Understanding of cultural diversity is essential to a healthy multicultural society. Fundamental to this book’s approach is the belief that a comparative, cross-cultural view of human differences and similarities enhances understanding of diversity and multiculturalism within contemporary North America.

On Being Different provides an up-to-date, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary account of diversity and multiculturalism in the United States and Canada. Conrad Kottak and Kathryn Kozaitis clarify essential issues, themes, and topics in the study of diversity, including ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. The book also presents an original theory of multiculturalism, showing how human agency and culture work to organize and change society.

NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

- **New demographic and census data** particularly inform the chapters on ethnicity (5), religion (6), gender (9), age (11), fitness (12), class (13), residence (14), language (15), and family (16).
- **Flexibility** is incorporated so that professors can, depending on their individual teaching needs and approaches, assign Chapters 5-17 in any order.
- **Four new Reflections** (Chapters 6, 7, 9, and 10) illustrate social and cultural processes through the experience of particular individuals or communities. All other Reflections have been revised to reflect current events, social processes, and intellectual debates.
On Being Different
Also Available from McGraw-Hill by Conrad Phillip Kottak

*Culture*, (2012) (with Lisa Gezon)

*Anthropology: Appreciating Human Diversity*, 14th ed. (2011)


Fourth Edition

On Being Different

Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream

Conrad Phillip Kottak
University of Michigan–Ann Arbor

Kathryn A. Kozaitis
Georgia State University
To our students, who teach us about the struggles and privileges of being citizens of the world and architects of our multicultural society.
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This book is written for use in (1) courses that examine cultural diversity, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication; (2) classes that meet a core social science requirement, including human geography and political science; (3) academic programs in the helping professions, including public health, social work, and education; and (4) a general college course designed to satisfy the diversity requirement.

The data, analysis, and interpretations offered here draw on varied sources and academic fields, including history, anthropology, demography, education, history, linguistics, political science, public health, psychology, social work, and sociology. Of course, because both authors are cultural anthropologists, our discipline inevitably influences our analysis of North American societies and cultures. Because of its biocultural perspective on human differences and similarities, anthropology adds particular value in discussions of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, health, and age. Instructors of courses on cultural diversity, including the “diversity requirement” (sometimes called a race and ethnicity course), will benefit from our cross-cultural and interdisciplinary treatment of cultural diversity, identity politics, human rights movements, and multiculturalism.

Today, a mainstream formal education increasingly is a multicultural education. The systematic study of humanity through a liberal arts curriculum requires attention to histories, traditions, experiences, and symbols that represent different peoples, experiences, and points of view. More and more colleges and universities offer courses on human diversity and multiculturalism, as electives or as graduation requirements. This book responds to a need to understand and live resourcefully in our multicultural society. We emphasize the human capacities of agency and mobilization based on culture in responding to large-scale transformations.

**Outline and Organization**

*On Being Different* offers a broad and comprehensive analysis of the human condition, and a critical interpretation of mainstream North American structures, practices, and beliefs. As a thematic text it illuminates our understanding of human variation and the role of multiculturalism in the social organization of contemporary Western societies, including our own. A holistic, empirical, comparative, and interdisciplinary perspective informs our discussion of diversity and multiculturalism, and supports our argument for human unity and social equity.
The fourth edition of *On Being Different* surveys aspects of diversity and multiculturalism in an order we find logical, starting with culture and proceeding through ethnicity, religion, “race,” gender, sexual orientation, age, health, class, residence, language, and family. Our book’s introduction and conclusion respectively set and sum up the major themes of unity and diversity in multicultural North America. Our contextual and theoretical frameworks are laid out most systematically in Chapters 3 (“Globalization and Identity”) and 4 (“The Multicultural Society”), and again in Chapter 17 (“Conclusion”), but we apply our perspective to specific topics and cases throughout the other chapters.

**What’s New in the Fourth Edition**

Every chapter in this edition, which represents a major revision, has been thoroughly updated with demographic, empirical, and theoretical material. We have done substantial rewriting, with additions balanced by cuts. New demographic and census data particularly inform the chapters on ethnicity (5), religion (6), gender (9), age (11), fitness (12), class (13), residence (14), language (15), and family (16). The only organizational change involving chapter order has been to place the chapter on biology and race (7) before the chapter (8) on race’s social construction. Depending on their individual teaching needs and approaches, professors can feel free to assign chapters (except, probably, the first four) out of order.

