would publically admit to pursuing such policies. Relocation, likewise, poses ethical dilemmas; most groups are moved against their will, and some other nationality must be relocated to make room for the migrants. In the modern world, there is nowhere to relocate to without violating some other group’s territorial rights. Finally, as we have seen, passive assimilation is usually slow and its result uncertain.

Political accommodation is the only practical and morally acceptable solution. But how well does it work, and what are the problems in maintaining a multinational state? First, we will look at the countries who have adopted the strategy of recognized ethnic pluralism; In January 1993, by mutual agreement, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia. In Canada in the 1960s, a separatist movement emerged among the French Canadians in Quebec and in the 1976 elections, the Parti Québécois, the separatist party, won control of the government of Quebec. Although in a 1980 referendum in Quebec, voters rejected separation from Canada, the issue was not resolved and in 1995, a second referendum was

held on Quebec separation and failed by less than 1 percent. There are still many people in Quebec who support separation from Canada. At sometime in the future, there may be a third referendum. In Belgium, there is an active Flemish nationalist movement. In every case many, if not the majority of the members the smaller of the two national ethnic groups, wants independence. This is not because their individual rights or liberties are threatened; rather, they feel their collective ethnic identity is being eroded or diminished. As for Yugoslavia, after the death of Josip Tito in 1980, the presidency of Yugoslavia revolved among the presidents of six republics. In 1991, Slovenia declared its independence. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many of the other Republics quickly followed suit, and a series of extremely bloody multisided wars frequently broke out, resulting in the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The creation of political autonomous regions for ethnic minorities within countries with a numerically dominant ethnic nationality has also had mixed results. Russia and China have both have problems with secessionist movements within some their autonomous regions. In 1994–95 and again in 1999–2000, Chechens secessionists in the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya were involved in extremely bloody and destructive rebellions. Even today, Chechen separatists stage terrorist attacks in Russia itself. There are active secessions movements



**Figure 17.3** Republics and Autonomous Provinces of Yugoslavia. The individual republics and autonomous provinces more or less correspond with the territories of major ethnic groups.

among the Tibetans and Uyghurs in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Indonesia and the Philippines created autonomous areas as a response to successions movements; however, successions movements among the Aceh in Indonesia and the Muslim groups in the southern Philippines continue. The United States created the special political status for Puerto Rico in response to an increasingly militant independence movement. There was even an attempt to assassinate President Truman. This strategy was successful only in that the Puerto Rican separatists today are attempting to achieve independence through political means. The creation of separate parliaments for Scotland and Wales has not been sufficient for many Scot and Welsh nationalists, they want total independence within the European Union. There are two problems with addressing nationality differences through the creating of “autonomous regions.” One, is how much autonomy does the particular ethnic group actually have? In most cases, the group has only limited internal control over their population and their resources. The second is that autonomy is not the same as sovereignty, and many groups aspire for total independence.

Finally, it is important to note that countries that are home to multiple ethnic nationalities are inherently unstable unless one ethnic group’s dominance over the others is so great as to be indisputable. Otherwise, there has to be an expected and stable social, political, and economic balance between the resident ethnic nationalities. The two factors that most seriously threaten the political stability of such countries are differential rates of population growth and relative differences in economic development. If the population of one group grows more rapidly than that of another, it threatens the existing social and political balance of the country. Differences in economic growth may result in changes in the relative economic well-being of the different nationalities and the feeling of exploitation by some.

The evolving global economy requires close cooperation between countries and nationalities. Rising nationalism directly threatens the global economy. Although we cannot change our basic human feelings, we can more clearly understand those factors that unleash ethnic emotions and attempt to minimize them. In the next chapter, we discuss the critical issues of population growth, world hunger, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

## Summary

- 1 Define ethnic group.** An ethnic group is a named social grouping of people based on what is perceived as shared ancestry, cultural traditions, and history. Ethnic group identity divides the world into categories of “us” and “them.”
- 2 Explain what we mean when we say ethnic identity is situational.** An individual’s ethnic group identity is seldom absolute, but changes with the social context. An individual may assume various hierarchically ranked identities. This characteristic is called the hierarchical nesting quality of identity.
- 3 Explain the attributes of ethnic groups.** The two main attributes of an ethnic group are origin myths and ethnic boundary markers. The origin myth or history describes the common or shared historical experiences that define the social boundaries of the group. Ethnic boundary markers are those overt characteristics that make its members identifiable. Ethnic boundary markers may include language, religion, physical characteristics, and other cultural traits such as clothing, house types, personal adornment, food, and so on.
- 4 Describe the different levels of ethnic identity.** There are four categories of ethnic identity: nationality, subnationality, civilizations, and transnationals. An ethnic nationality is an ethnic group that shares a feeling of homeland and the inherent right to political sovereignty. A subnational group is an identity nested in a larger national identity. A subnationality claims neither a separate homeland nor rights to political sovereignty. Recently, some scholars have argued that another important level of ethnic identity is emerging: civilizations. A civilization is a grouping of a number of distinct nationalities on the basis of a shared or common cultural historical tradition, generally religion. Finally, globalization has resulted in the creation of ethnic communities that have become geographically separated from their homelands yet maintain their distinctive identity and social solidarity with members of the group who have remained in their traditional homeland. These groups are termed transnationals.
- 5 Explain why ethnic conflict is so prevalent in the world today and describe an “artificial country.”** Much of the conflict in the world today is between ethnic nationalities. There are 3,000 to 5,000 ethnic



nationalities in the world, but only about 200 separate countries. Most countries are “artificial countries” whose boundaries and thus ethnic compositions was a product of European imperialism. Ethnic conflict is the result of stateless nationalities wanting to establish their own independent countries.

**6 Explain ethnic homogenization.** Frequently, more powerful groups have attempted to resolve ethnic differences by the elimination rival ethnic groups. In some cases, the men, women, and children of the rival group are killed—this is known as genocide. In other cases, the members of the rival ethnic group are physically removed from a geographic area—this is known as relocation. Finally, in still other cases, the dominant

group attempts to assimilate the other group or groups by eliminating their ethnic boundary markers in hopes of destroying their identity.

**7 Elaborate on the meanings of ethnic segregation and ethnic accommodation.** If the dominant group does not wish to destroy a rival group, they may adopt either policies of segregation or accommodation. Segregation consists of legally limiting the rights and movements of the members of the group. Accommodation consists of formally recognizing and supporting the cultural differences that define the group and in many cases designating a particular geographic region in which they have some degree of collective group autonomy.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other

material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# 18

# WORLD PROBLEMS AND THE PRACTICE OF ANTHROPOLOGY



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## **Applied Anthropology**

### **Health and Health Care**

*Medical Anthropology*

*Scientific Medicine and  
Traditional Healing*

### **Population Growth**

*Anthropological Perspectives  
on Population Growth*

*Costs and Benefits of Children  
in North America*

*Costs and Benefits of Children  
in the LDCs*

## **World Hunger**

*Scarcity or Inequality?*

*Is Technology Transfer the  
Answer?*

*Agricultural Alternatives*

## **Anthropologists as Advocates**

*Indigenous Peoples Today*

*Vanishing Knowledge*

*Medicines We Have Learned*

*Adaptive Wisdom*

*Cultural Alternatives*



Because of anthropology's emphasis on fieldwork, ethnographers often become intimately involved with the people they work among, which makes them more likely than most outsiders to listen to local voices.



## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 **Define** applied anthropology and discuss its importance today in understanding the cultures of other peoples.
- 2 **Define** medical anthropology.
- 3 **Compare** the differences between Western or scientific medicine and most traditional systems of healing.
- 4 **Identify** the unfavorable consequences of rapid population growth.
- 5 **Explain** why the population growth rates in North America and other industrial regions are relatively low.
- 6 **Explain** why the population growth rates are high in the poorer regions of the world.
- 7 **Describe** the two explanations for world hunger.
- 8 **Identify** some of the possible solutions for hunger.
- 9 **Discuss** how globalization is changing the lives of indigenous peoples and destroying the cultural traditions of these peoples.
- 10 **Analyze** the potential importance of the cultural knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Increasing numbers of anthropologists today are using their training to help solve human problems. In the private sector, for example, anthropologists work in a variety of roles—from training international businesspeople to become culturally sensitive when dealing with people from other countries to observing how humans interact with machines. Governmental agencies and international organizations employ anthropological expertise to address problems connected to development, health, education, social services, and ethnic relations. In the first part of this chapter, we show some of the specific contributions anthropologists have made to understanding the problems of population growth and hunger. In the second part, we discuss the anthropologist as advocate.



## Applied Anthropology

**Applied anthropology** is most simply defined as the application of anthropological perspectives, theory, empirical knowledge of cultures, and methods to help assess and solve human problems. The subfield has grown dramatically since the early 1970s, partly because the number of people earning Ph.D. degrees in anthropology has outstripped the number of academic jobs available and partly because larger numbers of anthropologists want to use their expertise to help people and organizations.

What special talents or insights do applied anthropologists bring to problem solving? What unique contributions can anthropologists make to programs and agencies? One way to answer this question is to think of cultural anthropologists as sharing a certain worldview (see Chapter 2) that differs somewhat from the views of other professional people. Anthropologists' worldview includes how we think about people and groups: The assumptions we share, the categories we use to describe and analyze ideas and behavior, the kinds of information we think is important to collect to understand a human group, how we believe this

**applied anthropology** Subfield whose practitioners use anthropological methods, theories, and concepts to solve practical, real-world problems; practitioners are often employed by a governmental agency or private organization.



information can best be collected, and so on. Anthropologists learn this worldview through our graduate training, our fieldwork, and other experiences involving members of other cultures, our interactions with one another, our readings of ethnographies and theoretical studies, and so forth. Not all ethnologists share this worldview, of course, and (like all worldviews) this one changes over time. Nonetheless, its basic features are well ingrained in most anthropologists, and the uniquely and distinctively anthropological contributions to problem solving come out of this worldview more than anything else. For applied work, this worldview has five emphases.

1. *Attention to small-scale communities.* Ethnologists pay attention to peoples and cultures that are too often ignored or—what is sometimes worse—known to others mainly by inaccurate or simplistic stereotypes. In applied work, an anthropologist who has worked in a particular small-scale community is often the only outsider who knows enough to provide information about it. Commonly, because of our training in fieldwork methodologies, we are the professionals most qualified to acquire new information relevant to some project about some local community. Through field research, anthropologists provide outside agencies and organizations with information about specific people and cultures.
2. *Insistence on prior detailed knowledge.* Because of anthropology's long-standing emphasis on first-hand fieldwork, we believe it is important to devote time and resources, prior to planning a project or program, to determine what the people affected are doing and thinking. Whatever their goals, almost all projects introduce some kind of change to a group, and prior knowledge of the culture is essential to plan and implement the changes. Many projects fail because those who design them know too little about the “target population” (those whose lives will be affected by the project).
3. *Sensitivity to cultural differences.* Anthropologists try to make themselves aware of the customs and beliefs of a community, to interact with members of the community in culturally appropriate ways, and to treat community traditions with respect. This cultural sensitivity derives partly from anthropology's relativistic, anti-ethnocentric perspective (see Chapter 1).
4. *Appreciation of alternatives.* Anthropologists believe that no one culture's experts know all the

answers and solutions. Different people with different histories and traditions have worked out varying solutions to similar problems. What works well in one place and time and among one group may not work well elsewhere. Indeed, local people themselves often know the solutions to their problems but do not have the resources to implement them. More than most other professionals, anthropologists listen to local voices.

5. *Recognition of systematic complexity.* Even the smallest and most homogeneous human groups are enormously complicated. But this complexity is ordered and patterned, and ethnographers have long recognized the importance of trying to determine how the parts of a complex system relate to one another and to the whole. A recognition of systematic complexity allows applied anthropologists to realize that changes introduced into a community may have unforeseen, unintended, and often undesirable consequences. Sometimes making small modifications in a program can avoid some of the potential negative impacts.

In the remainder of this chapter, we describe examples of how these five emphases of anthropological thinking lead to new insights into human problems. Three of our cases deal with major global problems: health, population growth, and world hunger. We show how anthropological work has contributed new insights into these problems. We hope to challenge your conceptions of health, population growth, and hunger and to lead you to think about them in new ways or—at the very least—to question much of what you read and hear in the popular media. We also hope you will think about alternative solutions to these problems.

Quite often, applied anthropologists work in the lesser developed countries (LDCs), which are often collectively known as the Third World. Terms such as *developed*, *less developed*, *First World*, and *Third World* convey a certain prejudice resulting from a Western view (e.g., Third World to whom?). Because they are familiar terms, however, we continue to use them as shorthand descriptions of major world regions.



## Health and Health Care

### Medical Anthropology

The study of health and health care falls under the heading of medical anthropology, the largest and most

rapidly growing specialty in Applied Anthropology. While most medical anthropologists are cultural anthropologists, physical anthropologists, linguists, and sometimes even archaeologists are involved in the study of health issues. Here, we are just going to treat medical anthropology as an aspect of cultural anthropology. First, it is important to note that health is a critical issue in every society, and every culture has a manner of dealing with disease and illness. Second, it is important to note that cultural behaviors, and changes in these behaviors, can have health related consequence for a community. Cultural anthropologists study a wide range of health and health related topics. Here, we are just going to discuss two broad overlapping categories: (1) the study of what can be called traditional or folk medicine and (2) programs by which “Western” or “scientific medical” practices can be made compatible with traditional medical beliefs and practices.

### **Scientific Medicine and Traditional Healing**

Traditional medical beliefs and practices differ greatly not only from “scientific medicine,” but from each other as well. Thus, there is tremendous cultural diversity in health and health care. Without understanding these differences, it is impossible to adequately address the health concerns of a particular community. These differences fall into interrelated areas: the causes of particular illnesses and the treatment of these illnesses.

In his cross-cultural study of illness, G. P. Murdock found that explanations of illness fell into one of two categories; natural causation and supernatural causation. Natural causation “... accounts for the impairment of health as a physiological consequence of some experience of the victim in a manner that would appear reasonable to modern medical science” (1980, 9) such as infection, stress, organic deterioration, or an accident. Supernatural causation account for the health impairment as the consequence of something “supernatural” such as fate, contagion, sorcery, soul loss, spirit aggression, and so forth. Western or “scientific” medicine explains all illness as the result of natural causes. Non-western or traditional medicine most frequently uses some combination of natural and supernatural causes to explain illnesses. How a society explains the causes of illness in turn affects the curing practices used by their medical practitioners.

Scientific medicine views illness as a solely a physical problem, the result of natural causes, thus its treatment focuses on the physical elimination, alteration, or

containment of the illness to either correct, cure, or give some degree of physical relief to the patient. To achieve these objectives, scientific medicine relies heavily on the use of surgical techniques and/or various drugs. Traditional medicine usually takes what is sometimes called a “holistic” approach to treatment: treating the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of the illness. Thus, treatment usually involves, in part, religious healing rituals.

Numbering over 300,000, the Navajo are not only the largest native group in the United States, they are also the most studied of any tribal group in the world. Traditionally, the Navajo have a distinction between what might be termed “commonplace” and “serious” illnesses. Commonplace illnesses are treated by bonesetters and herbalists. Serious illnesses are the results “... from the disturbance of the normal order, harmony, or balance among the elements of the universe...” (Wyman 1983, 536). To cure the individual, this order, harmony, or balance has to be restored. Since the cause is supernatural, both the diagnosis and the cure take the form of religious rituals. Health and healing are a central focus of Navajo life, virtually all Navajo religious ceremonies are healing rituals with a patient. Making a distinction between symptoms and causes, the individual first sees a diagnostician, usually a “hand trembler”—an individual with an inherent ability to determine the cause of the illness. By passing his hand over the body of the individual, he determines the cause and which ritual the individual needs to restore their harmony or balance. The actual ritual is performed by a highly trained specialist called a “singer.” Since the learning of a ritual or “sing” usually requires several years of study as an apprentice to an established singer, each singer is a specialist in only a limited number of rituals of the several dozen possible rituals used. The rituals vary in length from an hour to nine days and involve songs, memorized prescribed prayers, sand paintings, the taking of various herbs, ritual bathing with yucca, and/or offerings of corn pollen.

There are two important limitations on traditional Navajo healing. First, these rituals can only be performed with a specific geographical region, the traditional Navajo area defined by their four sacred mountains. Second, they require a trained singer who knows the needed ritual. The number of singers has declined relative to the total population during the twentieth century. Some of the rituals have become extinct or known only by a very few individuals. As a result of these other factors, the Navajo have added

two religious healing traditions: the Native American Church and Pentecostal Christianity.

The Native American Church (NAC), involving the use of the peyote cactus, first became popular among the Navajo in the 1930s (see discussion in Chapter 14). A Pan-Indian religion, health and the curing of illness are the primary reasons for meetings among the Navajo. Held from sundown to sunrise, and presided over by a “roadman,” spontaneous prayers and the ingestion of peyote are used to restore the health. Because only limited ritual knowledge is required to conduct a meeting, it is far easier to become a roadman than a traditional singer. Also because they last only one night, peyote meetings are far less time consuming and costly for the patient and their family than most traditional Navajo healing rituals. Another advantage of the NAC is that its meetings are not geographically restricted to the land between the four sacred mountains and can be used by Navajo living well removed from the reservation.

Euro-American Christian missionaries began working among the Navajo in the nineteenth century and many of the early clinics, hospitals, and schools on the reservation were operated by missionaries who were openly hostile to traditional Navajo religious practices. As a result, relatively few Navajo actually converted to Christianity. This started to change in the 1950s when travelling protestant evangelical ministers began holding tent revivals on reservations which emphasized spiritual healing. Because of the lack of a formal organizational structure, any individual so motivated could become a minister and establish their own church. As a result, independent Pentecostal churches with Navajo ministers quickly appeared and spread throughout the reservation. Although some prayer and healing meetings are held for individuals in homes, most are held in churches or large tent camp meetings. These larger meetings usually involve sermon and bible readings, hymn singing, the giving of testimony, and prayers for healing. For individuals, healing may involve lying on the hands, the use of oils, bible readings, and healing prayers by the entire congregation. Pentecostal meetings, like NAC meetings, are not restricted by geography. However, they also have an advantage over NAC in that an ill individual does not have to schedule a special meeting but may attend any of the regularly scheduled Pentecostal meetings or revivals.

There is and has been antagonism between many of the traditional religious leaders and the leaders of the Native American Church and the Pentecostal churches.

However, for the most part, individual Navajos appear to move between the three groups, depending on the particular circumstances.

The traditional Navajo do not see any basic conflict between their ideas and religious practices and “scientific” medicine as provided by the Indian Health Service and/or the Navajo tribe. As noted, they make a distinction between the symptoms and the cure. Thus, when Western medical care can prove effective, as in the case of surgical procedures or medicines such as antibiotics, they have no difficulty in accepting this care. Western medicine is seen as only addressing the symptoms. Perhaps not surprising, Western trained physicians are at times equated with traditional herbalists and bonesetters, not singers. The causes of illness are supernatural and thus the actual cure requires a religious healing ceremony to restore harmony and balance. The main problem has not been the Navajo rejection of “scientific medicine” but rather the reverse, the Western trained health professionals and their hostility and rejection of traditional Navajo healing practices. Some physicians would even reject patients who had undergone a traditional healing ritual.