There are four new Reflections, for Chapters 6, 7, 9, and 10. These illustrate social and cultural processes through the experience of particular individuals or communities. All other Reflections have been revised to reflect current events, social processes, and intellectual debates.

Our cases and examples, whether new or previously included, illustrate human problems and responses rooted in global–local relations and sociocultural inequities. Insights on human diversity, multicultural awareness, and cultural competency will be of interest not only to students and professors but also to professionals in the fields of health, education, business, forensics, social work, cultural resource management, museum studies, and the environment.

We are pleased to have access to an increasing amount of recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) provides annually updated information on the nation’s population. It offers a timely supplement to the decennial census, and it has helped us keep this book up-to-date.

Here is a chapter-by-chapter list of the major changes:

- Chapters 1 (“Introduction”) and 2 (“Culture”) have been thoroughly revised and updated.
- Chapter 3 (“Globalization and Identity”) contains new or updated information on Advanced Information Technology (AIT), antiglobalization action, foreign ownership of “American” brands, and Internet censorship.
- Chapter 4 (“The Multicultural Society”) has been thoroughly revised, with a major new section on critical multiculturalism.
- Chapter 5 (“Ethnicity”) contains an updated and expanded discussion of ethnic diversity in African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American nations.
There also is new and updated information on poverty among American ethnic groups.

- Chapter 6 (“Religion”) contains a new Reflection on the hijab and Muslim identity, new information on the growth and decline of membership in various religious groups in the United States between 1990 and 2008, and a new comparison of identities and loyalties based on fandom compared with religion.
- Chapter 7 (“Race: Its Biological Dimensions”) has a new Reflection on flying while Muslim and a completely revised section on skin color.
- Chapter 8 (“Race: Its Social Construction”) has been updated, and there is a new discussion of how national systems of racial classification are changing in the context of international identity politics and rights movements.
- Chapter 9 (“Gender”) features a refined focus on gender in North America; a new Reflection on sex-gender roles, work, and marriage; a major new section titled “Beyond Male and Female” on gender, biology, and culture; a new section on “Work and Happiness” that compares extradomestic labor and measures of happiness in various countries; and an updated discussion of the feminization of poverty.
- Chapter 10 (“Sexual Orientation”) contains a new Reflection on “Coming Out,” a new section on bisexuality, a new section titled “Legal Protection of LGBT,” and a new section titled “Gay Culture.”
- Chapter 11 (“Age and Cohort”) includes an updated and expanded discussion of aging in relation to gender, political activity, wealth, and work; a major new section titled “The Gray and the Brown” that describes the growing polarization in the United States between older white people and younger minorities; and a new section on the Tea Party movement.
- Chapter 12 (“Bodies, Fitness, and Health”) contains a thoroughly updated discussion of people with disabilities, including the ADA and employment rates; updated and revised sections on gender and health and mental health; and an expanded discussion and tabulation of mental disorders in America.
- Chapter 13 (“Class”) has been thoroughly updated throughout, with an expanded discussion of rising poverty rates, including by ethnic group, age, and gender.
- Chapter 14 (“Places and Spaces”) has been reorganized and updated throughout. There is a major new section titled “Lifestyles and Small Towns,” a new discussion of age variation in cities and by region, and an updated discussion of the income gap by state.
- Chapter 15 (“Linguistic Diversity”) contains a new section on languages spoken at home in the United States.
- Chapter 16 (“Families”) contains a new section on “Family and Work” and expanded discussion, with new cases, of cross-cultural variation in family organization. There is a revised and updated discussion of media, work, and family based on ethnographic research in the United States, and new information has been included on costs of raising an American child. Finally, all figures have been updated.
- Chapter 17 (“Conclusion”) has been revised thoroughly with new information on globalization in relation to local and regional cultural forces.
This edition incorporates suggestions by reviewers, both users and nonusers, of the first three editions of *On Being Different*. The result, we hope, is a sound, well-organized, interesting discussion and an informed analysis of diversity and multiculturalism.

Here are some of the distinguishing pedagogical features of this book:

**Writing Style:** Our students have taught us that material that is inaccessible, no matter how profound, is useless. They object even more to writing that excludes them deliberately, especially when the content is important and relevant to their intellectual development. We want the insights we offer in this book to be shared with as many people as possible. Our goal is to examine topics that are critical, difficult, and controversial in a style that is clear, appealing, and enlightening. We hope to engage our readers in informed conversations, productive cross-cultural communications, and affirming intercultural relations.

**Chapter Opening Reflections:** We want *On Being Different* to inspire critical thinking. Each chapter starts with a “Reflection” intended to give students a chance to think about matters relevant to their own lives, their multicultural society, and today’s complex world. Some Reflections are about current events or debates. Others are more personal accounts, drawn from lived experience, that add feelings to our social science. Many of our Reflections illustrate a point with examples from our own ethnographic research. Others refer to the findings of other social scientists. Students also will recognize vignettes familiar from their own enculturation and participation in society.

**Key Terms and Glossary:** Important terms that are boldfaced in each chapter are listed as key terms at the end of that chapter. All key terms are defined in the Glossary at the end of the book. These terms expose readers to an interdisciplinary examination of diversity and multiculturalism.

**Bibliography:** A bibliography of all cited references also is included. The subject matter of human diversity and multiculturalism is vast. This list of references is intended to guide students toward more specialized knowledge in particular topics or disciplines.

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**Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to many colleagues at McGraw-Hill. We’re delighted to work once again with Kate Scheinman, freelance developmental editor. We thank Kate for compiling, summarizing, and analyzing reviews of previous editions, to guide us in preparing this new one. We very much appreciate Kate’s suggestions and guidance as well as her help choosing photos for the fourth edition.

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We’ve been pleased by the enthusiasm expressed in our reviewers’ comments, especially by those who have used *On Being Different* in their courses. We also thank those faculty and students who have taken the time to e-mail us with questions or comments about this book.

Anyone—student or instructor—with access to e-mail can reach us at the following addresses: ckottak@umich.edu. and kozaitis@gsu.edu. Our families have offered understanding, support, and inspiration during the preparation of all four editions of *On Being Different*. Our children and grandchildren have kept us on our toes as we have ventured to write about growing up American.

We dedicate this book to our students, who teach us about the struggles and privileges of being citizens of the world and architects of our multicultural society.

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CONRAD PHILLIP KOTTKAK, who received his A.B. and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University, is the Julian H. Steward Collegiate Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, where he has taught since 1968. He served as Anthropology Department chair from 1996 to 2006. In 1991 he was honored for his teaching by the university and the state of Michigan. In 1999 the American Anthropological Association awarded Professor Kottak its Award for Excellence in the Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology. In 2005 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2008 to the National Academy of Sciences. Professor Kottak has done ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, Madagascar, and the United States. His general interests are in the processes by which local cultures are incorporated— and resist incorporation— into larger systems. This interest links his earlier work on ecology and state formation in Africa and Madagascar to his more recent research on globalization, national and international culture, and the mass media.


Conrad Kottak’s articles have appeared in academic journals, including *American Anthropologist, Journal of Anthropological Research, American Ethnologist, Ethnology, Human Organization*, and *Luso-Brazilian Review*. He also has written for more popular journals, including *Transaction/SOCIETY, Natural History, Psychology Today*, and *General Anthropology*.

In recent research projects, Kottak and his colleagues have investigated the emergence of ecological awareness in Brazil, the social context of deforestation and biodiversity conservation in Madagascar, and popular participation in economic development planning in northeastern Brazil. Professor Kottak has been active in the University of Michigan’s Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life, supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. In that capacity, for a research project titled “Media, Family, and Work in a Middle-Class Midwestern Town,” Kottak and his colleague Lara Descartes have investigated how middle-class families draw on various media in planning, managing, and evaluating their choices and solutions with respect to the competing demands of work and family. That research is the basis of their recent book *Media and Middle Class Moms: Images and Realities of Work and Family* (Descartes and Kottak 2009, Routledge/Taylor and Francis).

Conrad Kottak appreciates comments about his books from professors and students. He can be reached by e-mail at ckottak@umich.edu.