In what may have been the earliest example of applied medical anthropology, in 1944, Alexander and Dorothea Leighton wrote *The Navajo Door*. This “introduction to the health beliefs and practices of the Navajos (was) written ... for Indian Bureau employees providing medical care. The message in part was that Navajo ceremonials, while not adequate therapy for appendicitis or tuberculosis, did have great psychotherapeutic and social value; traditional healers were to be respected as potentially valuable allies. ...” (Kunitz 1983, 149). In his 1983 study of the changes in morbidity patterns among the Navajo, Kunitz found that while death rates from infectious diseases, particular tuberculosis, had declined dramatically, death rates from alcohol-related accidents, alcoholic cirrhosis, homicide, and suicide, particularly among young adults in their 20s and 30s, had dramatically increased. In the last few decades, drug abuse could also be added to these health problems. Kunitz argues that the increased social conflict within families and communities, which are the underlying causes of these health problems, are in large part the result of stress brought on by increasing relative poverty on the reservation. Poverty is a health issue that cannot be addressed by scientific medicine. However, one can also argue that while the three healing traditions now utilized by the Navajo cannot alleviate the poverty on the reservation, by stressing the spiritual harmony and balance within the family



and the community, they can alleviate some of the social problems and conflict that result in many of the health problems.



## Population Growth

As we discussed in Chapter 16, one of the consequences and problems of globalization is the phenomenal increase in Earth's population. In the last 50 years, world population has more than doubled, jumping from 2.5 billion to more than 6.6 billion. Most of this growth is occurring in the poorer countries of the world, which creates a wide range of problems. Whereas the standard of living in the developed countries of North America, Europe, and Japan is increasing, the standard of living for most of the rest of the world's people is declining, and differences in population growth rates are the primary reason. In addition, overpopulation in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia is resulting in increasing ethnic and social conflict, environmental degradation, and massive migrations of people from the underdeveloped to the more developed countries of the world. Why are the poorest peoples of the world continuing to have large families, while the wealthier peoples are having fewer and fewer children? What is the reason for this inverse correlation?

### Anthropological Perspectives on Population Growth

Anthropological insight on this issue is twofold. First, anthropologists study human reproductive behavior—including the choices couples make about how many children to have—holistically, meaning in terms of the total system in which people live their everyday lives. By understanding the overall context of behavior, we can understand how the birthrates of a region result from local conditions—especially economic conditions faced by many rural poor. Second, anthropologists have conducted detailed fieldwork in local communities to uncover the major causes of high birthrates in Third World settings.

There is an apparent paradox about the comparatively high birthrates of many underdeveloped countries. An average North American family is able to afford more children than an average Nigerian family. Canadians and Americans have more money to house, feed, clothe, educate, and otherwise provide for their children. Yet they have only two or three children,

whereas the Nigerian family averages six or seven. And this is the most puzzling thing about high fertility: It continues despite its adverse consequences for those very nations that experience it and whose citizens cause it—the LDCs.

Why do these people continue to have so many children? Are Indians, Nigerians, and El Salvadorans too ignorant to realize they cannot afford to support so many children? Can't they see the strain that all these children put on their nations' educational, health, and agricultural systems? Isn't the refusal of couples in these countries to practice birth control even when condoms and pills are available a perfect example of their backwardness and ignorance?

Not at all.

### Costs and Benefits of Children in North America

The March 30, 1998, cover story of the weekly news magazine *U.S. News & World Report* was titled "Cost of Children." The article reported on the high monetary expenses of raising an American child born in 1997. Middle-income parents (defined in the article as couples who earn between \$35,000 and \$60,000 a year) can anticipate paying about \$300,000 for their child's day care and education, food and clothing, housing, transportation, health care, and other expenses, between birth and age 18. If parents also finance their child's college degree (not including graduate school), the cost of caring for and educating each new member of a middle-income family rises to around \$460,000—close to a half-million dollars. Those numbers are in 1998 dollars, however; adjusted to 2006 dollars, these figures would increase to about \$350,000 and \$550,000, respectively. Canadians, Japanese, Americans, Europeans, and parents living in other modernized, highly urbanized, industrial, or postindustrial nations are well aware of these monetary costs. Of course, parents in such societies do not have children because we expect our children to bring us future material rewards. For the most part, we do not have children because we expect them to help with chores around the house and yard, or because they will share their income with us when they (finally) get jobs, or because our kids will support us in our old age. Most of us realize all too well that children are an *economic* liability—however *emotionally* gratifying they might be.

Children certainly do cost a lot of money to wage-earning working-class and middle-class couples in an urbanized, industrialized, developed country. Bills for

Western medical professionals, such as this doctor working in Kenya, frequently confront cultural barriers in treating traditional peoples. One role of medical anthropologists is to study traditional health beliefs and practices to improve the delivery of health services for traditional peoples.



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food, housing, doctors, clothing, insurance, and transportation are higher with children—not to mention the costs of day care, babysitting, and education. Nor do most children contribute much economically to their parents as they grow older; retirement plans, Social Security, 401(k)s, and IRAs provide most of the income of the elderly. No wonder that when a young couple learns that it costs a half-million dollars or more to raise a child and finance a college education, they decide that one or two are quite enough.

The dollar costs of children are not the only factor that leads North American couples to limit their family sizes. There are other relevant factors as well:

- *Cultural norms and social expectations about desirable family sizes.* Not all couples think one or two or three children are enough, but the majority do agree that seven or eight are too many. Enculturated norms and expectations of friends and families certainly affect how many children we have. Note, however, that these norms and expectations themselves respond to other kinds of societal and economic conditions, so they alone do not explain low (or high) fertility rates.
- *Occupational and spatial mobility.* Many young couples do not know where they will be or how they will be earning a living in the next few years. They want children someday, but they are too unsettled and lack the income to start their family right away. If most couples postpone pregnancy

until their mid-20s or 30s, a lower completed average family size results than if most women begin childbearing earlier.

- *Women's employment.* Many women want to have a career and perceive that numerous children will interfere with this goal. The limited time and energy of two-earner households lead to lowered fertility rates.
- *Social burdens of children.* Modern society offers numerous social and recreational outlets that serve as alternatives to devoting one's time and energy to children. A couple may know some friends who have hardly left their house since their baby was born, and they have no desire to be so tied down.

This discussion does not imply that North American couples always have the number of children they choose. Some wind up with more children than they want or with a child sooner than they had planned. And the preceding considerations, to some extent, are class and race biased—they apply more to well-educated, middle-income whites than to African Americans and Hispanics, for example. But we do make reproductive choices, and the result of them—barring infertility and so forth—is that we have about the number of children we desire.

North American couples consider many other factors, of course. But notice the main overall feature of the considerations just listed: They are all things that will affect the deciding couple personally. People

Population growth contributes to social problems in the Third World, including unemployment and overcrowding in urban areas. This is a portion of Iquitos, Peru.



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consider the benefits and costs to *themselves* of having or not having children, or of having only so many and not more. They do not worry much about whether their children will increase the burden on the American educational system, increase the unemployment rate 20 years in the future, contribute to society's expenditures on public waters and sewers, or overload the nation's farmlands. That is, for the most part, they do not concern themselves with the *social consequences* of their reproductive decisions. They do what they think is best for themselves.

### Costs and Benefits of Children in the LDCs

Curiously, although most North Americans do not weigh heavily the future societal consequences when they decide to limit their family size, many of them expect people in the LDCs to be more altruistic by reducing their fertility. Too often, when we learn that rural people in parts of the Third World average six, seven, or more children per couple, we think this is economically irrational. They must be having large families for other noneconomic reasons. Probably "children are highly valued in their traditional culture." Or maybe "men have higher prestige if they have lots of children." Perhaps "they are not educated

enough to recognize the effects of having such large families." It could be that "they don't know how to prevent pregnancy."

Part of our error comes from our failure to put ourselves in their shoes—to grasp the conditions of their lives that lead them to bear more children than we do. Just because children are an economic liability in a highly mobile, industrialized, urbanized, monetarized society does not mean they are a liability everywhere. Many demographers argue that rural people in the LDCs have high fertility not simply because of cultural preferences but because children are economically useful. Village-level ethnographic studies suggest that children do indeed offer a variety of material benefits to their parents in the LDCs.

One such study was done in the Punjab region of northern India by anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani. He researched a family planning project that aimed to reduce the birthrate in seven villages. Mamdani found that in the village of Manupur, people accepted the birth control pills and condoms offered by the staff of the program, but most refused to use them. The reaction of the project's administrators was like that of many outsiders when local people do not behave in ways they seemingly ought to behave: They blamed the "ignorance" and "conservatism" of the villagers. To the staff, the benefits of having fewer children seemed



obvious. The amount of land available to most people was barely adequate, so by reducing family size, people could stop the fragmentation of land that was contributing to their poverty.

However, the village's parents interpreted their economic circumstances differently. They believed that children—especially sons—were economically beneficial, not harmful. Villagers of all castes and all economic levels reported that children were helpful to a household in many ways. They helped with everyday tasks such as washing, gathering animal dung to use as fertilizer, weeding fields, collecting firewood, and caring for livestock. Even young children supplemented family income by doing small jobs for neighbors. When they grew up, sons were the major source of support for their elderly parents because one or more of them usually continued to live with their parents and farm the land or work in other occupations. Adult sons often went to cities, where part of the money they earned from their jobs was sent back to help their parents and siblings.

In short, Mamdani argued, the residents of Manupur recognized that the benefits of children exceeded their costs to the parents. Outsiders did not recognize this fact because they did not fully grasp the economic circumstances under which people were actually living.

Like people everywhere, however, the people of this region of India proved capable of altering their behavior as their circumstances changed. In 1982, 10 years after Mamdani's study, Moni Nag and Neeraj Kak restudied the village of Manupur. They found that couples had changed their attitudes about desirable family size: About half of all couples were now using contraception or had accepted sterilization after they had two sons. The reason was that changing economic conditions in the region had made children less valuable to families. Parents did not need as much children's labor as before. The introduction of new crops and farming methods had almost eliminated grazing land in the region, so boys were no longer useful for tending cattle. Increasing reliance on purchased chemical fertilizers reduced the value of children's labor in collecting cattle dung to spread on fields. Chemical weedkillers reduced the amount of hand work necessary for weeding. A new crop, rice, did not take as much work to grow as the old staples.

The increased value of formal education also led people to have fewer children. Because more outside skilled jobs were available, parents became more interested in providing a secondary education that would increase their children's ability to acquire high-paying

jobs. Opportunities for women increased, and secondary school enrollment rates for girls more than doubled between 1970 and 1982. Sending more children to secondary school raised the costs of child rearing. Parents had to pay for clothing and textbooks for their children who attended school, which was a significant expense for poorer families. Accordingly, they wanted and had fewer children.

Finally, most couples believed that having lots of sons was not as necessary as it had been 10 years earlier. People still desired sons for old-age support, but many believed sons were not as dependable as they used to be. Many sons no longer brought their wives with them to live on the family land, but instead left the village to live on their own. One elderly man said:

Children are of no use any more in old age of parents. They also do not do any work while going to school. My son in the military does not keep any connection with me. My son living with me has two sons and one daughter. I have advised him to get a vasectomy. (Nag and Kak 1984, 666)

All these and other changes increased the economic costs and decreased the benefits of having large families, and couples reacted to these changes by having fewer children. In this region of northern India, then, ideas and attitudes about desirable family sizes were not fixed by tradition but changed as people adapted their family sizes to changing circumstances.

Researchers in other parts of the world also report that children offer many economic benefits to their parents, explaining why high fertility persists in most LDCs. On the densely populated Indonesian island of Java, rural parents do not have to wait for their children to grow up to acquire the benefits of their labor. Children aged 6 to 8 spend three to four hours daily tending livestock, gathering firewood, and caring for their younger siblings. By the time they are 14, girls work almost nine hours a day in child care, food preparation, household chores, handicrafts, and other activities. Most of the labor of children does not contribute directly to their family's cash income or food supply, so it is easy to see how outsiders might conclude that children are unproductive. However, children accomplish many household-maintenance tasks that require little experience and skill, which frees the labor of adult family members for activities that do bring in money or food. Ethnographer Benjamin White suggests that large families are more successful economically than small families in Java.

Similar findings have been reported by ethnographers working in rural Nepal, Bangladesh, Samoa, and the Philippines. Unlike suburban and urban North Americans, farming families in the LDCs use much of the time of even young children productively. As children grow older, they are used to diversify the economic activities of a household, earning cash themselves or performing subsistence work that frees their parents for wage labor.

In many countries, the grown children of rural people migrate to a city in their own country or to a developed country. They acquire jobs—which are well paid relative to what they could earn in their own villages—and send much of the cash back to their families. Such remittances contribute half or more of the family income in Western Samoa, Tonga, and some other small nations of the Pacific, both because migrants feel a continuing sense of obligation to their parents and siblings back home and because many of them hope to return to their islands someday. Remittances are also a major source of family income (and, as a by-product, of national income) in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Pakistan, India, Mexico, Central America, and parts of the Middle East.

In most parts of the world, children are also the major source of economic support in their parents' old age because rural villagers lack pension plans and Social Security. As Stanley Freed and Ruth Freed have pointed out, in many parts of India parents prefer to bear two or three sons to ensure themselves of having one adult son to live with them, in case one son dies or moves elsewhere.

In addition to the value of children's labor, remittances, and old-age security, other factors encourage rural families in the LDCs to have many children:

- Relatively high rates of infant mortality, which encourage parents to have “extra” children to cover possible deaths of their offspring
- Extended families, which spread out the burden of child care among other household members, thus reducing it for individual parents
- Low monetary cost of children compared with children in developed countries, partly because many necessities (such as housing and food) are produced by family labor rather than purchased
- The fact that the tasks women are commonly assigned are not as incompatible with child care as wage employment (see Chapter 11)

Such factors mean that children are perceived (in most cases, correctly) as both more valuable and less

costly than most citizens of the developed world perceive them. We should not assume that couples in the LDCs are too ignorant to understand the costs of having many children or to appreciate the benefits of small families. Nor should we think they are prisoners of their “traditional cultural values,” which have not changed fast enough to keep up with changing conditions. We should rather assume that they make reproductive decisions just as we do. Then we can begin to understand the economic and other conditions of their lives that often lead them to want more children than affluent couples in urbanized, industrialized countries want. We can also see why birthrates are falling in so many LDCs today. It is not simply the increased family planning education and the recent availability of contraceptive devices. Lowered fertility is also a response to the increased urbanization of most nations, to the growth in wage employment over subsistence farming, to the rising emphasis placed on education for both girls and boys, and to other factors that have changed the circumstances of family lives.

As we have seen, rising human numbers contribute to the resource shortages faced by LDCs today. One of the resources in shortest supply is one of the things people cannot do without: food. Most North Americans see malnutrition and overpopulation as two sides of the same coin. In the popular view, the “fact” that there are “too many people” in the world is the major reason there is “too little food to go around.” And the solution to world hunger is “more food”—that is, increased production by the application of modern agricultural technologies. In the next section, we try to convince you that neither the problem (too many people) nor the solution (more production through better technology) is this simple.



## World Hunger

The famine in Somalia in the early 1990s is only the most recent reminder of hunger in the world. Hunger is endemic in much of the world today. The World Food Programme of the United Nations estimates that 800 million people go to bed hungry every night and that 24,000 people die of hunger or hunger-related causes every day. Hunger afflicts poor people in parts of southern Sudan, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Chad, Bolivia, Peru, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Even in countries considered “moderately developed” or “rapidly developing,” there are regions of extreme poverty and hunger, as in Indonesia, Egypt, Brazil, and Mexico.

Women and children constitute the vast majority of the malnourished. Children are especially at risk; if malnutrition does not kill them, it frequently causes lifelong mental and physical disabilities. In this section, we discuss the conditions that contribute to hunger in the Third World. Our focus is on chronic malnutrition or undernutrition on a worldwide scale, not on short-term famine in particular countries or regions. (The reason we focus on *chronic* hunger is that the immediate causes of famine are more likely to be political upheavals and conflicts that disrupt food production or distribution than economic or demographic forces.) First, we discuss two alternative explanations for hunger. Then we describe attempts to increase the food supply by modern technological methods, showing why such attempts are so often unsuccessful and counterproductive. Throughout, we suggest anthropological insights into the problem.

### Scarcity or Inequality?

What causes hunger? In any given region, people are hungry for a variety of reasons. On a worldwide basis, however, two explanations for hunger are most commonly offered. The first, which we call the **scarcity explanation of hunger**, is that the major cause of widespread hunger in the LDCs is *overpopulation*: In the twentieth century, populations have grown so large that available land and technology cannot produce enough food to feed them. The second, which we call the **inequality explanation of hunger**, holds that the *unequal distribution of resources* is largely responsible for chronic hunger on a worldwide basis: So many people are hungry today because they lack access to the resources (especially land) needed to produce food.

The scarcity explanation holds that not enough food-producing resources exist to provide the poor with adequate nutrition. In countries like India, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Kenya, and Ethiopia, populations have grown so large in the last century or two that there is not enough land to feed everyone. This argument holds that food-producing resources like land, water, fertilizers, and technology are absolutely scarce, that is, there are not enough resources for the size of the population. In brief, the scarcity explanation holds that hunger is caused by too many people.

Although not our focus here, the scarcity explanation accounts for starvation by saying that chronic hunger turns into outright famine when some sort of disaster strikes. With so many people chronically undernourished, anything that disrupts food production

(e.g., droughts, floods, plant diseases, insect infestations, or political disturbances) will reduce food supplies enough to turn hungry people into starving people.

The inequality explanation arose, in part, as a reaction to the excesses of the scarcity explanation, which (some believe) blames the victims of hunger by saying that their own (reproductive) behavior causes their hunger. The inequality explanation holds that resources are not absolutely scarce. In fact, there is enough productive capacity in the land of practically every nation to feed its people an adequate diet, if only this productive capacity were used to meet the needs of the poor. Instead, too many productive resources are used to increase the profits of wealthy landowners and to fulfill the wants of the more affluent citizens of the world.

The inequality explanation says that poor people are hungry because of the way both the international economy and their own national economies allocate productive resources. The international (global) economy allocates resources on the basis of ability to pay, not on need. For example, if affluent North American consumers want coffee and sugar, wealthy and politically powerful landowners in Central America will devote their land to coffee and sugar plantations for export, because this is how they can make the most money. If North Americans want tomatoes and other vegetables during the winter, large landowners in northwest Mexico will produce them, rather than the beans and corn that are major staples for Mexican peasants. The national economies of countries with hungry people work in a similar way. Urban elites have the money to buy luxuries, and urban middle- and working-class families pressure governments to keep food prices low. As a result, too much land is used to produce crops sold to city dwellers at prices made so low by government policy that the rural poor cannot feed themselves. In brief, according to the inequality explanation, hunger is caused mainly by the use of and unequal access to resources.

**scarcity explanation of hunger** Holds that there are not enough land, water, and other resources to feed all the people of a country or region an adequate diet, given current technology.

**inequality explanation of hunger** Notion that hunger is not caused by absolute scarcity but by the unequal distribution of resources and how these resources are used.