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Dr. Kozaitis investigates global-local articulations, particularly the processes by which economically, politically, and socially subordinated groups use culture to construct security, community, identity, and meaning. She has conducted ethnographic research on transnational identity and social integration among Albanian immigrants in Thessaloniki, Greece (2009); race, ethnicity, and identity construction among the Roma (Gypsies) in Athens, Greece (1987–1989); ethnicity, class, gender, and age among Greek immigrants in Chicago, IL (1983–1985); and employment, health, and educational disparities and identity politics among marginalized communities in North America (since 1977). In the period 1995–2008 Kozaitis conducted applied
anthropological research on NSF-funded initiatives designed to improve science and math education through cultural transformations of Atlanta’s underfunded public schools. In 2011, Dr. Kozaitis received a Fulbright Research Award to conduct ethnographic research in Thessaloniki. She works with self-identified native Greeks and postsocialist immigrants from Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Pakistan, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia who have settled in Thessaloniki and its surrounding coastal towns. She examines cultural constructions and economic accommodations by Greek hosts of transnational foreigners whom they view as both an asset in the economic development of Greece, and a threat to its imagined and desired cultural homogeneity. Her work includes analysis of immigration policies, and economic integration and citizenship rights among new immigrants and their descendants who now participate in mainstream Greek society and culture.

Dr. Kozaitis’ research and teaching repertoire includes cultural anthropology, urban anthropology, anthropological theory and praxis, social movements, qualitative research methods, cultures of Europe, and applied anthropology. She may be reached by e-mail at kozaitis@gsu.edu.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

REFLECTIONS: UNITY AND DIVERSITY, ILLUSTRATED BY STAR TREK, AN AMERICAN MYTH

❖ American Culture and Cultures ❖ Studying Diversity and Multiculturalism

UNITY AND DIVERSITY, ILLUSTRATED BY STAR TREK, AN AMERICAN MYTH

Expressions of American popular culture that have remained prominent for several generations include Superman, Batman, and Disney creations, including movies and popular theme parks. The year 2006 marked the 40th anniversary of the debut on American television of another enduring popular creation—the original “Star Trek.” Over the years that series has spawned a series of offshoots, still regularly visible on cable and satellite TV, as well as in the world of DVDs, Trekkie conventions, fanzines, and new movies.

“Star Trek,” a familiar, powerful, and enduring force in American popular culture, can be used to illustrate the idea that popular media content often is derived from prominent values expressed in many other domains of culture. Americans first encountered the Starship Enterprise on NBC in 1966. The TV series Star Trek was shown in prime time for just three seasons. However, the series continues to thrive in reruns, in books, on DVDs, in theatrical films, and in spinoff series. Revived as a regular weekly series with an entirely new cast in 1987, Star Trek: The Next Generation soon became the third most popular syndicated program in the United States (after Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy—which themselves are fixtures in American popular culture). More recent Star Trek spinoffs include Deep Space Nine, Star Trek: Voyager, Enterprise, and a 2009 hit movie.

What does the enduring appeal of Star Trek tell us about American culture? We suggest that the answer is this: Star Trek is a transformation of a fundamental American origin myth about unity and diversity. The same myth shows up in the image and celebration of Thanksgiving, a distinctively American holiday. Thanksgiving sets the myth in the past, and Star Trek sets it in the future.

Encountering the word myth, which comes from the Greek for “what they say,” most people probably think of stories about Greek or Roman gods and heroes. However, all societies have myths. Their central characters need not be unreal, superhuman, or physically immortal (although Superman, for one, is all of these). Sometimes
such stories are rooted in actual historical events. The popular notion that a myth is untrue—indeed, that its untruth is its defining characteristic—not only is naive but shows misunderstanding of its very nature. Its scientific truth or otherwise is irrelevant. A myth is a statement about society, and our place in it and in the surrounding universe (Middleton 1967, p. x). Myths are hallowed stories that express fundamental values. They are widely and recurrently told among, and have special meaning to, people who grow up in a particular culture. Myths may be set in the past, present, or future, or in fantasyland. Whether set in real time or fictional time, myths always are at least partly fictionalized.