Which explanation is correct? As is often the case, the two are not mutually exclusive. Both are correct to a certain degree, depending on time and place. The scarcity explanation is correct: All else being equal, the amount of land available per person has been and is being reduced by population growth. Moreover, as the population grows, land of increasingly poorer quality has to be cultivated, reducing its productivity. And as families grow poorer, they have less money to acquire new land or to buy fertilizer or other products that will increase the productivity of their land. These arguments are the kind we encounter regularly in the popular news media. It is hard to see how such conclusions can be wrong.

But these conclusions could be right and still tell only part of the story. The explanation for hunger is more complex than “too many people” combined with “low farm productivity.” Hunger is created by human institutions as much as by population increase and unproductive technologies and farming methods. For example, at a growth rate of 3 percent a year, a population will double in less than 25 years. Does this mean that in 25 years everybody will have only half the amount of food? Of course not. Land that formerly was underused will be brought into fuller production, more labor-intensive methods of cultivation can bring higher yields per acre, people can change their diets and eat less meat, and so on. People will adjust their cultivation methods, work patterns, eating habits, and other behaviors to the new conditions rather than tolerate hunger.

Or, rather, they will adjust if they have access to the resources they need to do so. And this is a large part of the problem in many LDCs: It is not just that there are too few resources, but that too few people own or control the resources available. In their books *Food First* and *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins question what they call “the myth of scarcity.” They claim that every nation could provide an adequate diet for its citizens if its productive resources were more equitably distributed.

We do not attempt to present a complete discussion of the evidence to show that inequality is as important as scarcity in explaining hunger around the world. There are several excellent contemporary studies by anthropologists of the relationships among population, resource distribution, and hunger. Here, we discuss a well-known historical example because it personally affected the ancestors of so many North Americans—the Irish potato famine of 1845–1850.



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Increasingly, lesser developed countries allocate food producing resources for the production of export cash crops.

In the early nineteenth century, Ireland was an agriculturally diverse country in which large landowners controlled most of the land. Politically and economically, the island was controlled by England. Starting in the last decades of the eighteenth century, large landowners had begun increasingly allotting their land to the production of cash crops for export to England, where the Industrial Revolution was transforming the economy. English mills needed Irish wool and flax in their production of textiles, and England needed Irish wheat, meat, butter, and other food products to help feed the increasing numbers of factory workers. The export of wool, in particular, had resulted in a significant reduction of land available for farming as many wealthy landowners evicted their tenant farmers to turn their land into sheep pastures. Still other large landowners focused on raising wheat, flax, and other exportable grains. Only a small portion of the population of Ireland worked on the large estates or in the

towns or cities. The vast majority of the population survived as small subsistence farmers. Their landholdings, either owned or rented, were so small—usually less than 5 acres—that they had to plant a crop that yielded the most in terms of subsistence value. Thus, they planted potatoes, which, in a normal year, would yield sufficient food to feed their family, with a small surplus they could sell. The sale of a few potatoes and some irregular wage work produced the only cash income most families had. Malnutrition was common in rural Ireland during the early nineteenth century.

In 1845, the potato blight struck, destroying between a third and half of the potato crop. The severity of the blight varied from one part of the country to another. However, in every region, small farmers quickly found themselves short of food, with little if any cash, little in the way of property to sell, and little chance of finding wage labor. Many families were quickly reduced to starvation. As the blight continued in 1846 and 1847, conditions became increasingly difficult. Several million starving people began wandering the countryside in a desperate search for food or jobs or anything to keep them alive. Many simply abandoned their farms, while others were evicted for nonpayment of rent. Hundreds of thousands gathered in the port cities, where, ironically, a few found work loading ships with wool, flax, wheat, meat, butter, and other agricultural products for shipment to England. Starvation in Ireland was not the result of a lack of agricultural resources, but rather the people of Ireland did not have money to purchase the food that was grown and exported. One estimate found that, during the famine, Ireland was exporting to England food sufficient to support 18 million people. In 1845, the population of Ireland had been about 8.5 million. When the famine ended in 1850, only about 6.5 million remained. An estimated 1 million people had died of starvation or related causes, while another 1 million had emigrated to North America, England, or Australia.

The economic relationship between agricultural Ireland and industrialized England that existed during the early nineteenth century is seen on a global scale today. Poorer, primarily agricultural, countries are increasingly allocating their resources to the production of exports to wealthier, more developed countries, while at the same time their populations are growing rapidly.

There is no denying that population growth contributes to hunger and poverty. But we should not conclude that “too many people” is *the* problem, or that the scarcity explanation is sufficient. Population growth always occurs within a political and economic context,

and this context greatly influences the degree to which poor people can adjust to it. In a similar vein, it is fascinating that many economists recognize that famines do not result mainly from an absolute scarcity of food, but rather from the inability of some groups—usually the poorest groups—to gain access to food. There is also increasing recognition that development ought to be measured by more than “income” and ought to mean more than material affluence.

The combination of population growth and increasing land concentration is doubly devastating. Even if they manage to hang on to their land, the poor will get poorer if their numbers grow. If their increased poverty makes it necessary for them to borrow from the wealthy, to sell part of their land to raise cash, or to work for low wages to make ends meet, they are likely to grow poorer still. This “double crunch” is precisely the experience of the rural poor in many LDCs.

### *Is Technology Transfer the Answer?*

One commonly proposed solution for world hunger is to apply modern scientific know-how and technology to areas in which agriculture is still technologically underdeveloped. This solution seems simple: Thanks to agricultural machinery, plant breeding, modern fertilizers, pest control methods, advances in irrigation technology, genetic engineering, and so on, the developed countries have solved the nutrition problem for most of their people. We have developed science and technology and applied it to agriculture. The LDCs need only adopt our know-how and technology to solve their hunger problems. In this view, the main thing hungry countries need is a transfer of our food production technology.

There are many problems with the **technology-transfer solution**. We can touch on only a few. First, many of the methods developed for application in temperate climates fail miserably when transported to the tropics, where most hungry people live. This is largely because of the profound differences between tropical and temperate soils and climates.

Second, many experts doubt that so-called high-tech solutions to food problems are appropriate to economic

**technology-transfer solution** The notion that developing nations can best solve their hunger problems by adopting the technology and production methods of modern mechanized agriculture.

conditions in the LDCs. Labor is much more available than capital in these nations, so to substitute technology (machinery, herbicides, artificial fertilizers, and so forth) for labor is to waste a plentiful factor of production in favor of a scarce one. Besides, those who need to increase production the most—the poorest farmers—are those who can least afford new technology. And borrowing money for new investments involves risks because many small farmers who borrow from rich landowners lose their land if they default.

Third, new technologies often come as a package deal. For instance, new crop varieties usually require large amounts of water, pesticides, and fertilizers to do well. Small farmers must adopt the whole expensive package for success. The expense, combined with the logistics of long-term supply of each element of the package in countries with uncertain transportation and political regimes, makes many farmers wary of innovations. Further, many new high-yielding varieties of crops are hybrids, which means that farmers cannot select next year's seeds from this year's harvest. Rather, they must purchase their seeds every year from large companies, many of which operate internationally. Is it a good idea to make the world's farmers dependent on a few suppliers of genetic material for their crops?

Fourth, agricultural experts from the developed world often report problems of “resistance” by peasant farmers. Sometimes, peasants cling tenaciously to their traditional crops, varieties, and methods of cultivation even when genuine improvements are made available to them. This famed cultural conservatism of peasants seems downright irrational to many technical experts.

But some anthropologists who have conducted village-level fieldwork offer an alternative interpretation of peasant resistance to change. Living in intimate contact with local people, fieldworkers are sometimes able to perceive problems the way peasants do. Subsistence farmers who are barely feeding their families cannot afford to drop below the minimum level of food production it takes to survive. Traditional crops and varieties give some yield even when uncontrollable environmental forces are unfavorable because over the generations they have adapted to local fluctuations of climate, disease, and pests. The new varieties might not fare as well. Because the consequences of crop failure are more severe for poor subsistence farmers than for well-off commercial farmers, the poor farmers minimize their risks by using tried and true crop varieties and methods. Peasant cultural conservatism thus may be a sound strategy, given the conditions of peasant lives.

Finally, the technology that some believe is wise to transfer to other parts of the world may not be as effective or as efficient as they think. Modern mechanized agriculture requires a large amount of energy to produce its high yields. Studies done in the 1970s suggest that on modern commercial farms in the United States, on average about 1 calorie of energy is required to produce about 2 calories of food. The “energy subsidy” to agriculture goes into producing and running tractors, harvesters, irrigation facilities, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and other inputs. The payoff for this energy subsidy is enormously high yields, in terms of both yields per acre and yields per farm worker. In traditional agricultural systems, however, for every 1 calorie of energy expended in agricultural production, 15–50 calories of food energy are returned (the amount depends, of course, on local conditions, cultivation methods, crop type, and a multitude of other factors). The main reason traditional agriculture is so much more energy efficient is that human labor energy, supplemented by the muscle energy of draft animals, is the major energy input.

Many questions follow from this difference in energy subsidy. Is there enough energy for modern mechanized agricultural methods to be widely adopted around the world? If there is, can the rural poor of the Third World afford them? What will happen if the rural poor have to compete on a local level with the well-off farmers who can afford to purchase and maintain the new technologies? What will be the local and global environmental consequences of agricultural mechanization on such a large scale? The worldwide price of oil was high in 2007, but what will happen to it if tens or hundreds of millions of additional farmers mechanize their operations? Can such methods be used indefinitely—are they ecologically sustainable?

We raise such questions not because the answers are obvious. Some experts—mainly economists—believe that the new problems new technologies create will be solved by even newer technologies. Others say it is too risky to count on a future of uncertain technological salvation, and the consequences of being wrong are too severe to do so. Some believe that whatever future scarcities of energy or other resources occur will stimulate the search for alternative sources, so that the free market will save us. Others claim we are near the limits of our planet's ability to produce affordable food and other products.

To point out that technology transfers are not economically or ecologically feasible for many regions is not to say that modern food-producing methods are



always harmful or should not even be considered as solutions for world hunger. It merely points out that mechanized technologies have problems of their own and that “experts” do not have all the answers. Are there other solutions that avoid or minimize some of the problems with transfers of technology? Some agricultural scientists, anthropologists, and other scholars are researching alternative methods of boosting food production—methods that are productive and sustainable, yet avoid some of the high energy requirements and the problems associated with mechanized agriculture.

### *Agricultural Alternatives*

Since the early 1980s, increasing numbers of agricultural scientists have been taking another look at traditional farming practices, that is, methods of cultivating the soil that have been used for decades or centuries by the people living in a particular region. In the past, technical experts in agricultural development often scorned traditional farming methods, which they viewed as inefficient and overly labor intensive. But today, there is increasing awareness of the benefits of traditional methods.

This awareness stems partly from the failure of so many agricultural development programs for the Third World. It also stems from the environmental movement that began in the developed countries in the 1970s, which called attention to the negative environmental impacts of mechanized agriculture. In addition to the high energy requirements of mechanized agriculture previously discussed, some farming practices commonly used in the developed countries cause environmental problems. Such problems include water pollution from fertilizer runoff, poisoning of farm workers and wildlife from agricultural chemicals, soil erosion from failure to rotate crops, and increasing resistance of insects because of exclusive reliance on pesticides.

In addition to negative environmental impacts, technologies such as machinery, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides are too expensive for many traditional farmers. Sometimes they are inappropriate or uneconomical to use on the small plots that are characteristic of farms in many parts of the world. They may be unfamiliar to local people, who understandably are reluctant to abandon proven cultivation methods for alternatives they perceive to be riskier.

Considerations such as these led some agricultural scientists to ask: Are there *viable* alternatives to mechanized agricultural technologies and practices? Some

experts believe there are. The main goals of such alternatives are minimization of negative environmental impacts, affordability to small farmers, reliance on technologies and locally available resources, adaptation to local environmental conditions, and long-term sustainability.

Over the centuries, traditional farming systems have evolved that meet many of these goals. Increasingly, agricultural scientists and development agencies look at traditional agriculture not as a system that should be replaced but as a set of farming techniques they can learn from. Much research on this topic is ongoing; here, we present brief descriptions of only two traditional methods: intercropping and resource management.

#### *Intercropping*

One method used by traditional farmers in many parts of the world (in the tropics especially) is intercropping, also known as multiple cropping or polyculture. In contrast to monoculture, intercropping involves the intermingling of numerous crops in a single plot or field. It has been practiced for centuries by shifting cultivators, whose plots usually contain dozens of crops and varieties.

Although intercropped fields look untidy, this method offers several benefits, stemming from the diversity of crops growing together in a relatively small space. Many plant diseases and pests attack only one or a few crops, so if there are several different crops, yields may still be good despite an outbreak. In regions where water supply is a problem and rainfall is erratic, some crops suffer during droughts but others will still produce a harvest. The varying growth patterns and root structures of diverse crops have useful ecological benefits: Erosion is reduced because more of the soil is covered, and sun-loving weeds are suppressed by the shade of the crops themselves.

Traditional farmers in some parts of the world have learned over the centuries that many crops grow better when planted together. Leguminous crops, such as beans, peas, and peanuts, take nitrogen (a necessary plant nutrient) from the air and store it in their roots. Intercropping legumes with crops that need lots of nitrogen can increase yields. This is done in Mexico and Central America, where traditional farmers have long intercropped corn, beans, and squash. The stout corn plants provide support for the bean vines to climb, and the ground-hugging squash plants keep the soil covered. African farmers intercrop sorghum with peanuts and millet with cowpea with similar benefits.

### Traditional Resource Management Practices

In many parts of the world, traditional farmers actively take steps to control the plant species growing in areas that, to outsiders, look “wild” or “abandoned.” They are, in other words, managing their resources so they can continue to use them indefinitely. Two brief examples illustrate these management practices.

The Kayapó of the Xingu River basin of Brazil farm in the forest by shifting cultivation. According to anthropologist Darrell Posey, who has worked among the Kayapó for years, the Kayapó manage the forest carefully. One of their traditional practices is the creation of “islands” of forest in deforested areas. They move composted soil made from termite and ant nests and vegetation into open areas and transplant crops and other useful plants. The created and managed environment provides plant foods, medicines, and building materials and attracts some of the animals hunted by the Kayapó.

The Lacandon Maya of the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico practice slash-and-burn agriculture. Although the staple crop is corn, they plant many other crops in the cleared fields, including several tree species that yield fruits. Lacandon farmers clear and plant new plots frequently, but they do not simply abandon a plot once its main crops are harvested. Rather, they return to it for many years to harvest the long-lived fruit trees and other species they planted. Even while the natural forest is regrowing, the Lacandon continue to use the land. They manage their fallowing fields and thus integrate their exploitation of the land with the natural process of forest regeneration.

We have presented some of the reasons many scientists and others concerned with agricultural development are reconsidering traditional agriculture. It is all too easy to romanticize traditional farmers, to think that they really have had the answers all along and that only recently have so-called experts been forced to pay attention. This view, too, is simplistic. In all likelihood, solutions to the food crisis will require a mixture of traditional and modern technologies. It is, however, encouraging that the knowledge and methods embedded in traditional agricultural adaptations are taken seriously by the World Bank and other institutions in a position to make critical decisions.

**indigenous peoples** Culturally distinct peoples who have occupied a region longer than peoples who have colonized or immigrated to the region.



## Anthropologists as Advocates

Anthropologists do not merely define problems. From the earliest origins of the discipline, anthropologists as individuals have been politically active, using the information gained from their research to voice their concerns about a wide range of public policy issues. Franz Boas (see Chapter 4) took an active role in attacking racist stereotypes during the first decades of the twentieth century and publicly opposed U.S. immigration laws based on racist ideas. Margaret Mead (see Chapter 4) was certainly the best-known advocate for women’s rights in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. As individuals, anthropologists have been and still are activists concerned with a wide range of particular and global issues. However, no single issue has concerned anthropologists as a group more than the rights of indigenous peoples.

This should not be surprising. Much of anthropological research has focused on the study of these peoples, and field research is a highly personal experience. As a result, anthropologists as a group more clearly understand the problems of these peoples than other outsiders, and collectively we know them and value them not just as individuals but also as friends. In the late nineteenth century, American anthropologists were engaged in advocating the rights of American Indian peoples. As members of the Lake Mohonk Conference and other Indian rights organizations, they lobbied Congress for changes in the laws concerning American Indian tribes. In 1972, David Mayberry-Lewis, a Harvard anthropologist, and his wife Pia, co-founded Cultural Survival, the largest U.S.-based organization advocating the rights of the indigenous peoples. The director of Survival International, the major London based indigenous rights organization, is British anthropologist Stephen Corry. Throughout the twentieth century and today, anthropologists continue to fight for the rights of indigenous peoples. Thus, it is fitting that we end this book by advocating the rights of indigenous peoples to preserve their cultural systems—assuming, of course, that is their choice.

### Indigenous Peoples Today

The vast majority of stateless ethnic nationalities are those commonly referred to as indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, the term indigenous is somewhat ambiguous in that it refers to anything “native.” **Indigenous peoples** as we use the term refers to “culturally distinct groups that have occupied a region longer than other

immigrant or colonist groups” (*Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Spring 1992, 73). Generally, these indigenous peoples are small-scale societies, whose population numbers in the hundreds or thousands and who make their living by foraging, farming, and/or herding. Sometimes, they are termed *tribal peoples* or, more recently, *Fourth World peoples*.

Indigenous peoples survive as ethnic enclaves within larger nation states. The governments, controlled by the dominant ethnic group or groups of these countries, usually claim to have ultimate control over the land, resources, and lives of the indigenous people who live within their officially recognized national borders. For indigenous peoples, the colonial world still exists. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations estimates that there are 370 million indigenous peoples in the modern world. Among them are the Native peoples of the Americas; the aboriginal peoples of Australia and other islands of the Pacific; the Sami (formerly known as the Lapps) and other reindeer-herding peoples of northern Europe and Asia; hundreds of “tribal” cultures of eastern Asia, Southeast Asia, and southern Asia; and numerous smaller ethnic groups of Africa. Estimates can and do vary greatly due to a lack of agreement on which particular groups should or should not be counted as “indigenous.”

These small, culturally distinct societies have survived up to the present day in the remote jungles, swamps, mountains, deserts, tundra, and other “undeveloped” regions of the world for only one reason: They did not have anything their larger and far more powerful neighbors wanted. Globalization is rapidly changing their relationship with the outside world. The growth of industrialization together with a global population explosion is creating ever-increasing demands for food, timber, minerals, energy, and water. The lands presently occupied by these indigenous peoples are the last “undeveloped” lands in the world. The lands of the indigenous peoples are the last “frontier.” The remaining jungles and woodlands of the world are rapidly being cleared for timber and/or for new farm and ranch lands. Vast river valleys are being dammed and flooded for hydroelectric power. No region is too remote or isolated to be safe from “development” if rich deposits of oil, natural gas, iron, copper, nickel, bauxite (aluminum ore), gold, or valuable minerals are discovered. The rights of indigenous peoples became an issue at the time of Columbus’s landing in the Americas. Questions of whether the native peoples of the Americas—or, for that matter, any indigenous people—had any inherent rights to their land, resources, or political

sovereignty were debated in Spain. Although legal particulars differed from one colonial power to another as well as over time, a basic consensus was reached early in the colonial period: An indigenous people did have some rights based on prior occupancy. However, more “civilized” peoples could unilaterally claim dominion over them and make use of any land and resources that were either not utilized or “underutilized.” “Civilized” peoples had both a right and an obligation to uplift indigenous peoples and to act in their “best interest.” “Civilized” peoples also had the right to travel and trade wherever they wanted without interference from indigenous peoples. Finally, if an indigenous people resisted, then the “civilized” peoples had the right to use military force against them. Racism, ethnocentrism, and social Darwinist ideas about the inevitability and desirability of progress provided the moral justification for the treatment of indigenous peoples.