The myths of contemporary America come from varied sources. Examples include such popular-culture fantasies as the Star Wars movies, Harry Potter, and comics and films about superheroes. The Wizard of Oz and Star Trek provide other examples. Our myths also include real people, particularly national ancestors, whose lives have been reinterpreted and endowed with special meaning over the generations. The media, schools, churches, communities, and parents teach the national origin myths to American children. The story of Thanksgiving, for example, continues to be important. It recounts the origin of a national holiday celebrated by Protestants, Catholics, Jews, members of other religious congregations, and even agnostics and atheists.

Again and again Americans have witnessed idealized retellings of that epochal early harvest. We have heard how Indians taught the Pilgrims to farm in the New World. Grateful Pilgrims then invited the Native Americans to share their first
Thanksgiving. Native American and European labor, techniques, and customs thus blended in that initial biethnic celebration. Annually reenacting the origin myth, our schools commemorate the first Thanksgiving as children dress up as Pilgrims, Native Americans, and pumpkins.

Our culture constantly reinterprets the origin, nature, and meaning of national holidays. The collective consciousness of contemporary Americans includes media-saturated memories of the first Thanksgiving and the first Christmas. Our mass culture has instilled widely shared images of a Peanuts-peopled Pilgrim–Indian “love-in.” We also conjure up a fictionalized Nativity with Mary, Joseph, Jesus, manger animals, shepherds, three kings of Orient, a little drummer boy, and, in some versions, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Note that the interpretation of the Nativity that American culture perpetuates is yet another variation on the same dominant myth. We remember the Nativity as a Thanksgiving involving interethnic contacts (e.g., the three kings) and gift giving. It is set in Bethlehem rather than Massachusetts.

We impose our present on the past as we reinterpret quasi-historic and actual events, such as the relationship between Captain Smith and Pocahontas. Our cultural present and past profoundly influence our science-fiction and fantasy creations. Star Trek places in the future what the Thanksgiving story locates in the past—the myth of the assimilationist, incorporating, melting-pot society. The myth says that America is distinctive not just because it is assimilationist but because the nation is founded on unity in diversity. (America’s very origin is unity in diversity. The motto E pluribus unum—“Out of many, one”—is carried by the eagle on the Great Seal of the United States. We call ourselves “the United States.”) Both Thanksgiving and Star Trek illustrate the credo that unity through diversity is essential for survival, whether of a harsh winter or of the perils of outer space. Diversity is as important as—in fact it promotes—unity in the form of teamwork. Americans work, cope, and survive by sharing the fruits of specialization.

Star Trek proclaims that the sacred principles that validate American society, because they lie at its foundation, will endure across the generations, even the centuries. The original Starship Enterprise crew was a melting pot. Captain James Tiberius Kirk was emblematic of real history. His clearest historical prototype was Captain James Cook, whose ship the Endeavor also sought out new life and civilizations. Kirk’s infrequently mentioned middle name, from the Roman general and eventual emperor, linked the captain to the earth’s imperial history. Kirk was also symbolic of the original Anglo-American. He ran the Enterprise (America is founded on free enterprise), just as laws, values, and institutions derived from England continue to run the United States.

McCoy’s Irish (or at least Gaelic) name represented the next wave, the established immigrant. Sulu was the successfully assimilated Asian American. The African-American female character Uhura, whose name means “freedom,” confirmed that blacks would become full partners with all other Americans. Yet Uhura was the only major female character in the original crew. Female work outside the home was much less characteristic of American society in 1966 than it is today.

One of the constant messages of Star Trek is that strangers, even enemies, can become friends. Less obviously, this message is about cultural imperialism, the
assumed irresistibility of American culture and institutions. Through Chekhov’s inclusion, who could doubt that Russian nationals would one day succumb to an expansive American culture? Spock, though from Vulcan, was half human, with many human qualities. We learned, therefore, that our assimilationist values eventually would rule not just the earth but extend to other planets as well. By The Next Generation, Klingon culture, even more alien than Vulcan culture, personified by Bridge Officer Worf, had joined the melting pot. Other aliens were added to later crews.

The Next Generation offered many analogues of the original characters. Several “partial people” served as single-character personifications of particular human qualities represented in more complex form by the original crew members. Kirk, Spock, and McCoy were all split into multiple characters. Captain Jean-Luc Picard possessed the intellectual and managerial attributes of James T. Kirk. With his English accent and Kirk-like French name, Picard, like Kirk, drew his legitimacy from symbolic association with historic western European empires. First Officer Riker (almost a Kirk anagram) took over from Kirk as the romantic man of action.