Such attitudes and policies affected the governing of most indigenous peoples in the colonial possession of European nations. With the collapse of these colonial empires, the leaders of the new independent countries adopted the same basic attitudes and policies toward the resources of “their” indigenous minority communities. American and Canadians should be able to readily understand what is happening to the smaller indigenous peoples in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania today. The policies of most of these governments in regard to the treatment of their smaller indigenous peoples do not significantly differ from the policies of the United States and Canada toward Native Americans prior to the 1970s. Here, we are just going to discuss three groups in three different regions of the world to show some of the ways in which globalization is destroying the lives of indigenous peoples.

Within the southern African nation of Botswana lies the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), larger in land area than Switzerland, it is the second largest game reserve in all Africa. The CKGR was established in 1961, partly to provide the indigenous hunter-gatherers of the region—the San—with adequate resources for their subsistence needs. In the 1960s and 1970s, local groups of San used the territory for subsistence foraging, hunting and gathering of food plants. In the 1980s, European environmentalists began pressuring Botswana officials to remove the people from the CKGR and declare the area a solely game reserve, with no hunting allowed. By the 1990s, the San were “encouraged” to move outside the reserve by various methods, including failure to repair a needed well, intimidation by selective enforcement of game laws,



and (allegedly) severe physical punishments of accused “poachers.”

By 2002, the government of Botswana had resettled nearly all of the resident San, about 1,000 individuals, in two settlements outside the boundaries of the reserve, placing them in an environment that had few trees and wild plant foods and offering them very little compensation. This action was taken partly in the name of conservation. However, the government also argued that it was for the “good” of the San, so “... that they may be provided with modern facilities, schools, clinics, etc. and to integrate them into modern society.” But the San argued that increasing numbers of tourists in four-wheel-drive vehicles were destroying the land and that more cattle were on the reserve. According to an article by Robert Hitchcock (1999, 54) in the journal *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, the San “expressed that the reason they were being removed was so that well-to-do private citizens could set up lucrative safari camps in the reserve.” In 2002, the San filed a legal case in the High Court of Botswana. In 2006, the court finally ruled that their eviction was illegal, they had a right to live on the reserve, and the government had to issue them hunting permits. In spite of the court ruling, the government still attempted to keep the San from returning to the reserve by refusing to issue hunting permits for San hunters and arresting San hunters. Just recently, the government began issuing armbands to San which they have to wear if they are on the reserve. Meanwhile, a new tourist lodge complete with a swimming pool has been established. However the San cannot take water from the lodge swimming pool or any of the water wells on the reserve which are for animals. In responding to criticism, the Bushman Welfare Minister stated “To those who think for some reason that opening lodges for tourists in the Kalahari while we are banning the Bushmen from accessing their water borehole is immoral, I say, ‘would you prefer your tourists sweaty?’” He further added “... they should have realized by now, it will be much better for them to go back to the relocation camps, where there is no shortage of home-brew and other alcoholic beverages to quench their thirst, rather than persisting in living on their ‘ancestral land’ in the Kalahari.”

Numbering only about 8,000, the Dongria Kondh are a small tribal people in India. Living in the jungle-covered Niyamgiri hills in Orissa, the Dongria Kondh support themselves by growing small crops of millet, peas, and beans and by collecting fruits, plants, and palm oil in the jungle, some of which they sell in the towns at the foot of the hills. As one young tribal

member stated, “We get everything from the jungle like the fruits we take to the market. This is like our source of life for our Dongria Kondh peoples.” Speaking their own distinct language, Kui, they are neither Hindu nor Muslim. They have their own native religion, the mountains being their “temples,” the homes of their gods and the places they pray and make sacrifices. The region is so remote that their villages lack schools, electricity, television, and telephones. Only a few have had any formal education; however, their isolation is rapidly ending. Vandanta Resources, a London based, but Indian controlled, multinational corporation, has constructed a \$1 billion aluminum refinery at the base of the Niyamgiri hills. The government of Orissa, one of the poorest states in India, has agreed to allow Vandanta to strip mine the Niyamgiri hill for bauxite ore, from which aluminum is made. This open pit mine will not only necessitate the clearing of much of the jungle, but the destruction of most of the hills as well. For the Dongria Kondh the strip mining will not just destroy their economy and religion, but their whole way of life. Local environmentalists attempted to legally stop the development in court, arguing that the mining violates the Indian Forest Conservation Act. Norway’s Council on Ethics, which monitors investments of the national pension fund, objected to the project citing “an unacceptable risk of ... severe environmental damage and human rights violations.” As a result, the Norwegian government sold all of their shares of Vandanta. In July 2009, activists in London demonstrated at the annual meeting of Vandanta. In response to the demonstrations, Vandanta announced that the project had just been approved by the Supreme Court of India, the last legal hurdle, and that they were proceeding with their plans to start mining the hills.

In October 2009, after a nine-month investigation, the British government, found among other things, that Vandanta “did not respect the rights of the Dongria Kondh” and “did not consider the impact of the construction of the mine on ... (their) rights.” The government further stated that “a change in the company’s behaviour is essential.” Although legally a British company, Vandanta ignored the government’s rulings, saying in effect that it was really an Indian company. In early 2010, citing ethical reasons, the Church of England sold its holding in Vandanta. In spite of national and international outcry, Vandanta is still proceeding with the project. Prior to the decision of the court in 2009, one of the tribal leaders stated, “If the Supreme Court ... allows(s) mining here, all our Dongria Kondh people from children to old women will go to the

The physical and cultural survival of the Yanomamö and other Amazonian peoples is threatened by opening up their traditional lands to mining, logging, ranching, and other extractive industries.



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factory and sleep on the road and first you will kill us, then you can mine, because we cannot live without our mountain.”

Brazil began planning for a massive development of hydroelectric dams in the Amazon basin in the mid-1970s; however, it was not until the late 1980s with funding from the World Bank that planning began in earnest. The plan called for a major hydroelectric dam to be built on the lower Xingu River. With a relatively small reservoir covering only about 150 square miles of jungle, this dam would be capable of producing 11,000 megawatts of electricity, making it potentially one of the world’s three largest producers. However, for the three to five months during the dry season, lower Xingu dam would be able to produce little if any electricity. Thus, the construction of lower Xingu dam would necessitate the construction of five other dams on the upper Xingu. While these new dams would not produce as much electricity as the dam on the lower Xingu, controlled water releases into the river from the larger upstream reservoirs would allow the main dam to generate the maximum amount of electricity throughout the year. The largest of these upstream reservoirs would flood over 2,500 square miles of forest, while the reservoirs of the other four would cover several thousand additional square miles. The result would be a massive flooding of the valley of the Xingu and its tributaries, affecting the lands of 37 different native tribes and result in the relocation of many of them. Realizing that these reservoirs would flood their lands and those of

their neighbors, leaders of the Kayapo contacted other indigenous groups, the Brazilian National Congress approved the construction of what is now called the Belo Monte dam on the lower Xingu. There appears to be two reasons why the Brazilian government changed its position. Due to the global economy, Brazil has experienced phenomenal economic growth since the 1980s and needs far more electricity. Brazil also has large deposits of bauxite ore, and production of aluminum requires tremendous amounts of electricity. A Japanese-Brazilian aluminum company already has a refinery nearby and is planning to more than double its production. In addition, a Chinese-Brazilian company is planning to build the world’s largest aluminum refinery in the region. Second, because of its increased prosperity and the financial support from China, Brazil no longer needs a loan from the World Bank. In spite of renewed protest by the Kayapo and other tribes and legal delays in local courts, in April 2010, the Brazilian government awarded the contract for the construction

of the Belo Monte dam. One Kayapo leader stated: “There will be bloodshed. ...”

The situation with the San, the Dongria Kondh, and the Kayapo are far from unique. At this very time, probably several hundred ethnic nationalities are faced with the problem of some or all their lands being appropriated for economic “development.” Most of these groups are so small and isolated that the outside world has little knowledge of what is occurring.

Do indigenous people have the right to control the use of their own lands? Do indigenous peoples have the right to practice their own religion? Do indigenous peoples have the right to live the way they wish? Do indigenous people have the right to determine their own futures? What is the difference between the San and the Germans, the Dongria Kondh and the Japanese, the Kayapo and the Russians? All six groups have their own distinct histories, homelands, languages, cultural traditions, and political institutions. The only difference is that in the cases of the San, Dongria Kondh, and Kayapo, the governments of Botswana, India and Brazil have unilaterally claimed dominion over them and all other peoples residing within their national boundaries. What is the basis for the claims of these governments? These are just some of the questions that can be asked.

After more than a decade of deliberations, in 2007, the United Nations passed The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see A Closer Look on page 432). Among other things, the declaration clearly states that indigenous peoples have the right to determine the use of “... the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.” Only four countries, stating that they already had their own laws protecting the rights of indigenous people, voted against the declaration; the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Although Botswana, India, and Brazil voted in favor of the declaration, the actions of these governments since 2007 in regard to the San, the Dongria Kondh, and the Kayapo are clearly violations of the declaration.

The declaration is a nonbinding resolution, meaning it is not international law. It is merely a statement as to what should be, not what shall be. Tourism is an important source of revenue in Botswana, Orissa is one of the poorest states in India and needs the job that the refinery and mine will create, Brazil badly needs electricity for its rapidly expanding economy. Not only did Peru support the declaration, Peruvian representatives played an important role in drafting the declaration. However,

in February 2009, the Peruvian government signed oil leases for portions of the Amazon basin occupied by native groups. In protest, members of several indigenous groups, led by the Awajun, armed with bow and arrows, blocked the main road, while others with canoes blockaded a major river. The response? The Peruvian Navy first destroyed the river blockade, and later the police using helicopters and assault rifle, attacked the road block leaving at least 30 protesters dead. In defending these attacks, President Garcia told the Peruvian people that “The lands of the Amazon belong to you, to you sons, to all the nation, to all Peruvians not just to a small group lives there. ...” What Garcia was saying with is that the economic needs of the 28 million people of Peru were more important than the rights of the 300,000 or so indigenous peoples of the Amazon. Following international cries of genocide, the Peruvian government cancelled the leases.

The vast majority of world leaders agree in principle with the ideas set forth in the declaration. Unfortunately, the vast majority of leaders of underdeveloped and developing countries also agree with President Garcia. The recognition of the rights of their indigenous peoples is a luxury they do not feel their countries can afford. The governments in most parts of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania face serious economic, political, and social problems. Many governments—including those democratically elected—are under pressure from their dominant ethnic group to pursue policies that lead to the displacement or assimilation of the indigenous peoples whose territories lie within their national boundaries. In many countries aspiring to modernization, indigenous people living in remote, “undeveloped” regions are forced to move aside in the interest of what the dominant society sees as the “greater good” of their nation.

### *Vanishing Knowledge*

Despite the U.N.’s Declaration of Rights, the increased political sophistication of indigenous peoples around the world, and the protests of concerned citizens in many countries, there is no doubt that many preindustrial cultures will be destroyed within the coming decades. Even if the people themselves survive the onslaughts of lumbering, mining, damming, grazing, farming, and building, their way of life is liable to disappear. Most people would agree that genocide is a crime of the highest degree. But destruction or alteration of a culture is another matter—isn’t it possible that indigenous people themselves would



be better off if they joined the cultural mainstream of their nations?

Yes, many peoples do want to acquire formal education, get jobs, improve their living standards, and generally “modernize” their societies. For many peoples and for many individuals within an indigenous culture, contact with the wider world offers new opportunities and new choices. Young people are especially attracted by the material goods, entertainments, new experiences, and sheer variety of activities found in towns and cities. They should have these opportunities and these choices. But indigenous peoples and their ways of life are often overwhelmed by forces over which they have no control. It is not that most indigenous peoples are given the opportunity to carefully weigh the options available to them, so that they make informed choices about whether it is best for them to preserve or to modernize their ways of life. Today, as in the past, their traditions are disappearing more often because powerful national governments want to open up their territory or because private entrepreneurs or corporations want to exploit their resources.

Anthropologists are especially concerned with the rights of indigenous peoples for several reasons. First, because of our interest in cultural diversity, we are more aware than most people of what has happened to non-Western cultures in the past several centuries. Second, we identify with indigenous peoples partly because so many of us have worked among them. Third, our professional training gives us a relativistic outlook on the many ways of being human, so we can appreciate other peoples’ customs and beliefs as viable alternatives to our own. Finally, the fieldwork experience often affects our attitudes about our own societies—deep immersion in other cultural traditions leaves some of us not so sure about our commitment to our own.

Whether an anthropologist or not, one can appreciate the rights of any group of people to have their lives, property, and resources secure from domination by powerful outsiders. The most important factors in considering the rights of indigenous peoples to be left alone are ethical ones. Don’t people everywhere have the right to live their lives free from the unwanted interference of those more powerful and wealthy than themselves? Does any government, regardless of its “problems,” have the right to dispossess people from land they have lived on and used for centuries? Is the demand of citizens in Japan, Europe, North America, or anywhere else for wood, minerals, meat, electricity, or

other products a sufficient justification for relocating a people or taking land away from them? (Readers who follow politicians’ statements about human rights violations in Iran, Iraq, China, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other countries might wonder why they have so little to say about the rights of indigenous peoples.)

Surely, most of us agree on the answers to such questions. Ethical concerns for the human rights of indigenous peoples, combined with a respect for their cultural traditions, are the primary reasons for granting their rights to survive as living communities.

But if the ethical arguments alone (based on shared values about human rights) are not compelling, there are other arguments (based on practical concerns, and even on the self-interest of the dominant majority). The long-term welfare of all humanity may be jeopardized by the loss of cultural diversity on our planet. Think about the cultural heritage of humanity as a whole. Consider *all* the knowledge accumulated by *all* humanity over hundreds of generations. Imagine, in other words, human culture—here defined as the sum of all knowledge stored in the cultural traditions of all humans alive today.

Some of the knowledge in present-day human culture has been widely disseminated in the past few centuries by means of written language. We may call it *global knowledge* (not meaning to imply that it is “true” or “universally known”). Although some global knowledge will be lost or replaced, much of the knowledge stored in writing (or, more recently, on computer disks) will be preserved and added to over the coming decades and centuries. Other knowledge in human culture is *local knowledge*—it is stored only in the heads of members of particular cultures, many of which are endangered. Most local knowledge will disappear if those cultural traditions disappear—even if the people themselves survive.

How much of this local knowledge is knowledge that may (today, tomorrow, someday) prove useful to all humanity? Of course, no one knows. But no one can doubt that the rest of the world has much to learn from indigenous cultures. (Incidentally, anthropologists have always understood the importance of learning *about* other cultures; recently, there has been increasing emphasis placed on learning *from* them.) In fact, much of what had been only the local knowledge of some indigenous culture has been incorporated into global knowledge, as a consequence of contact with the West and other colonizing peoples. We conclude this book with a small sample of some of the medical and adaptive wisdom of indigenous peoples, whose

In 1982, the United Nations created the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). The purpose of the WGIP was to develop standards for the protection of indigenous peoples. In the decades that followed, the WGIP and then other United Nations bodies worked with indigenous leaders as well as representatives of national governments to draft a declaration concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted “The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

The declaration itself is lengthy, containing 45 articles. (For the full text, go to <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/GO6/125/71/PDF/GO612571.pdf>.) Here we quote only some of the more important points relative to indigenous rights in general, as well as rights directly related to the political status, landholdings, and cultural traditions of indigenous peoples.

Article 7 states: “Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.”

Several articles address the political rights of indigenous peoples: “Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination [and] by virtue of that right ... freely determine their political status” (Article 3); “the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs” (Article 4); and “the right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures and ... in the cases where they exist, juridical systems or customs, in accordance with international human rights standards” (Article 34).

Other articles address the issues of land, resources, and economic development: “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired” (Article 26); “the right to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to freely engage in all their traditional and other economic activities” (Article 20); “the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources” (Article 32); and “the right to the

conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources” (Article 28).

Finally, the declaration states that “indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories” (Article 10), and it gives peoples “the right to ... restitution or ... fair and equitable compensation, for lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent” (Article 28).

The related issues of assimilation and traditional cultures of indigenous peoples are addressed in a variety of ways: “Indigenous peoples ... have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” (Article 8); “the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature” (Article 11); “the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains” (Article 12); and “the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts ... the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions” (Article 31).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the declaration with 143 countries voting in favor, 11 countries abstaining, and 4 countries—the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—voting against. It is important to note that the declaration is not legally binding; compliance with the declaration is voluntary.

local knowledge has already contributed so much to the world.

### Medicines We Have Learned

“The Medicine Man Will See You Now,” proclaimed a headline in a 1993 edition of *Business Week*. The

accompanying article described a California pharmaceutical company that sends ethnobotanists and other scientists into rain forests to learn from indigenous shamans. Companies as well as scholars are beginning to understand that the traditional remedies long used by preindustrial peoples often have genuine medical value. In fact, many of the important drugs in use today were

derived from indigenous knowledge. Here, we provide only a few examples of the medicines originally discovered by indigenous peoples that now have worldwide significance. An enjoyable source of more examples is the 1993 book, *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, by Mark Plotkin.

Malaria remains a debilitating, although usually not fatal, sickness in tropical and subtropical regions. Its main treatment is quinine, a component of the bark of the cinchona tree. Europeans in the seventeenth century learned of the value of quinine from Peruvian Indians.

The Madagascar periwinkle has long been used in folk medicine to treat diabetes. Researchers first became interested in the plant as a substitute for oral insulin, but it seems to have little value for this purpose. During their investigation, however, scientists discovered that extracts from periwinkle yielded dramatic successes in treating childhood leukemia, Hodgkin's disease, and some other cancers. Drugs based on the plant—notably vincristine and vinblastine—remain the major treatments for these otherwise fatal diseases.

Muscle relaxants are important drugs to surgeons. A popular one is curare, made from the chondodendron tree. Taken in large amounts, curare can paralyze the respiratory organs and lead to death. This property was recognized by South American Indians, who used it as arrow poison for hunting birds, monkeys, and other game, and from whom medical science learned of the drug's value.

The ancient Greeks and several North American Indian tribes used the bark of willows for relief from pain and fever. In the nineteenth century, scientists succeeded in artificially synthesizing this compound that today we call *aspirin*.

There is no way of knowing how many plants used by surviving indigenous peoples could prove medically effective. The potential is great. According to pharmacologist Norman Farnsworth, about one-fourth of all prescribed drugs in the United States contain active ingredients extracted from higher plants. The world contains more than 250,000 species of higher plants. Although as many as 40,000 of these plants may have medical or nutritional values that are undiscovered by science, only about 1,100 of these have been well studied. Botanists and medical researchers are coming to realize that indigenous peoples already have discovered, through centuries of trial and error, that certain plants are effective remedies for local diseases. The future value of their medical wisdom to all of humanity is largely unknown, but probably great.