Spock, an alien (strange ears) who represented science, reason, and intellect, was split in two. One half was Worf, a Klingon bridge officer whose cranial protuberances were analogues of Spock’s ears. The other was Data, an android whose brain contained the sum of human wisdom. Two female characters, an empath and the ship’s doctor, were analogues of Dr. McCoy as the repository of healing, emotion, and feeling.
Mirroring a changing American culture, *The Next Generation* featured prominent characters who were black, female, and physically disabled. An African-American actor played the Klingon Mr. Worf. Another, LeVar Burton, became Geordi La Forge. Although blind, Geordi was not really visually impaired; he managed, through his visor, to see things other people could not. His mechanical vision expressed the American faith in technology. So did the android, Data. During its first year, *The Next Generation* had three prominent female characters. One was the ship’s doctor, a working professional with a teenage son. Another was an empath, the ultimate helping professional. The third was the ship’s security officer.

The United States had become, and by now is even more, specialized, differentiated, and professional than it was in the sixties. The greater role specificity and diversity of *The Next Generation* characters reflect this. Nevertheless, both series convey the central message of the “Star Trek” myth, a message that dominates the culture that created them: Americans have varied backgrounds. Individual qualities, talents, and specialties divide us. However, we make our living and survive as members of cohesive, efficient groups. We explore and advance as members of a crew, a team, an enterprise, or, most generally, a society. Our nation is founded on and endures through effective subordination of individual differences within a smoothly functioning multiethnic team. The team is American culture. It worked in the past. It works today. It will go on working across the generations. Orderly and progressive democracy based on mutual respect is best. Inevitably, American culture will triumph over all others—by convincing, attracting, and assimilating rather than conquering them. Unity in diversity guarantees human survival, and for this we should be thankful.

The Star Trek message about unity through diversity is an enduring one, as apparently is its fan base. The well-reviewed 2009 *Star Trek* movie prequel featuring young versions of Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Uhura, Sulu, and Chekhov was a big hit—the seventh most popular film of that year, grossing $257 million. Interestingly, five of the top seven films of 2009 (*Avatar, Transformers II, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Twilight: New Moon, and Star Trek*) were based in space or the supernatural. Issues of human/humanoid diversity are prominent in almost all these films. Think of *Avatar’s* Na’vi versus humans, Harry Potter’s wizards versus Muggles, *Twilight’s* vampires versus werewolves, and the diverse terrestrials and extraterrestrials of the *Star Trek* franchise.

Now apply these observations about American values involving unity and diversity to a more recent media creation. Some possibilities: the TV series *Glee*, the X-Men movies, MTV’s *The Real World*, or any one of several weekly medical, crime, or legal series.

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**American Culture and Cultures**

In this book, writing as social scientists, we have two goals: (1) to offer a comprehensive analysis of social and cultural trends of unity and diversity in contemporary North America, and (2) to employ a comparative, cross-cultural perspective to shed light on
aspects of human variation, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism in the United States and Canada. We examine many forms and aspects of sociocultural diversity, based on such factors as ethnicity, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, occupation, region, and differential physical and mental ability. This book extends work on American culture that Conrad Kottak has been doing since 1976. Kottak’s early work on the United States focused on American mass culture and popular culture (see Kottak 1982). His main focus then was on unifying themes, values, and behavior in American national culture—institutions and experiences that transcend particular regions and social divisions. Kathryn Kozaitis has studied cultural diversity in the United States, working directly with several minority groups, for about three decades. More recently, both authors have focused on the range of American identities and practices and on the role that culture plays in organizing and transforming North American society. Our interests in human diversity, multiculturalism, and culture as an organizing principle orient this book.

A 1992 Internal Review document of the University of Michigan American Culture Program gives a clear exposition of the multicultural model that informs this book. It recognizes “the multiplicity of American cultures.” It presents multiculturalism as a new approach to the central question in American studies: What does it mean to be an American? The document suggests a shift from the study of core myths and values, and people’s relationships to them as generalized Americans, to “recognizing that ‘America’ includes people of differing community, ethnic, and cultural histories, different points of view and degrees of empowerment.” Such a multicultural perspective encourages studies of the manifestations of American diversity that we examine in subsequent chapters.