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Indigenous peoples, such as these Indonesian “medicine men,” commonly have an extensive and potentially important knowledge of the curative powers of plants. How much medical knowledge of healers in indigenous cultures will be lost?

## Adaptive Wisdom

Many preindustrial peoples have lived in and exploited their natural environments for centuries. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the problems of technology in attempting to overcome hunger, and some of the important traditional agricultural alternatives used by indigenous peoples such as the Kayapo and Lacandon Maya. They have learned to control insect pests and diseases that attack the plants on which they depend, and to do so without using expensive and often dangerous artificial chemicals. They have often learned how to make nature work for them while minimizing the deterioration of their environments. They have, in short, incorporated much adaptive wisdom into their cultural traditions. Following are possible benefits that all humanity might gain by preserving the ecological knowledge of indigenous peoples.

### Preservation of Crop Varieties

In all cultivation systems, natural selection operates in the farmers' fields. Like wild plants, crops are subject to drought, disease, insects, and other natural elements, which select for the survival of the individual plants best adapted to withstand these hazards. In addition, crops are subject to human selection. For example, crop varieties most susceptible to drought or local diseases are harvested in smaller quantities than drought-



and disease-resistant varieties. Perhaps without knowing it, the cultivator replants mainly those varieties best adapted to survive the onslaughts of drought and local diseases. This tuning of plant varieties to the local environment, with all its hazards and fluctuations, goes on automatically so long as the crops harvested from the fields are replanted in the same area. Thanks to the unintentional and intentional selection by hundreds of generations of indigenous cultivators around the world, each species of crop (e.g., beans, potatoes, wheat) evolved a large number of *land races*, or distinct varieties adapted to local conditions.

Over the course of human history, several thousand species of plants have been used for food but less than a hundred of these were ever domesticated. Of all the plants that have been domesticated, today only a handful provide significant amounts of food for the world's people. In fact, only four crops—wheat, rice, maize, and potato—provide almost half of the world's total consumption of food.

Since around 1950, plant geneticists and agricultural scientists have developed new varieties of wheat, corn, rice, and potatoes capable of giving higher yields if they receive proper amounts of water and fertilizers. These new strains were developed by crossing and re-crossing native land races collected from all over the world. The aim was to achieve a “green revolution” that would end world hunger by increasing production. Many new varieties are hybrids, which means that farmers must receive a new supply of seeds yearly from governmental or private sources.

Ironically, having been bred from the genetic material present in their diverse ancestors, the new strains now threaten to drive their ancestors to extinction. As farmers in Asia, Africa, and the Americas plant the seeds of artificially bred varieties, the traditional varieties—the land races that are the product of generations of natural and human selection—fall into disuse and many have disappeared.

Why should we care? Increasingly, agricultural experts are realizing the dangers of dependence on a few varieties. If crops that are nearly identical genetically are planted in the same area year after year, a new variety of pest or disease will eventually evolve to attack them. The famous Irish potato famine of the 1840s was directly related to the genetic uniformity of the potato because all the potatoes in Ireland were apparently descended from only a few plants. More than a million people died as a result of the potato blight, and a million more immigrated to North America. The United States has also suffered serious economic

losses: The corn blight of 1970 destroyed about 15 percent of the American crop. Losses would have been less severe had most American farmers not planted a single variety of corn.

Many plant breeders are alarmed at the prospect of losing much of the genetic diversity of domesticated plants. Today, they are searching remote regions for surviving land races that contain genes that one day might prove valuable. (The seeds are stored in seed banks for future study.) The searchers have been successful, although no one knows how much of the genetic diversity of crops such as wheat and corn has already disappeared.

The knowledge of indigenous peoples is an important resource in the effort to preserve land races. In many parts of the world—the Andes, Central America, Amazonia, the Middle East, and elsewhere—cultivators still grow ancient varieties of crops. They know where these varieties yield best, how to plant and care for them, how to prepare them for eating, and so on. In the Andes, for instance, hundreds of potato varieties survive among the Quechua Indians as a legacy of the Inca civilization. Many have specific ecological requirements, and some are even unique to a single valley. Research is now under way to determine how well specific land races will grow in other areas to help solve food supply problems elsewhere. It is important to preserve the genetic information encoded in these varieties for future generations.

Indigenous peoples who still retain the hard-won knowledge of their ancestors and who still use the often-maligned “traditional crop varieties” are important informational resources in the effort to save the genetic diversity of crops on which humanity depends.

### “Undiscovered” Useful Species

In addition to their familiarity with local crop varieties that have potential worldwide significance, many indigenous peoples cultivate or use crop species that are currently unimportant to the rest of the world. One example is amaranth, a grain native to the Americas that was of great importance to the Indians in prehistoric times. The great Mesoamerican civilizations made extensive use of the plant in their religious rituals. This led the Spanish conquerors, in their anxiety to root out heathenism, to burn fields of amaranth and prohibit its consumption. Otherwise, it—like maize, potatoes, beans, squash, and other American crops—might have diffused to other continents. Amaranth remains an important food to some indigenous peoples of highland Latin America, who retain knowledge of its properties

and requirements. Its unusually high protein content might someday make it valuable to the rest of the world.

Other plants used by native peoples have the potential to become important elsewhere. Quinoa, now grown mainly in Peruvian valleys, has twice the protein content of corn and has long been recognized as a domesticate with great potential. The tepary bean, now grown mainly by the O’odham of the American Southwest, can survive and yield well during extreme droughts, which might make it cultivatable in other arid regions of the world. Another legume, the winged bean, has long been cultivated by the native peoples of Papua New Guinea, and it has helped nourish people in 50 other tropical countries.

Humans use plants for more than food. Indigenous peoples have discovered many other uses for the plants found in their habitats. Scientific researchers today are attesting to the validity of much native knowledge about the use of plants as sources of fuel, oils, medicines, and other beneficial substances, including poisons. Forest peoples of Southeast Asia use the toxic roots of a local woody climbing plant as a fish poison. The root is so powerful that a mixture of 1 part root to 300,000 parts water will kill fish. From the indigenous tribes, scientists learned of the toxicity of these roots, which allowed them to isolate the rotenoid now used as an insecticide spray for plants and as dips and dusting powders for livestock.

Scientists no doubt will rediscover many other useful plants that today they know nothing about—if the tropical forests in which most endangered plant species are found last long enough. Their task will be easier if the original discoverers—indigenous peoples—are around to teach them what their ancestors learned.

### Cultural Alternatives

There is another kind of practical lesson we might learn from surviving indigenous peoples. Industrialized humans have developed technologies that discover, extract, and transform natural resources on a scale undreamed of a century ago. To North Americans and many other citizens of the developed world, *progress* is almost synonymous with “having more things.” Yet whether our economies can continue to produce ever-increasing supplies of goods is questionable. Many of us are frightened by the thought that economic growth might not continue. The fear that we will be forced to accept a stagnation or even a decline in our levels of material consumption no doubt contributes to the

interest today’s undergraduates have in careers they believe are most likely to earn high incomes for themselves and their future families.

On the other hand, some individuals and groups in the affluent, developed world have questioned the value of what most of their fellow citizens call “economic progress.” They think the environmental and familial costs of the unceasing drive to accumulate and to succeed in a highly competitive environment are not worth the benefits. Some of them believe material affluence cannot bring happiness because it is gained at the high cost of the emotional gratifications that spring from community relationships, from supportive family and friendship ties, and adherence to what some call spiritual values (see the Globalization box).

Most readers of this book are the beneficiaries of economic progress. At the same time, we should be careful not to become the victims of the mentality of progress—of that unceasing desire to earn more, to have more, to succeed more. If the industrial bubble does not burst in our lifetime, then most of us who live in the developed world will spend our lives in a continuous effort to increase our consumption of goods. We will do so despite the fact that we can never catch up with the Joneses because there will always be other Joneses whom we have not yet caught. We will do so despite the fact that our efforts will never be sufficient to get us all we want because no one can consume goods as fast as companies can turn them out and advertisers can create new desires for them. We will do so despite the fact that many of our marriages and families will be torn apart by the effort and many of us will suffer psychologically and physically from stress-related disorders. Sadly, most of us pursue our dollars and goods unthinkingly because we remain ignorant of any alternative way of living.

The world’s remaining indigenous peoples provide us with such alternatives. They do not and did not live in a primitive paradise. Subjugation of neighboring peoples, exploitation by the wealthy and powerful, degradation of women, warfare, and other ideas and practices many of us find abhorrent existed among some preindustrial peoples, just as they do today. Yet, we also find other cultural conditions that some of us long to recover: closer family ties, greater self-sufficiency, smaller communities, more personal and enduring social relationships, and “more humane,” “more moral” values. No anthropologist can tell you whether life is better or worse in preindustrial communities; indeed, we cannot agree on the meaning of *better*. We do know that humanity is diverse. We know that this diversity means that human beings—ourselves

When we think of development, we almost invariably think in terms of economic development. To us, the economic development of a country, a state, or a region is easily measured; it is a matter of dollars and cents. We need only to look at the gross national product (GNP) or the per-capita incomes. If we compare countries in terms of their growth of GNP, then we can determine which are the most economically successful. However, are the gross production figures the only—or even the best—measure of development? Are per-capita incomes the best measure of the standard of living of the society?

Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that growth in the GNP alone is not a particularly good indicator of development. As a child in India, he lived through the great famine of 1943, during which 3 million people died. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of his interests as an economist is in famines. He has discovered that famines were not solely or even primarily the result of food shortages. Instead, famines are frequently the result of market forces that increase the cost of food while depressing incomes to the point that families can no longer purchase adequate food. Just as famines are not necessarily the result of food shortages, the growth in the GNP of a country does not in itself result in increased prosperity. The GNP of a country might be growing, with little economic benefit to many, if not most, of the people.

Sen also questions how we measure standards of living. Is it merely a question of relative income? The Indian state of Kerala is an excellent example that per-capita income figures alone are not always the best measure of quality of life. Covering only 24,000 square miles along the southwest coast of India, Kerala is home to 33 million people. Depending primarily on agriculture, Kerala is a poor state, even by Indian standards. In terms of gross domestic product (GDP), Kerala averages only about \$1,000 per capita, \$200 less than India as a whole, and only one-twenty-sixth that of the United States. By such economic measures alone, residents of Kerala would appear to have a very poor standard of living. If we look at Kerala in terms of health, education, and other social issues, however, we see a far different picture.

In terms of health, the people of Kerala are better off than most other peoples in India and in countries with much higher

incomes. Their infant mortality rate is among the lowest in the developing world. Their life expectancy is 72 years—11 years longer than the average for India, and only 4 years shorter than the United States.

Even more impressive are their achievements in education. Well-maintained schools are scattered throughout the state, and education is virtually universal. As a result, 90 percent of the people are literate—an achievement that places Kerala on the same level as the far more prosperous peoples of Spain and Singapore.

Social discrimination is less of a problem than in other parts of India and most of the world. Protests against the caste system began in Kerala in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in no other part of India has this system been so expunged from social consciousness. Although there are sizable Muslim and Christian minorities in the state, there have not been the religious conflicts that have beset most of India.

However, possibly the major factor that distinguishes Kerala from other parts of India and most parts of the world is its relative equality in income and opportunity. In the 1960s, the state government abolished landlordism and redistributed the land to 1.5 million tenant families. Kerala also has a relatively high minimum wage. This wage has discouraged industrial development and, as a result, Kerala has an unemployment rate of 25 percent. Because most families have land on which they can garden, however, they are shielded from destitution.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. What do we mean by *standard of living*? Can the standard of living of a people be measured in monetary terms alone?
2. Should development take into account not only incomes but also the distribution of wealth, educational levels, health standards, and social discrimination?
3. Do the people of Kerala serve as an example of balanced development? Are they, as Akash Kapur has said, “poor but prosperous”?
4. What do you value more: money or people?

SOURCES: Sen (1984, 1987); Kapur (1998)

included—have many alternative ways of living meaningful and satisfying lives. In the end, it is these cultural alternatives provided by indigenous peoples that might have the greatest value to humankind.

Perhaps a people themselves are the only ones qualified to judge the quality of their lives, to decide what it will take to lend meaning and dignity to their existence.

We hope we have convinced you that there are many ways of being human, and we hope you have learned to appreciate some of the alternative ways of living experienced by various human populations. We hope you will agree that some of these alternatives are worth preserving, both in their own right and for the long-term well-being of all humanity.



## Summary

**1 Define applied anthropology and discuss its importance today in understanding the cultures of other peoples.** Anthropological expertise is useful for solving human problems because the way anthropologists look at people and cultures (our worldview) differs somewhat from the views of other professionals. Applied anthropologists have conducted research relevant to both global and local-level problems.

**2 Define medical anthropology.** Medical anthropology is the study of all aspects of health and health care for the purpose of improving the health of the people of the world.

**3 Compare the differences between Western or scientific medicine and most traditional systems of healing.** Explanation of illness usually falls into two broad categories; natural causation, which accounts for illness as a physiological consequence of some experience of the individual and supernatural causation, which accounts for illness as the consequences of some supernatural experience. Western or scientific medicine sees and treats illness as the result of natural causes, while many traditional medical practices are based on the belief that illness is at least in part the result of supernatural causes.

**4 Identify the unfavorable consequences of rapid population growth.** Population growth has many unfavorable consequences. It contributes to serious environmental problems, low economic productivity, urban sprawl and shantytowns, political conflicts, and even war. This is the main paradox of population growth: The high fertility of a country's citizens is mainly responsible for it, yet their high fertility contributes to many of their nation's problems.

**5 Explain why the population growth rates in North America and other industrial regions are relatively low.** Having many children is not a simple product of ignorance or irrational cultural conservatism. The fertility rate is a response to the overall economic conditions in a region or country. This is shown by how North American couples choose how many children to have. Our low fertility is a rational response of couples to the conditions of their personal lives. In deciding how many children they want, most modern couples consider the personal, not the societal, costs and benefits of children.

**6 Explain why the population growth rates are high in the poorer regions of the world.** High fertility in the LDCs is likewise a consequence of the overall economic and social environment that constrains reproductive behavior. Ethnographic studies suggest that children are a net economic asset rather than a liability in the rural areas of the Third World. Children are productive family members at a young age. They seek jobs with local people to supplement the family income. When older, they go to the cities or to foreign countries and send money back home. They provide old-age security for their parents. Under such conditions, high fertility exists because large families are beneficial.

**7 Describe the two explanations for world hunger.** Population growth is often believed to be the major cause of world hunger. This is the scarcity explanation of hunger, which holds that overpopulation leads to chronic malnutrition and periodic massive starvation. The alternative is the inequality explanation. It holds that land and other food-producing resources are in fact sufficient to provide an adequate diet for the whole world. Hunger is caused by the way local and world economies allocate resources.

These two explanations of hunger are compatible: Population growth contributes to hunger by increasing the scarcity of food production resources, yet prevalent inequalities in access to productive resources aggravate the scarcity and prevent people from adjusting to it.

**8 Identify some of the possible solutions for hunger.** Technology transfer is a viable solution to hunger in the LDCs, according to many. But there are numerous problems with this solution. Temperate agricultural methods often do not work well in tropical climates and soils. New technologies sometimes harm rather than help the poorest families. Peasants often do not adopt new technologies and crop varieties because they perceive them not worth the costs, or because they cannot afford to assume the risks of failure. Mechanized agriculture requires so much energy to produce food that it may not be affordable to Third World farmers and may not be sustainable in the long run. Agricultural scientists, anthropologists, and others have been researching alternative farming methods long used by traditional peoples of the world. Traditional methods such as intercropping and resource management hold promise for increasing food production sustainably. It

is likely that a combination of solutions will be necessary to alleviate problems of hunger and poverty.

**9 Discuss how globalization is changing the lives of indigenous peoples and destroying the cultural traditions of these peoples.** Smaller indigenous foraging, farming and herding peoples have existed until the present day in isolated and remote regions of the world. They have survived primarily because they had nothing their more powerful neighbors wanted. Globalization and the global economy are today threatening the continued existence of these peoples. The forests and jungles that many depend on are being cut for timber and/or farmland and rangeland. Mining and energy development is destroying their land and polluting their water. The construction of hydroelectric dams is flooding their valleys. The national governments who claim dominion over them are ignoring their rights in the name of development.

**10 Analyze the potential importance of the cultural knowledge of indigenous peoples.** Ethical considerations alone are a sufficient reason these peoples should be allowed to remain in their communities, on their traditional lands, living in the ways of their ancestors, if that is their choice. Pragmatic considerations are also important because these people still retain

a vast body of knowledge—knowledge that is of great potential value to all humanity. Science has already adapted several important medicines and treatments from indigenous peoples. Many other plants with medical value will probably be discovered, if the tropical forests and the cultural knowledge of their indigenous inhabitants last long enough. Adaptive wisdom is to be found in the traditions of indigenous peoples. Land races of important crops still survive and might contain genetic materials from which useful foods might someday be bred. Crops that today are used primarily by indigenous peoples—such as amaranth, quinoa, tepary bean, and the winged bean—might eventually have worldwide significance. Nonfood plants are also important as insecticides, oils, fibers, and other products. Indigenous people also provide us with alternative cultural models that should reduce our anxieties about the likelihood of eventual decline in our material living standards. The diversity of the human species shows that we can live meaningful and wholly satisfying lives without the technologies and huge quantities of consumer goods we consider necessary to our economic welfare. The remaining preindustrial cultures allow us to see that there is more than one narrow road to personal fulfillment, cultural health, and national dignity and prestige.

## Media Resources

### The Wadsworth Anthropology Resource Center [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)

The Wadsworth discipline resource website that accompanies *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, includes a rich array of material, including online anthropological video clips, to help you in the study of cultural anthropology and the specific topics covered in this chapter. Other

material includes a case study forum with excerpts from various Wadsworth authors, map exercises, scientist interviews, breaking news in anthropology, and links to additional useful online material. Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) to access this valuable resource.

# GLOSSARY

**accommodation** The creation of social and political systems that provide for and support ethnic group differences.

**acculturation** The cultural changes that occur whenever members of two cultural traditions come into contact.

**aesthetic** Qualities that make objects, actions, or language more beautiful or pleasurable, according to culturally relative and variable standards.

**affines** In-laws, or people related by marriage.

**agriculture** Intentional planting, cultivation, care, and harvest of domesticated food plants (crops).

**ambilocal residence** Residence form in which couples choose whether to live with the wife's or the husband's family.

**ancestral cults** A type of communal cult centered around rituals performed to worship or please a kin group's ancestors.

**animism** Belief in spiritual beings.

**anthropological linguistics** Subfield that focuses on the interrelationships between language and other aspects of a people's culture.

**anthropology** The academic discipline that studies all of humanity from a broad perspective.

**applied anthropology** Subfield whose practitioners use anthropological methods, theories, and concepts to solve practical, real-world problems; practitioners are often employed by a governmental agency or private organization.

**archaeology** The investigation of past cultures through excavation of material remains.

**art** Any human action that modifies the utilitarian nature of something for the primary purpose of enhancing its aesthetic qualities; or actions, objects, or words valued largely for their aesthetic pleasure or symbolic communication.

**artificial countries** Multinationality countries created by external powers; usually applied to former colonies.

**assimilation** The merging of the members of one ethnic group into another, with the consequent abandonment of the former group's identity.