The newer multicultural model and the older national approach to cultural forces in North America are not mutually exclusive. We still detect a series of nationally relevant institutions, norms, values, and expectations to which various culturally defined groups within the United States subscribe. Examples of national culture include formal education, fast food, high school proms, and Thanksgiving. The pressure for members of an ethnic group to observe “general American values” may come not only from the mass media and other agents of national culture but also from other ethnic groups. For instance, in interviews with various ethnic groups in Los Angeles following the riots of 1992, blacks complained about Koreans. In doing so, the African Americans invoked a general American value system that included friendliness, openness, mutual respect, community participation, and fair play. They saw their Korean neighbors as deficient in these traits. The Koreans countered by stressing yet another set of American national values, involving education, family unity, discipline, hard work, and achievement.

▶ Studying Diversity and Multiculturalism

The data, analyses, and interpretations offered in this book draw on varied sources and academic fields, including anthropology, demography, education, history, linguistics, political science, public health, psychology, social work, and sociology. Still, because both authors are cultural anthropologists (Kozaitis is also trained in social work and urban applied anthropology), it is inevitable that our particular backgrounds will influence our views about and analysis of American culture. As anthropologists we are accustomed to approaches that are holistic, comparative, and global.
Anthropology’s **holism** involves its study of the whole of the human condition—biological and cultural variation in time and space. This incorporates human biology, language, society, and culture, past and present, in all cultures, ancient and modern, simple and complex. In early anthropology, interests in the origins and diversity of Native Americans brought together the study of customs, social life, language, and physical traits. Now, along with other social scientists, anthropologists have turned their attention to contemporary North America and the range of diversity it encompasses.

Our goal is to describe contemporary societies and the cultural groups and identities that define them, to understand human similarities and differences, and to increase empathy for human groups seeking security and integrity. Transnational migration changes both the sending and receiving societies of migrants and refugees, who create new, hybrid cultures in their adopted homelands. People construct and maintain ethnic boundaries to distinguish themselves from others and to express their cultural integrity. We see diversity and multiculturalism as key components of North American society.

Both authors are researchers in the field of **cultural anthropology**—the study of cultural differences and similarities among widespread human groups. To become a cultural anthropologist, one normally does **ethnography**, or ethnographic research. This firsthand, field-based study of a particular society usually entails spending a year or more in the field, living with local people and learning about their customs. Traditional ethnographers studied small, nonliterate (without writing) populations and developed research methods appropriate to that context. “Ethnography is a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture—an experience labeled as the fieldwork method—and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 18). Kottak has done such field research in Brazil, the western hemisphere’s second most populous country (after the United States), and in Madagascar, a large island off the southeastern coast of Africa. More recently, he has studied issues of work and family in the American middle class. Kozaitis has conducted field research in Chicago, Detroit, and Atlanta on aging, race and ethnicity, and educational disparities among the urban poor. She did her major fieldwork with Gypsies (Roma) in Athens, Greece. She also has conducted 10 years of applied ethnographic research on public educational reform in grades K–16 in the state of Georgia. Presently she is studying cultural diversity, transnational coexistence, and citizenship among natives and postsocialist immigrants, migrants, and refugees in Thessaloniki, Greece, that country’s second largest city. In the chapters that follow, our own field research, along with accounts by many others, serve as a basis for our comparative statements about aspects of human diversity across space and time.

Ethnographers employ varied techniques, including participant observation, interviews, and focus groups, to discover and reveal the intimate details of local life. Anthropologists can transfer the personal, direct, observation-based techniques of ethnography to social groups and social networks in any setting. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, ethnography provides new perspectives on life in **complex societies** (large and populous societies with social stratification and central governments), such as the United States and Canada.

Besides ethnography, another research strategy—survey research—is indispensable in studying large, populous, and diverse nations. Survey researchers, including
those employed by the U.S. Census Bureau, gather statistical information about such variables as age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, income, and political party preference. These variables—attributes that vary among members of a sample or population—are known to influence beliefs and behavior, including political decisions. Gender, for example, is a useful predictor of political-party affiliation and voting behavior. More men than women claim to be Republicans, and men are more likely to vote for candidates of that party than women are. Besides gender, all nations include social contrasts reflecting age, profession, social class, and many other attributes.