**authority** The recognized right of an individual to command another to act in a particular way; legitimate power.

**avunculocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the mother's brother of the husband.

**balanced reciprocity** The exchange of goods considered to have roughly equal value; social purposes usually motivate the exchange.

**band** A small foraging group with flexible composition that migrates seasonally.

**big men** Political leaders who do not occupy formal offices and whose leadership is based on influence, not authority.

**bilateral kinship** Kinship system in which individuals trace their kinship relationships equally through both parents.

**bilocal residence** Postmarital residence in which couples move between the households of both sets of parents.

**biological determinism** The idea that biologically (genetically) inherited differences between populations are important influences on cultural differences between them.

**biological/physical anthropology** Major subfield of anthropology that studies the biological dimensions of humans and other primates.

**body arts** Artificial artistic enhancement or beautification of the human body by painting, tattooing, scarification, or other means.

**body painting** The decoration of the body by painting designs.

**body piercing** The decoration of the body by piercing holes in parts of the body for the attachment of ornaments.

**bound morpheme** A morpheme attached to a free morpheme to alter its meaning.

**brideservice** Custom in which a man spends a period of time working for the family of his wife.

**bridewealth** Custom in which a prospective groom and his relatives are required to transfer goods to the relatives of the bride to validate the marriage.

**cargo cults** Melanesian revitalization movements in which prophets claim to know secret rituals that will bring wealth (cargo).

**caste** Stratification system in which membership in a stratum is in theory hereditary, strata are endogamous, and contact or relationships among members of different strata are governed by explicit laws, norms, or prohibitions.

**chiefdoms** Centralized political systems with authority vested in formal, usually hereditary, offices or titles.

**civilization** A form of complex society in which many people live in cities.

**clan** A named unilineal descent group, some of whose members are unable to trace how they are related, but who still believe themselves to be kinfolk.

**class** System of stratification in which membership in a stratum can theoretically be altered and intermarriage between strata is allowed.

**classifications of reality (cultural constructions of reality)** Ways in which the members of a culture divide up the natural and social world into categories, usually linguistically encoded.

**cognatic descent** Form of descent in which relationships may be traced through both females and males.

**cognatic descent group** A group of relatives created by tracing relationships through both females and males.

**communal cults** Cults in which the members of a group cooperate to perform rituals intended to benefit all.



**comparative methods** Methods that test hypotheses by systematically comparing elements from many cultures.

**comparative perspective** The insistence by anthropologists that valid hypotheses and theories about humanity be tested with information from a wide range of cultures.

**composite bands** Autonomous (independent) political units consisting of several extended families that live together for most or all of the year.

**configuralism** Theoretical idea that each culture historically develops its own unique thematic patterns around which beliefs, values, and behaviors are oriented.

**conflict theory of inequality** Theory holding that stratification benefits mainly the upper stratum and is the cause of most social unrest and other conflicts in human societies.

**consanguines** “Blood” relatives, or people related by birth.

**consultant (informant)** A member of a society who provides information to a fieldworker, often through formal interviews or surveys.

**controlled comparisons** A methodology for testing a hypothesis using historic changes in societies.

**court legal systems** Systems in which authority for settling disputes and punishing crimes is formally vested in a single individual or group.

**courts of mediation** Court systems in which the judges attempt to reach compromise solutions, based on the cultural norms and values of the parties involved, that will restore the social cohesion of the community.

**courts of regulation** Court systems that use codified laws, with formally prescribed rights, duties, and sanctions.

**cross-cultural comparisons** A methodology for testing a hypothesis using a sample of societies drawn from around the world.

**cultivation** Planting, caring for, and harvesting domesticated plants.

**cultural anthropology (ethnology)** The subfield that studies the way of life of contemporary and historically recent human populations.

**cultural construction of gender** The idea that the characteristics a people attribute to males and females are culturally, not biologically, determined.

**cultural construction of kinship** The idea that the kinship relationships a given people recognize do not perfectly reflect biological relationships; reflected in the kinship terminology.

**cultural construction of reality** *See classifications of reality.*

**cultural determinism** The notion that the beliefs and behaviors of individuals are largely programmed by their culture.

**cultural identity** The cultural tradition a group of people recognize as their own; the shared customs and beliefs that define how a group sees itself as distinctive.

**cultural integration** The interrelationships among the various components (elements, subsystems) of a cultural system.

**cultural knowledge** Information, skills, attitudes, conceptions, beliefs, values, and other mental components of culture that people socially learn during enculturation.

**cultural relativism** The notion that one should not judge the behavior of other peoples using the standards of one’s own culture.

**cultural universals** Elements of culture that exist in all known human groups or societies.

**culture (as used in this text)** The socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior shared by some group of people.

**culture shock** The feeling of uncertainty and anxiety an individual experiences when placed in a strange cultural setting.

**descent group** A group whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor.

**diachronic** Studies of changes in a culture over time.

**domestication** The process by which people control the distribution, abundance, and biological features of certain plants and animals in order to increase their usefulness to humans.

**dowry** Custom in which the family of a woman transfers property or wealth to her and/or her husband’s family upon her marriage.

**ecclesiastical cults** Highly organized cults in which a full-time priesthood performs rituals believed to benefit believers or the whole society, usually in large buildings dedicated to religious purposes or deities; found in complex societies.

**egalitarian society** Form of society in which there is little inequality in access to culturally valued rewards.

**enculturation (socialization)** The transmission (by means of social learning) of cultural knowledge to the next generation.

**endogamous rules** Marriage rules requiring individuals to marry some member of their own social group or category.

**Eskimo terminology** Kinship terminology system in which no nuclear family kin term is extended to more distant relatives; nuclear family members have unique terms.

**ethnic boundary markers** Any overt characteristics that can be used to indicate ethnic group membership.

**ethnic cleansing** The elimination or removal of an unwanted ethnic group or groups from a country or a particular geographical region; usually involves genocide and/or relocation of the population.

**ethnic group** A named social group based on perceptions of shared ancestry, cultural traditions, and common history that culturally distinguish that group from other groups.

**ethnic homogenization** The attempt to create a single ethnic group in a particular geographical region.

**ethnocentrism** The attitude or opinion that the morals, values, and customs of one’s own culture are superior to those of other peoples.

**ethnogenesis** The creation of a new ethnic group.

**ethnographic fieldwork** Collection of information from living people about their way of life; *see also fieldwork.*

**ethnographic methods** Research methodologies used to describe a contemporary or historically recent culture.

**ethnography** A written description of the way of life of some human population.

**ethnohistoric research** The study of past cultures using written accounts and other documents.

**ethnohistory** *See ethnohistoric research.*

**ethnology** The study of human cultures from a comparative perspective; often used as a synonym for cultural anthropology.

**evolutionary psychology (sociobiology)** Scientific approach emphasizing that humans are animals and so are subject to similar evolutionary forces as other animals; associated with the hypothesis that behavior patterns enhance inclusive fitness.

**exogamous rules** Marriage rules prohibiting individuals from marrying a member of their own social group or category.

**extended family** A group of related nuclear families.

**feud** A method of dispute settlement in self-help legal systems involving multiple but balanced killings between members of two or more kin groups.

**fictive kinship** Condition in which people who are not biologically related behave as if they are relatives of a certain type.

**fieldwork** Ethnographic research that involves observing and interviewing the members of a culture to describe their current way of life.

**foraging** Adaptations based on the harvest of wild (undomesticated) plants and animals.

**forced assimilation** The social absorption of one ethnic group by another ethnic group through the use of force.

**forensic anthropology** A specialization of physical anthropology that identifies and analyzes human skeletal remains; forensic anthropologists usually work for or consult with law enforcement agencies.

**form of descent** How a people trace their descent from previous generations.

**free morpheme** A morpheme that can be used alone.

**functional theory of inequality** Theory holding that stratification is a way to reward individuals who contribute most to society's well-being.

**functionalism** Theoretical orientation that analyzes cultural elements in terms of their useful effects to individuals or to the persistence of the whole society.

**gender crossing** Custom by which a person of one sex is allowed to adopt the roles and behavior of the opposite sex, with little or no stigma or punishment.

**gender (sex) roles** The rights and duties individuals have because of their perceived identities as males, females, or another gender category.

**gender stratification** The degree to which males and females are unequal in dimensions such as status, power or influence, access to valued resources, eligibility for social positions, and ability to make decisions about their own lives.

**generalized reciprocity** The giving of goods without expectation of a return of equal value at any definite future time.

**genocide** The deliberate attempt to eliminate the members of an ethnic category or cultural tradition.

**global economy** The buying and selling of goods and services in an integrated global market.

**global trade** The direct or indirect exchange of goods and products between peoples from all regions of the world.

**globalization** The process of integrating the world's peoples economically, socially,

politically, and culturally into a single world system or community.

**globalization of production** The process of corporations headquartered in one country relocating their production facilities to other countries to reduce production costs and remain globally competitive.

**grammar** Total system of linguistic knowledge that allows the speakers of a language to send meaningful messages that hearers can understand.

**group marriage** Several women and several men are married to one another simultaneously.

**Hawaiian terminology** Kin terminology system in which only sex and generation are relevant in defining labeled categories of relatives.

**herding** Adaptations based on tending, breeding, and harvesting the products of domesticated animals (livestock).

**hierarchical nesting** Occurs when an ethnic group is part of a larger collection of ethnic groups, which together constitute a higher level of ethnic identity.

**historic archaeology** Field that investigates the past of literate peoples through excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts and other material remains.

**historical particularism (historicism)** The theoretical orientation emphasizing that each culture is the unique product of all the influences to which it was subjected in its past, making cross-cultural generalizations questionable.

**historicism** See **historical particularism**.

**holistic perspective** The assumption that any aspect of a culture is integrated with other aspects, so that no dimension of culture can be understood in isolation.

**homeland** A geographical region over which a particular ethnic group feels it has exclusive rights.

**horticulture** A method of cultivation in which hand tools powered by human muscles are used and in which land use is extensive.

**household** A dwelling or compound whose composition is culturally variable but lived in by people, usually relatives or fictive kin, who cooperate for some purposes and share some resources; a kin group of one or more nuclear families who live in the same physical space.

**human variation** Physical differences among human populations; an interest of physical anthropologists.

**humanistic approach** Theoretical orientation that rejects attempts to explain culture in general in favor of achieving an empathetic understanding of particular cultures.

**hunting and gathering** See **foraging**.

**ideology** Ideas and beliefs that legitimize and reinforce inequalities in stratified societies.

**incest taboo** Prohibition against sexual intercourse between certain kinds of relatives.

**incipient courts** Court systems in which judicial authorities meet, frequently informally, in private to discuss issues and determine solutions to be imposed. Evidence is not formally collected, and the parties involved in these cases are not formally consulted.

**indigenous peoples** Culturally distinct peoples who have occupied a region longer than peoples who have colonized or immigrated to the region.

**individualistic cults** Cults based on personal relationships between specific individuals and specific supernatural powers.

**industrialism** Development of technology to harness the energy of fossil fuels to increase productivity, profits, and the availability of consumer commodities.

**inequality** Degree to which individuals, groups, and categories differ in their access to rewards.

**inequality explanation of hunger** Notion that hunger is not caused by absolute scarcity but by the unequal distribution of resources and how these resources are used.

**influence** The ability to convince people they should act as you suggest.

**initiation rite** A rite held to mark the transition, usually to sexual maturity, of an individual or a group of individuals of the same sex.

**innovation** The creation of a new cultural trait by combining two or more existing traits.

**intellectual (or cognitive) approach** The notion that religious beliefs provide explanations for puzzling things and events.

**intensive agriculture** A system of cultivation in which plots are planted annually or semi-annually; usually uses irrigation, natural fertilizers, and (in the Old World) plows powered by animals.

**interpretive anthropologists** Contemporary theorists who analyze cultural elements by explicating their meanings to people and understanding them in their local context; generally emphasize cultural diversity and the unique qualities of particular cultures.

**interviewing** Collecting cultural data by systematic questioning; may be structured (using questionnaires) or unstructured (open-ended).

**Iroquois terminology** Kinship terminology system in which Ego calls parallel cousins the same terms as siblings, calls father's brother the same as father, calls mother's sister the same as mother, and uses unique terms for the children of father's sister and mother's brother.

**key consultant (informant)** A member of a society who is especially knowledgeable about some subject and who supplies information to a fieldworker.

**kin group** A group of people who culturally conceive themselves to be relatives, cooperate in certain activities, and share a sense of identity as kinfolk.

**kin terms** The words (labels) an individual uses to refer to his or her various kinds of relatives.

**kindred** All the bilateral relatives of an individual.

**kinship terminology** The logically consistent system by which people classify their relatives into labeled categories, or into "kinds of relatives."

**law** A kind of social control characterized by the presence of authority, intention of universal application, obligation, and sanction.

**levirate** Custom whereby a widow marries a male relative (usually a brother) of her deceased husband.

**life course** The changes in expected activities, roles, rights and obligations, and social relationships individuals experience as they move through culturally defined age categories.

**limited-purpose money** Money that may be used to purchase only a few kinds of goods.

**lineage** A unilineal descent group larger than an extended family whose members can actually trace how they are related.

**linguistic relativity hypothesis** See Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

**market** Exchange by means of buying and selling, using money.

**market globalization** Process through which the world's national economies become integrated into a single global exchange system organized by market principles.

**marriage alliances** The relationships created between families or kin groups by intermarriage.

**material culture** Artifacts and other physical, visible manifestations of culture, including art, architectural features, tools, consumer goods, clothing, and writing.

**materialism** Theoretical orientation claiming that the main influences on cultural differences and similarities are technology,

environment, and how people produce and distribute resources.

**matrifocal family** Family group consisting of a mother and her children, with a male only loosely attached or not present at all.

**matrilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals trace their primary kinship relationships through their mothers.

**matrilocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the wife's parents.

**medical anthropology** The subfield that researches the connections between cultural beliefs and habits and the spread and treatment of diseases and illnesses.

**monogamy** Each individual is allowed to have only one spouse at a time.

**morpheme** A combination of phonemes that communicates a standardized meaning.

**morphology** The study of the units of meaning in language.

**multiple gender identities** Definitions of sexual identities beyond the female and male duality, including third and fourth genders such as man-woman or woman-man.

**myths** Stories that recount the deeds of supernatural powers and cultural heroes in the past.

**nationality** An ethnic group that claims a right to a discrete homeland and to political autonomy and self-determination.

**negative reciprocity** Exchange motivated by the desire to obtain goods, in which the parties try to gain all the material goods they can.

**neoevolutionism** "New evolutionism," or the mid-twentieth-century rebirth of evolutionary approaches to the theoretical study of culture.

**neolocal residence** Residence form in which a couple establishes a separate household apart from both the husband's and the wife's parents.

**nomadism** Seasonal mobility, often involving migration to high-altitude areas during the hottest and driest parts of the year.

**nonunilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals do not regularly associate with either matrilineal or patrilineal relatives, but make choices about whom to live with, whose land to use, and so forth.

**norms** Shared ideals and/or expectations about how certain people ought to act in given situations.

**nuclear family** Family group consisting of a married couple and their offspring.

**Omaha terminology** Kinship terminology system associated with patrilineal descent in which Ego's mother's relatives are distinguished only by their sex.

**origin myth** The collective history of an ethnic group that defines which subgroups are part of it and its relationship to other ethnic groups.

**paleoanthropology** The specialization of physical anthropology that investigates the biological evolution of the human species.

**participant observation** The main technique used in conducting ethnographic fieldwork, involving living among a people and participating in their daily activities.

**passive assimilation** The voluntary social absorption of one ethnic group by another ethnic group.

**pastoralism** Adaptation in which the needs of livestock for naturally occurring pasture and water greatly influence the movements of groups.

**patrilineal descent** Form of descent in which individuals trace their most important kinship relationships through their fathers.

**patrilocal residence** Residence form in which couples live with or near the husband's parents.

**patterns of behavior** Within a single culture, the behavior most people perform when they are in certain culturally defined situations.

**peasants** Rural people integrated into a larger society politically and economically.

**performance arts** Forms of art such as music, percussion, song, dance, and theater/drama that involve sound and/or stylized body movements.

**phoneme** The smallest unit of sound that speakers unconsciously recognize as distinctive from other sounds; when one phoneme is substituted for another in a morpheme, the meaning of the morpheme alters.

**phonology** The study of the sound system of language.

**polyandry** One woman is allowed to have multiple husbands.

**polygamy** Multiple spouses.

**polygyny** One man is allowed to have multiple wives.

**postmarital residence pattern** Where the majority of newly married couples establish their own residence.

**postmodernists** Those who follow the philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes the relativity of all knowledge, including science; focus on how the knowledge of a particular time and place is constructed, especially on



how power relations affect the creation and spread of ideas and beliefs.

**prehistoric archaeology** Field that uses excavation of sites and analysis of material remains to investigate cultures that existed before the development of writing.

**priest** A kind of religious specialist, often full-time, who officiates at rituals.

**primatology** The study of primates, including monkeys and apes; subfield of biological anthropology.

**psychological approach** The notion that the emotional or affective satisfactions people gain from religion are primary.

**ranked society** Society that has a limited number of high-ranking social positions that grant authority; groups are ranked relative to one another, with the highest rank bringing the highest rewards in prestige, power, and sometimes wealth.

**\*rapport** The working relationship between the researcher and the members of the community he or she is studying.

**reasonable-person model** A model used in legal reasoning that basically asks how a reasonable individual should have acted under these circumstances.

**recall ethnography** The attempt to reconstruct a cultural system at a slightly earlier period by interviewing older individuals who lived during that period.

**reciprocity** The transfer of goods for goods between two or more individuals or groups.

**redistribution** The collection of goods or money from a group, followed by a reallocation to the group by a central authority.

**refugees** Individuals and families who temporarily take up residence in another region or country to escape famine, warfare, or some other life-threatening event.

**relocation** The forced removal of the members of a particular ethnic group from one geographical region to another.

**revitalization movement** A religious movement explicitly intended to create a new way of life for a society or group.

**rite of passage** A public ceremony or ritual recognizing and making a transition from one group or status to another.

**ritual** rganized, stereotyped, symbolic behaviors intended to influence supernatural powers.

**role** Rights and duties that individuals assume because of their perceived personal identity or membership in a social group. Also, the social and/or economic position a field researcher defines for him- or herself in the community studied.

**Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** The idea that language profoundly shapes the perceptions and worldview of its speakers.

**scarcity explanation of hunger** Holds that there are not enough land, water, and other resources to feed all the people of a country or region an adequate diet, given current technology.

**scarification** The scarring of the skin to produce designs on the body.

**scientific approach** Theoretical notion that human cultural differences and similarities can be explained in the same sense as biologists explain life and its evolution.

**secular ideology** An ideology that does not rely on the will of supernatural powers but justifies inequality on the basis of its societywide benefits.

**segregation** The enforced separation of ethnic groups, in which the dominant ethnic group places legal restrictions on the actions of the members of the other group.

**self-help legal systems** Informal legal systems in societies without centralized political systems, in which authorities who settle disputes are defined by the circumstances of the case.

**semantic domain** A class of things or properties perceived as alike in some fundamental respect; hierarchically organized.

**sexual dimorphism** Physical differences based on genetic differences between females and males.

**sexual (gendered) division of labor** The kinds of productive activities (tasks) assigned to women versus men in a culture.

**shaman (medicine man)** Part-time religious specialist who uses his special relationship to supernatural powers for curing members of his group and harming members of other groups.

**shamanistic cults** Cults in which certain individuals (shamans) have relationships with supernatural powers that ordinary people lack.

**simple bands** Autonomous or independent political units, often consisting of little more than an extended family, with informal leadership vested in one of the older family members.

**social anthropology** See **cultural anthropology (ethnology)**.

**social control** Mechanisms by which behavior is constrained and directed into acceptable channels, thus maintaining conformity.

**social distance** The degree to which cultural norms specify that two individuals or groups

should be helpful to, intimate with, or emotionally attached to one another.

**socialization** The process of social learning of culture by children.

**sociobiology** See **evolutionary psychology**.

**sociocultural anthropology** See **cultural anthropology (ethnology)**.

**sociolinguistics** Specialty within cultural anthropology that studies how language is related to culture and the social uses of speech.

**sociological approach** The effects of religion on maintaining the institutions of society as a whole by instilling common values, creating solidarity, controlling behavior, and so forth.

**solidities** Formal institutions that cut across communities and serve to unite geographically scattered groups; may be based on kin groups (clans or lineages) or on non-kin-based groups (age grades or warrior societies).

**sorcery** The performance of rites and spells for the purpose of causing harm to others by supernatural means.

**sororate** Custom whereby a widower marries a female relative of his deceased wife.

**state** A centralized, multilevel political unit characterized by the presence of a bureaucracy that acts on behalf of the ruling elite.

**stereotyping** Having preconceived mental images of a group that bias the way one perceives group members and interprets their behavior.

**stratified society** Society with marked and largely or partly heritable differences in access to wealth, power, and prestige; inequality is based mainly on unequal access to productive and valued resources.

**subculture** Cultural differences characteristic of members of various ethnic groups, regions, religions, and so forth within a single society or country.

**subnationality** A dependent subgroup within a larger nationality that lacks the concept of a separate homeland and makes no claim to any inherent right to political autonomy and self-determination.

**surplus** The amount of food (or other goods) a worker produces in excess of the consumption of herself or himself and her or his dependents.

**synchronic** The description of a culture at one period in time.

**symbols** Objects, behaviors, sound combinations, and other phenomena whose culturally defined meanings have no necessary relationship to their inherent physical qualities.

**tattooing** The decorating of the body with designs by cutting and placing colored pigments under the skin.

**technology-transfer solution** The notion that developing nations can best solve their hunger problems by adopting the technology and production methods of modern mechanized agriculture.

**tone languages** Languages in which changing voice pitch within a word alters the entire meaning of the word.

**totemism** A form of communal cult in which all members of a kin group have mystical relationships with one or more natural objects.

**transhumance** The pastoral pattern involving migration to different elevations to respond to seasonal differences in the availability of pasturelands.

**transnational corporation** A company that produces and sells most of its products or services outside its “home” country.

**transnationals** Members of an ethnic community living outside their country of origin.

**tribe** An autonomous political unit encompassing a number of distinct, geographically dispersed communities held together by sodalities.

**tribute** The rendering of goods (typically including food) to an authority such as a chief.

**unilineal descent** Descent through “one line,” including patrilineal and matrilineal descent.

**unilineal descent group** A group of relatives, all of whom are related through only one sex.

**unilineal evolution** The nineteenth-century theoretical orientation that held that all human ways of life pass through a similar sequence of stages in their development.

**unilineally extended families** Family grouping formed by tracing kinship relationships through only one sex, either female or male, but not both.

**values** Shared ideas or standards about the worthwhileness of goals and lifestyles.

**vision quest** The attempt to enlist the aid of supernatural powers by intentionally seeking a dream or vision.

**visual arts** Arts produced in a material or tangible form, including basketry, pottery, textiles, paintings, drawings, sculptures, masks, carvings, and the like.

**witchcraft** The use of psychic powers to harm others by supernatural means.

**worldview** The way people interpret reality and events, including how they see themselves relating to the world around them.

## CHAPTER 1—THE STUDY OF HUMANITY

### Subfields of Anthropology

Clyde Snow (1995) describes his forensic work in Argentina and northern Iraq. Additional material is in McDonald (1995).

### Cultural Anthropology Today

The articles cited about ethnologists studying North America are written by Adams, Van Hattum, and English (2009) and Lane (2009). The two books mentioned are by Fine (2007) and Ericka Johnson (2007).

## CHAPTER 2—CULTURE

Tylor's definition of culture is from Tylor (1871, 1).

### Defining Culture

The distinction between trial and error and social learning is from Boyd and Richerson (1985) and Pulliam and Dunford (1980), who also discuss the advantages of social learning. The material on the Yanomamö and Semai is drawn from Chagnon (1983) and Dentan (1968), respectively.

### Cultural Knowledge

Edward Hall's two early books (1959, 1966) were among the first to systematically discuss the importance of nonverbal communication in everyday social interaction. Turner (1967) applied concepts like multivocality and condensation to ritual symbols. Information on Navajo witchcraft comes from Kluckhohn (1967). Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971) describes shamanism among the Tukano. Aveni (1995) is a wonderful book describing how some cultures experience and measure the passage of time.

### The Origins of Culture

Material on the origins of language is from Lieberman (2007), on early bone flutes Germany from Conard, Malina, and Munzel (2009), and on the first known beads in Morocco from Bouzouggar and Barton et al. (2007). Interpretations and speculations are ours.

### Biology and Cultural Differences

The example of lactose intolerance is well known, but Arjamaa and Vuorisalo (2010) place it in the context of co-evolution. Extended coverage of cultural universals is provided in D. Brown (1991).

## CHAPTER 3—CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

### Five Properties of Language

Information on the five distinguishing features of human language is from Hockett's (1960) seminal discussion.

### How Language Works

The examples on Thai aspiration and Nupe tones are taken from Fromkin and Rodman's (1988) textbook. The author's (J. P.) own knowledge is the basis for the discussion of the Kosraen language.

### Communication and Social Behavior

Hall (1959, 1966) originated many ideas about proxemics. See Farb (1974) and Trudgill (1983) on male and female speech and on Javanese "levels" of speech. Chagnon (1983) discusses the Yanomamö name taboo. We thank Kathryn Meyer and Gary deCoker for help with the example of Japanese honorifics.

### Language and Culture

Concise descriptions and discussions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are in D. Brown (1991). Reviews by Leavitt (2006), Lucy (1997), and P. Brown (2006) helped with the updated material on linguistic relativity.

## CHAPTER 4—THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT Main Issues Today

Kuwayama (2004) provided part of the inspiration for this section.

### The Emergence of Anthropology

K.R. Howe (2003) discusses the idea that the Polynesians were a lost tribe of Israel. Unilineal evolutionary theory is best known from the works of Tylor (1865, 1871) and Morgan (1877). The times and places of the founding of the first anthropology programs in the United States are from Black (1991).

### Anthropological Thought in the Early Twentieth Century

The best single source of writings on Boas is a collection of his articles (1966). The critique of historical particularist assumptions is taken from Harris (1968). Malinowski's ideas about the functions of institutions, behaviors, and beliefs were first presented in a 1944 book, reprinted as Malinowski (1960). Good sources on structural-functionalism are Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 1965) and Nadel (1951).

### The Rebirth of Evolutionism in the Mid-Twentieth Century

See Leslie White (1949, 1959). Steward's most influential articles appear in two volumes (1955, 1977).

### Anthropological Thought Today: Divisions

The general discussion of the scientific-humanistic division is from our own knowledge and interpretations.

### Scientific Approaches

Dawkins (1976) and E. O. Wilson (1975, 1978) were instrumental works that popularized sociobiology. Books by Marvin Harris (1977, 1979, 1985) were influential in the development of modern materialist thought. Harris's work and M. Cohen (1977) emphasized the importance of population pressure. Harris (1999) is an introduction to his own variety of materialist theory. Sanderson (1999, 2007) provides nice summaries of current evolutionary theory and defends it from both old and new critics.

### Humanistic Approaches

On interpretive anthropology, good sources are early works by Geertz (1973, 1980).



## CHAPTER 5—METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

**Ethnographic Methods**

The discussion of ethnographic field methods is based on the authors own field experiences and numerous informal discussions with colleagues about the problems and issues they encountered during their field research. The discussion of how to evaluate a particular historical account was influenced by Naroll (1962). See also Hickerson (1970) on ethnohistoric methods. See Fogelson (1989) for a discussion of interpretation of historical events. The discussion of suicide in the Trobriand Islands is derived from Malinowski (1926). The problems of collecting genealogies among the Yanomamö are recounted by Chagnon (1983).

**Comparative Methods**

For information on cross-cultural research, see Ember and Ember “A Basic Guide to Cross-Cultural Research” and the Human Relations Area Files (see <http://www.yale.edu/hraf.htm>). The cross-cultural test of the sorcery and social control hypothesis is from B. Whiting (1950). The basic discussion of controlled comparisons is drawn from Eggan (1954). Data on matrilineal and patrilineal societies are from Allen (1984) and Bailey (1989). For A Closer Look on Captain Cook, see Sahlins (1981, 1995) and Obeyesekere (1992). For Globalization Data for Research Ethics and Indigenous Peoples. Whites research methods at Zia see White (1962:6-10), information on the Pitjantjatjara is from Brown 2003: 33–34; see the website of the American Anthropological Association for the Code of Ethics ([www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm)) and for the U.N.’s The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, see ([www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp](http://www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp)).

## CHAPTER 6

**Hunting and Gathering**

Dobyns (1983) provided most of the information on the distribution of foragers in North America used in Figure 6.1. Denevan (1992) and Krech (1999) discuss the use of fire to provide habitat for game animals among prehistoric Native Americans. Information on specific foragers is taken from the following sources: BaMbuti (Turnbull 1962), Hadza (Woodburn 1968), Netsilik (Balicki 1970), Western Shoshone (Steward 1938, 1955), Ju’hoansi (Lee 1969, 1979, 2003), Northwest Coast (Ferguson 1984; Piddocke 1965; Suttles 1960, 1962, 1968) and Cheyenne (Hoebel 1978). Information on the recent endangering of the Ju’hoansi is from Lee (2003); on the Hadza from *The Japan Times*, June 19, 2007, p. 7. Comparative information on foraging working hours is from Sahlins (1972) and Kelly (1995).

**Domestication**

Smith (1995) is a readable book covering the origins of farming in various world regions. Diamond (1997) summarizes dates and places of plant and animal domestication and provides reasons for both developments. Recent sources consulted on the origins of plant domestication are Dillehay et al. (2007) and Pickersgill (2007).

**Horticulture**

M. Cohen (1989) provides an overview of evidence about the health of prehistoric foragers. Sources used to draw the North American portion of the map on the distribution of horticulture are Dobyns (1983) and Doolittle (1992). Material on shifting cultivation is from Conklin (1957), Freeman (1970), and Ruddle (1974). See Bradfield (1971) on dry-land gardening among the Pueblo (mainly the Hopi).

**Intensive Agriculture**

Differences between extensive and intensive agriculture are described in Boserup (1965) and Grigg (1974). Material on intensive agriculture in the New World is drawn from our general knowledge and from

Donkin (1979). On peasant revolts, see E. Wolf (1969). Johnson and Earle (1987) analyze the relationship between intensification and cultural evolution. G. Clark (2007) argues that the overall quality of human life did not improve until after the industrial revolution.

**Pastoralism**

Porter (1965) discusses the subsistence risk-reduction benefit of pastoralism. Schneider (1981) shows the negative relationship between the distribution of the tsetse fly and cattle pastoralism in Africa. A short source on the Karimojong is Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson (1969).

**Industrialism**

Most of the material in this section is drawn from our general knowledge. For specific information, Economy (2004) is an excellent source on China’s water pollution problems. Economy (2007) provided numerical data on Chinese pollution and resource use. Factual information for the discussion in the globalization insert were taken from the following sources. Three *New York Times* articles available online provided the information on the G-8 meeting in July, 2009: (1) July 8, 2009 “Poorer Nations Reject a Target on Emission Cuts,” by Peter Baker; (2) July 10, 2009 “Where Iron is Bigger than Oil or Gold,” by Betinna Wassener; and (3) July 15, 2009 “U.S. Officials Press China on Climate,” by Keith Bradsher. On the Copenhagen meetings in December, 2009, we consulted “5 Nations Forge a Climate Deal, but Many Goals Remain Unmet” by John Bowder, *The New York Times*, December 18, 2009 and “Countries Submit Emissions Goals,” by John Bowder, *The New York Times*, February 2, 2010. Four entries from Johansen (2009) were helpful in summarizing the impacts of global warming: (1) “Agriculture and Warming” (pp. 10–16); (2) “Bangladesh, Sea Level Rise in” (pp. 83–84); (3) “China and Global Warming” (pp. 144–149); and (4) “Gulf of Mexico: Prospective Climate Changes” (pp. 319–321). Battista et al. (2009) discuss potential food shortages from global warming. The information about the Kamayura of Brazil is from “An Amazonian Culture Withers as Food Dries Up,” by Elisabeth Rosenthal, *The New York Times*, July 24, 2009.

## CHAPTER 7—EXCHANGE IN ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Peoples (see Peoples 1985) collected the anecdote about land ownership on Kosrae island, Micronesia. Information on the housing collapse and financial crisis of 2008–2010 was gleaned for many months from assorted news sources.

**Economic Systems**

Sahlins (1965) first distinguished the three forms of exchange.

**Reciprocity**

Lee (1979, 2003) describes Ju’hoansi sharing and *hxaro*. Kelly (1995) generalizes some of Lee’s points to other foragers. Malinowski (1922) describes Trobriand *wasi*. The Maring discussion is from Rappaport (1968) and Peoples (1982).

**Redistribution**

Alkire (1977), Sahlins (1958), D. Oliver (1989), and Peoples (1985) describe tribute in Micronesia and Polynesia.

**Market Exchange**

See Neale (1976) on money. Schneider (1981) describes some African monies. Pospisil (1978) discusses the multiple uses of money among Kapauku. Bohannon (1955) describes Tiv exchange spheres. Comparisons between markets and the Ju’hoansi are our own ideas.

**Globalization and Markets**

Material used in this section was drawn from our general knowledge and from recent news sources. Shapouri et al. (2002) provided the quantitative estimate of the energy balance of ethanol.

**CHAPTER 8—MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES****Incest Taboos**

Tylor (1888) first proposed the “marry out or die out” theory. “Familiarity breeds disinterest” was originally the idea of Westermarck (1926). On Taiwan, see A. Wolf (1970). On Israeli kibbutz, see Shepher (1971). On Lebanese cousin marriages, see McCabe (1983).

**Marriage**

Information on the Musuo is from Hua (2001). The material on Nayar “marriage” is from Gough (1959). Hart, Pilling, and Goodale (1988) describe Tiwi marriage and other aspects of Tiwi culture. J. Goodale (1971) provides information about Tiwi wives.

**Marriage in Comparative Perspective**

Goldstein (1987) describes Tibetan polyandry and its advantages to husbands and the wife. Chagnon (1983) discusses the importance of marriage alliances among the Yanomamö. The challenges of Tierney (2000) do not alter Chagnon’s conclusions about marriage alliances. Kuper (1963) describes Swazi bridewealth. See Lee (1979, 240–242) on Ju/’hoansi brideservice. See Goody and Tambiah (1973) and Harrell and Dickey (1985) on dowry. Material on Indian “dowry deaths” is from our general knowledge and a report in the *Columbus Dispatch* (July 25, 2004, p. A13).

**Postmarital Residence Patterns**

The frequencies of different residence patterns are as reported in Pasternak (1976, 44). Among those who have discussed the influences on residence patterns are Ember and Ember (1971, 1972) and Pasternak (1976).

**Family and Household Forms**

Murdock (1949) first suggested how forms of postmarital residence produce various forms of the family and household. Pasternak, Ember, and Ember (1976) suggest an economic hypothesis for why extended families exist.

**CHAPTER 9—KINSHIP AND DESCENT****Unilineal Descent**

Information on the frequencies of patrilineal and matrilineal descent are from Divale and Harris (1976). Firth (1936, 1965) describes the functions of Tikopian lineages and clans. See Eggan (1950) on Hopi matrilineal descent.

**Nonunilineal Descent**

Cognatic descent in Polynesia is discussed in Firth (1968), Howard and Kirkpatrick (1989), and D. Oliver (1989). The Samoan *’aiga* is described in M. Ember (1959), Holmes and Holmes (1992), and D. Oliver (1989).

**Cultural Construction of Kinship**

The diagrams portraying the terminological systems are from our own knowledge. Aberle (1961) and Pasternak (1976) provide statistical data on the general but imperfect correlation between forms of descent and terminological systems.

**CHAPTER 10—DIVERSITY IN CHILD CARE**

Information on Ju/’hoansi breast-feeding is from Shostak (1983). Howard and Millard (1997) reported on Chagga beliefs about nursing and pregnancy. Jim Peoples personally observed how Micronesian newborns take attention away from the next-youngest child. Among others, Dozier (1970, 79) reports the Hopi use of “ogre” *kachinas* to frighten misbehaving children.

**Two African examples**

The description of the Aka is based on Hewlett (1992). Information about the Gusii is from LeVine et al. (1994). The comparisons of the two are our own.

**Life Course**

The stages of a Gusii female’s life are given by LeVine et al. (1994, 81–82). The Cheyenne concept of abortion is from Llewellyn and Hoebel (1941). Sheper-Hughes (1992) describes the choices poor mothers must make in northeast Brazil. The description of the Osage child-naming rite is based on LaFlesche (1928). Material on whether Samoan young women experience all the stresses and strains typical of American adolescents comes from Mead (1928) and Freeman (1983). Information on drunkenness by young men from Chuuk, Micronesia, is from Marshall (1979). Cheyenne adolescence is mentioned in Hoebel (1978). Concepts of separation, liminality, and incorporation is from V. Turner (1967). The general information on New Guinea beliefs about feminine pollution and male initiation rituals is synthesized from the case studies of Herdt (1987), Meggitt (1970), Meigs (1988), and Wormsley (1993). Detailed material on the Awa is from Newman and Boyd (1982). On the Apache girls’ ceremony, see Farrer (1996). Wallace and Hoebel (1952) provided information on the treatment of the elderly among the Comanche. On the Inuit treatment of the elderly, see Hoebel (1954). Thanks to Brenda Robb Jenike for permission to use her unpublished material (n.d.) on the care of Japanese elderly. Information on well-being among American elderly was published by A. Stone et al. (2010).

**CHAPTER 11—GENDER IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE****Cultural Construction of Gender**

The Hua material is from Meigs (1988, 1990). T. Cohen (2000) is an excellent reader on masculinity.

**Multiple Gender Identities**

The primary sources of generalized information on Native American peoples are Roscoe (2000) and Nanda (2000). Information on the Zuni is from Roscoe (1991). Hoebel (1978) discusses the Cheyenne *berdache*. Nanda (1999) provides factual material on *hijra*.

Information on same-sex civil unions and marriage in the United States is from our general knowledge, with specific information taken from *Jurist*, an online site for legal news (<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2010/04/hawaii-house-approves-same-sex-civil.php>; retrieved June 14, 2010). Information about the division in the Lutheran church is from the article “UA Church Votes to Quit the ELCA,” by Meredith Heagney in the *Columbus Dispatch* (June 18, 2010, p. B4).

**The Gendered Division of Labor**

Table 11.1 was constructed from data in Murdock and Provost (1973). On female hunting among BaMbuti and Agta, see Turnbull (1962) and Estioko-Griffin (1986), respectively. On the possibility that strenuous exercise inhibits ovulation, see Graham (1985). The influence of female child care responsibilities on the division of labor was first made forcibly by J. Brown (1970a). The discussion of why female contributions to subsistence tend to decline with intensification uses information in C. Ember (1983), Martin and Voorhies (1975), Boserup (1970), Burton and White (1984), and White, Burton, and Dow (1981). The Kofyar material is from Stone, Stone, and McC. Netting (1995).

**Gender Stratification**

The general discussion in this section relies on material in di Leonardo (1991), Leacock (1978), Morgen (1989), Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), Quinn (1977), and Sacks (1982). The information

about Andalusia is from Gilmore (1980, 1990). The suggestion that women's status improves with age in many cultures is from J. Brown (1988). Sanday (2002) challenges the common definition of matriarchy. Information on the Iroquois is from Albers (1989), Stockard (2002), and J. Brown (1970b). Lepowsky (1993) describes gender egalitarianism among Vanatinai. On BaMbuti and Aka, see Turnbull (1962) and Hewlett (1992). The idea that women's control over key resources frequently leads to high overall status is discussed in Sanday (1973, 1981). Friedl (1975, 1978) was one of the first to argue that women's status in hunting and gathering cultures is positively related to the importance of women's ability to control the distribution of the products they produce. Yoruba material is from Barnes (1990). Data on women's employment status is from the Bureau of Labor Statistics website <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2009.htm> Tables 7, 24 (retrieved June 15, 2010). Schlegel (1972) and Whyte (1978) discuss why matrilineality and matrilocality tend to give women high status, all else equal. Information on Chinese wives is from M. Wolf (1972) and our general knowledge.

## CHAPTER 12—THE ORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL LIFE

### Forms of Political Organization

The definitions and ideas concerning political structure were influenced by Steward (1955), Service (1962), Cohen and Service (1978), Krader (1968), and Fried (1967). Ethnographic examples were taken from the following sources: Comanche from Hoebel (1940) and Wallace and Hoebel (1952); Tahiti from Goldman (1970); and Inca from D'Altroy (1987), Julien (1988), LaLone and LaLone (1987), LeVine (1987), and Metraux (1969).

### Globalization Box: Multinational Corporations and the Nation-states

The general information for this box is based on news reports over the past few years and the websites of the United Nations ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)), the World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)), the International Monetary Fund ([www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org)), and the World Trade Organization ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)).

The discussion of the effects of free trade and WTO is based in large part on Chomsky (2000); "The MAI Shell Game: The World Trade Organization (WTO)" from the Public Citizen Global Trade Watch website ([www.tradewatch.org](http://www.tradewatch.org)); "The WTO in brief" from the World Trade Organization website ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)); and "Is Globalization Shifting Power from Nation States to Undemocratic Organizations?" from the Globalisation Guide website ([www.globalisationguide.org](http://www.globalisationguide.org)). Many of the general ideas in the portions on global financial institutions are from Phillip (2008) as well as news reports. The more specific data on the Cayman Islands are from the CIA World Factbook 2009, the website of the Cayman Banking Services ([www.caymanbankingservices.com](http://www.caymanbankingservices.com)), and the U.S. Treasury Department "Major foreign holders of U.S. Treasury Securities" ([www.ustreas.gov/tic/mthp.txt](http://www.ustreas.gov/tic/mthp.txt)).

### Social Control and Law

For the basic definition of law as well as many of the concepts about legal systems, we relied on Hoebel (1954), Pospisil (1958), Fallers (1969), Bohannan (1968), Newman (1983), and Gluckman (1972, 1973). Ethnographic examples were taken from the following sources: Comanche from Hoebel (1940), Cheyenne from Llewellyn and Hoebel (1941), Nuer from Evans-Pritchard (1940), Jívaro from Harner (1973), and Barotse from Gluckman (1972, 1973).

## CHAPTER 13—SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND STRATIFICATION

### Systems of Equality and Inequality

The classification of societies into egalitarian, ranked, and stratified was proposed by Fried (1967). Woodburn (1982) discusses reasons

for egalitarianism among foragers. The material on Tikopia is from Firth (1936). Berreman (1959) long ago noted the similarity of race relations in the American South to a caste system.

### Castes in Traditional India

The Indian caste system and its relationship to Hinduism are discussed in Dumont (1980), Hiebert (1971), Mandelbaum (1970), and Tyler (1973).

### Classes in Industrial Societies: The United States

Data on 2006 income inequality are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table 1, p. 5 (2007—<http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-233.pdf>, retrieved November 10, 2007). Changes in the distribution of income between 1973 and 2004 are derived from DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Mills (2004). Information on the distribution of wealth in the United States for 2004 is from Economic Policy Institute (2007).

### Maintaining Inequality

Valeri (1985) describes Hawaiian religion. Information on the effects of federal income tax cuts on the wealthiest comes from IRS data reported in the *Columbus Dispatch*, October 13, 2007.

### Theories of Inequality

Davis and Moore (1945) originated the functionalist theory. Conflict theory goes back to Marx (1967, original 1867). Dahrendorf (1959) was important in formulating conflict theory in sociology. Lenski (1966) remains an excellent source, comparing and evaluating the functionalist and conflict theories. Information on CEO-to-worker income ratios is from Economic Policy Institute (2007).

## CHAPTER 14—RELIGION AND WORLDVIEW

### Defining Religion

Tylor (1871) defined religion as animism. An excellent summary of *mana* is Shore (1989). The idea that Judeo-Christian mythology helps inculcate a worldview conducive to environmental destruction is taken from Lynn White (1967). The Hopi information is from Frigout (1979) and our general knowledge.

### Theories of Religion

The Trobriand magic example is from Malinowski (1954). Frazer's intellectual theory is from Frazer (1963). Geertz (1965) argues that religion provides meaning. The anthropomorphic theory is Guthrie's (1993). Malinowski (1954) argues that magic and religion alleviate anxieties during times of stress and uncertainty. Dobu beliefs about the fate of the dead are discussed in Fortune (1932, 179–188). Kwaio pollution is described in Keesing (1982). The theory that ritual behavior creates social solidarity goes back to Durkheim (1915). Swanson's (1960) cross-cultural study is influential in the sociological approach.

### Supernatural Explanations of Misfortune

The distinction between imitative and contagious magic is Frazer's (1963). Fortune (1932) describes Dobu sorcery. The witchcraft examples are from Kluckhohn (1967, Navajo); M. Wilson (1951, Nyakyusa); Evans-Pritchard (1976, Zande); Offiong (1983, Ibibio); and Middleton (1965, Lugbara). Kluckhohn (1967) hypothesizes that Navajo witchcraft beliefs reduce overt, socially disruptive hostilities.

### Varieties of Religious Organization

Wallace (1966) formulated and named the kinds of cults. The vision quest material is from Lowie (1954, 1956) and our general knowledge. Middleton (1965) describes the Lugbara ancestral cult. V. Turner (1967) describes women's fertility rituals among the Ndembu.



### Revitalization Movements

A general description of cargo cults is in Worsley (1968). Lawrence (1964) describes several Garia movements. On Handsome Lake's movement among the Seneca, see Wallace (1969). Stewart (1980) and E. Anderson (1996) describe peyotism among Native Americans.

### CHAPTER 15—ART AND THE AESTHETIC

Many of the ideas for this chapter came from Hunter and Whitten (1975), R. Anderson (1989) and Toni Fratto (1978). On Shaker art, we consulted the classic study by Andrews and Andrews (1937) and a more recent study by Kirk (1997). For changes in Chinese art, we consulted the Nelson Gallery (1975). Other sources of general information used in this chapter were Lipman and Winchester (1974), Hobson (1987), and Harvey (1937). Specific information on art in particular cultures is drawn from Colton (1959, Hopi); Connelly (1979, Hopi); Hoebel (1978, Cheyenne); and Hail (1983, Plains Indians).

#### Forms of Artistic Expression

The general discussion of body arts is based primarily on Brain (1979). Nuba bodypaint is from Faris and from a conversation with Faris. Information on Polynesian tattooing is from Gell (1993), Hage et al. (1995), and Simmons (1983). A 1998 research paper by undergraduate Maureen McCardel of Ohio Wesleyan University also was helpful on Polynesian tattooing.

Close (1989) provides a good summary of the archaeological debate over style versus function. Material on the Northwest Coast art is from our general knowledge, with specific points drawn from R. Anderson (1989), Boas (1955), Furst and Furst (1982), and Holm (1965, 1972). The comparative information on style in visual arts is from Fischer (1961).

We drew from the studies of Kaeppler (1978) and Lomax (1962, 1968). Good sources on *voudon* are Metraux (1972) and W. Davis's (1985) controversial book. We drew information on !Kung healing from Lee (2003) and Shostak (1983) and on Tumbuka healing from Friedson (1998). A source of case studies on various performances and healing is Laderman and Roseman (1996). An informative and heavily illustrated source for students on Native American dance is Heth (1993). For a discussion of the individual in art, see Warner (1986).

#### Art and Culture

Information on the use of sandpaintings and song/chants in Navajo curing ceremonials is taken from Sandner (1991), Reichard (1950, 1977), and Parezo (1991). BaMbuti *molimo* is described in Turnbull (1962). The Globalization box on Varanasi saris is based on Wax (2007) as well as on news articles from BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>) and the Hindu Business Line ([www.thehindubusinessline.com](http://www.thehindubusinessline.com)).

### CHAPTER 16—GLOBALIZATION

The most important single source is Stavrianos (1998). Secondary information is drawn from E. Wolf (1982), Crosby (1972), and—for the period from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries—Braudel (1979a, 1979b) and Frank (1998). Data on the demographic effects of contact on Native American peoples are from Thornton (1987) and Dobyns (1976). Specific information on historic changes among Native Americans is from Leacock and Lurie (1971) and Kehoe (1992). Historical data on Africa and the African slave trade are from Davidson (1961, 1969), Oliver and Fage (1962), and Mintz (1986). Data on the effects of New World cultigens on Africa are

primarily from Miracle (1966, 1967). Statistics on the number of Europeans in India during the 1920s are from Mayo (1927).

#### The Emergence of the Global Economy

For information on the global economy, we have drawn from several studies: Giddens (2000), Hines (2000), Hutton and Giddens (2000), Klein (1999), and Robbins (1999). Data on the changing magnitude of world trade were obtained from Rostow (1978), supplemented with later data from the World Bank (1999) and the World Trade Organization website ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)).

#### The End of Colonialism

This section is based on general reading with specific data from the CIA (2010).

#### Free Trade

This section is based on general reading and information from the website of the World Trade Organization ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)) and Chomsky (2000).

#### Technological Change

Information on shipping is from an article in the *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (September 3–9, 2001) and the Shipping-Facts website ([www.marisec.org/shippingfact/worldtradeindex.htm](http://www.marisec.org/shippingfact/worldtradeindex.htm)). The information on information technology is from general reading.

#### Globalization: Social and Cultural Affects/Population Growth

Most of the twentieth-century general economic and population data were drawn from Hepner and McKee (1992), Jackson and Hudman (1990a, 1990b), the World Bank (1999), Robbins (1999), and the U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). The data on malaria and smallpox are from Gladwell (2001).

#### Inequalities and Immigration

For data on wealth distribution, see Wealth Distribution Statistics 1999 compiled by the United Nations ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)), the World Council of Churches (2000), and the Institute for Policy Studies, "Top 200: The Rise of Corporate Global Power" ([www.ips.org](http://www.ips.org)). For data on immigration issues, we drew heavily from the *Migration News* ([www.migration.ucdavis.edu](http://www.migration.ucdavis.edu)), the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service website ([www.ins.usdoj.gov](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov)), and the U.S. Census website ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Additional current data on economic, social, migration, and other issues were taken from news reports in the *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, the BBC News website ([www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)), and television and radio news reports.

#### Multinational Corporations

Data on Nokia are drawn from an article in the *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (July 23–29, 2001) and from the Nokia website ([www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)).

#### Westernization?

This section is adapted from Peter Berger (1997). We have given new names to the different agents of Westernization, modified the discussions of them, and dropped his fourth "face," Evangelical Protestantism.

#### Globalization Box

The basic ideals are from Kennedy (1987) and Frank (1998). The part on the auto industry is from Marr (2009) and Bloomberg News ([www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20670001&sid=aE.x\\_r...](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20670001&sid=aE.x_r...)).

The section on Indian Information Technology is from a 2010 article in *The Times of India* (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/553663.cms>), the web page of the Embassy of India ([www.indianembassy.org](http://www.indianembassy.org)), and "PM's Inaugural Address at the Pan IIT-2008" (<http://pib.nic.in/release>). The part on Chinese development is from general reading. Country and regional economic data

and other information are from the CIA Worldfact book (2010), and information on owners of U.S. public debt are from the U.S. Treasury ([www.ustrea.gov/mth.txt](http://www.ustrea.gov/mth.txt)). The future growth of China is from Fogel (2010).

#### CHAPTER 17—ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

There is a vast body of literature in anthropology and sociology on ethnicity and related issues. Because the entire chapter draws on the sources given here, we have not divided these notes into sections. Our ideas on the nature and significance of ethnicity have been most strongly influenced by the studies of Barth (1958, 1969), Vincent (1974), Khelif (1979), Glazer and Moynihan (1963, 1975), Bennett (1975), Himes (1974), DeVos and Romanusci-Ross (1975), R. Cohen (1978), Tax (1967), Nietschmann (1988), Horowitz (1985), and Jackson and Hudman (1990a, 1990b). For discussions of international legal and political issues, see Alfredsson (1989) and Swepton (1989).

For additional data on particular ethnic groups and historical events, we have drawn on a number of sources: CIA World Factbook (2010), Canfield (1986), Ember and Ember (2001), Germer (1994), Hajda and Beissinger (1990), Foster (1980), Bodley (1999), E. Wolf (1982), Stavrianos (1998), Davidson (1969), Carmack (1988), Kehoe (1992), McAlister (1973), Handler (1988), and Price (1979), Harrison (2007 and 2009), and the Library of Congress on-line Country Studies (<http://countrystudies.us>) as well as general news accounts and discussions with colleagues and students from Angola, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Malaysia.

In addition, one of the authors (G. B.) spent the summer of 1988 in Yugoslavia and the summer of 1989 in Guatemala collecting data on ethnic identity and conflict. For information on current ethnic conflicts, including the events of September 11, 2001, we have had to rely on current news reports from *The Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and BBC News ([www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)) as well as television and radio news reports. Materials for A Closer Look on Iraq were taken from news accounts as well as from Marr (1985), Tripp (2000), Izady (1992), and Houston (2001).

#### CHAPTER 18—WORLD PROBLEMS AND THE PRACTICE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

##### Applied Anthropology

The ideas about the unique contributions of anthropology to problem solving are our own.

##### Health

The discussion of western and traditional medicine is based on Murdock (1980). The data on Navajo healing and health are from Wyman (1983), Kunitz (1987), Csordas (2000), and Lewton (2000).

##### Population Growth

The economic interpretation of high birthrates in the Punjabi villages was presented by Mamdani (1973). The 1982 study of the same area is reported in Nag and Kak (1984). Data on large Javanese and Nepalese families appear in B. White (1973) and Nag, White, and Peet (1978). Nardi (1981, 1983), Shankman (1976), and Small (1997) discuss the importance of remittances in Samoa and Tonga. Freed and Freed (1985) discuss why Indian couples think they need more than one son.

#### World Hunger

The inequality explanation of hunger is stated and defended in lay terms in Lappé and Collins (1977, 1986). Data on the Irish famine are from O'Grada (1989), Kinealy (1995), and Woodham-Smith (1991). The discussion of the effects of the "green revolution" on Javanese peasants is from Franke (1974). Johnson (1971) discusses risk minimization among peasants. The quantitative data on the energetic efficiency of various food systems are compiled from information given in Pimentel et al. (1973, 1975) and Pimentel and Pimentel (1979).

The potential value of traditional farming methods for the modern world is described in Altieri (1987) and Wilken (1987). The advantages of intercropping and other traditional methods are covered in Innis (1980), Gliessman and Grantham (1990), and Harrison (1987). Traditional resource management is covered by Alcorn (1981) and Posey (1983, 1984, 1985). Nations and Nigh (1980) discuss the potential of Lacandon Maya shifting cultivation.

#### Anthropologists as Advocates

The anthropologist as advocate is best discussed by Peterson (1974). The early roles of anthropologists in American Indian rights issues are discussed in Mark (1987). For Boas and the issue of racism, see Stocking (1974), and for Mead, see Mark (1999).

For the best general discussion of the evolution of European attitudes to indigenous peoples, see Berkhofer (1978). Germany's policies toward the Herero are discussed in Bodley (1999). S. Davis (1977) discusses the impact on indigenous tribes of Brazil's efforts to develop the Amazon basin. On San relocation, see Hitchcock (1999); Hitchcock, Bieseke, and Lee (2003); BBC news (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/6174709> and [/6191185](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/6191185)); and Survival (<http://www.survival-international.org/tribes/bushmen> the quote about government policy is from the Botswana Tourism Board ([http://botswanaturism.com/bw/attractions/central\\_kalahari\\_gam..](http://botswanaturism.com/bw/attractions/central_kalahari_gam..)) and the quote of the Bushman Welfare Minister is from Survival International (<http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/5705>). The Dongria Kondh materials are from Survival International (<http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/dongria> and news/4980 and 5650), and The Kayapó and Belo Monte dam materials are from T. Turner (1989), A. Goodale (2003), Fearnside (2006), Switkes (2008), and BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Americas/8633786>). See also the Piaracu Declaration ([www.irm.org/pdf/xingu/Piaracu Declaration](http://www.irm.org/pdf/xingu/Piaracu%20Declaration.pdf)). For the conflict between the Peruvian government and the tribes of the Amazon, see BBC News 24 March and 19 August 2008, 17 May, 10 June, and 19 June 2009. The statement of President Garcia is from the website of Tribe (<http://tribes.tribe.net/amazonistas>). The *Business Week* issue referred to is from March 1, 1993. The examples of medicines learned about from indigenous peoples are taken from Lewis and Elvin-Lewis (1977). Farnsworth (1984) argues that many more plants will be discovered to have medical uses. A good discussion of the insights of "traditional medicine" is in Fabrega (1975). The discussion of the erosion of the genetic diversity of major food crops is from our general knowledge and Harlan (1975). The material on amaranth is from Sokolov (1986). The material on amaranth is from Sokolov (1986). Information for A Closer Look on "The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People" was taken from the United Nations website ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)) and from the BBC news website (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>).

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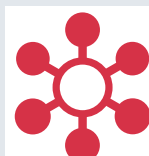
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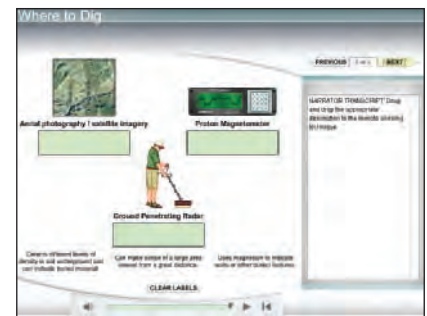


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