Many more variables affect social identities, experiences, and activities in a modern nation than in the small communities and local settings in which anthropologists originally developed ethnography as a research strategy. Today, hundreds of factors influence our social behavior and attitudes. Such social predictors or social indicators include our religion; the region of the country in which we grew up; whether we grew up in a town, suburb, or inner city; and our parents’ professions, ethnic origins, and income levels. Because we must be able to detect, measure, and compare the influence of social indicators, many contemporary anthropological studies have a statistical foundation. For example, statistical data and analysis can support and strengthen an ethnographic account of the work–family balancing act so characteristic of contemporary North America.

In the 21st century, the overwhelming majority of the world’s population, along with a large percentage of the populations of the United States and Canada, will be descendants of the non-Western groups that anthropologists have studied for more than a century. By 2025, developing countries will account for 85 percent of the world’s population, compared with 77 percent in 1992 (Stevens 1992). The population of Canada is growing more rapidly than the populations of the United States or western Europe. More than half that growth is from immigration. Solutions to future North American social problems will depend increasingly on understanding and accommodating non-Western cultural backgrounds.

Understanding of cultural diversity and the implementation of culturally informed policies and programs are fundamental to a healthy multicultural society. Accordingly, colleges and universities increasingly teach and require courses on diversity and/or multiculturalism. Such courses can play as important a role in informing and preparing citizens of a multicultural society as does literacy in the arts, sciences, and letters. These courses, for which this book is intended, can serve as forums in which diverse American voices are represented, as they also draw on perspectives derived from the study of societies and cultures outside North America. Fundamental to this book’s approach is our belief that a comparative, cross-cultural view of human differences and similarities enhances our understanding of diversity and multiculturalism within contemporary North America.

**Key Terms**

- complex societies (7)
- cultural anthropology (7)
- ethnography (7)
- holism (7)
- variables (8)
CHAPTER 2

CULTURE

REFLECTIONS: IT'S A MATTER OF CULTURE

❖ Culture and Its Aspects
  Culture Is Learned
  Culture, Space, and Scale
  Culture Is Shared
  Culture Is Symbolic
  Culture and Nature
  Culture Is All-Encompassing
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  Culture and the Individual: Agency and Practice
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❖ There Are Levels of Culture
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❖ Mechanisms of Cultural Change

❖ The Uses of Culture

IT’S A MATTER OF CULTURE

We live in a time when human similarities and differences confront us on a daily basis. World travelers may conclude that people are pretty much the same all over the world, while students who return from studies abroad often remark on unique cultures and different kinds of people. Both observations are accurate.

Anthropologists refer to Culture with an uppercase C—as the innate human capacity to create and transmit traditions, beliefs, and symbols that govern behavior. People can be described as the same all over the world, in that all create and rely on subsistence, spirituality, speech, and law to live an organized life in groups, which is fundamental to human survival.

A distinctly human, biopsychological foundation generates Culture, from which an almost infinite variety of cultures (each is a culture with a lowercase c) emerges. Such cultures are organized ways of life, however fluid and dynamic. Cultural differences and similarities correlate with geography, the environment, history, economics, politics, and human agency. All cultures are equally legitimate systems of adaptation, production, reproduction, and meaning.

In this book we are concerned particularly with the role of humans in constructing and deconstructing cultural hierarchies. People have a tendency to (1) create
and rank cultures one above the other, and (2) distribute resources unequally among members of different strata. In doing so, people cultivate both cultural diversity and cultural inequality. Even when people recognize that cultures, although different, are equally effective ways of life, they tend to value cultures unequally, thus considering some cultures to be not only different from, but less than, others.

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, humans by definition are biological creatures, but our distinction within the animal kingdom is culture. The most important distinctions within humanity also are cultural. People construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct culture to adapt and survive. All humans have culture, and Americans are no exception.

Semester after semester, by the second week of class at least one “white” student exclaims, “I didn’t know I had a culture!” Many white Americans are surprised and pleased to learn that, among all the foreign and ethnic cultures that surround them, there is a culture they can claim as their own. To be “an American,” not only as a citizen, but as a bearer of American cultural attributes, is an identity that many embrace enthusiastically. Humans do not survive without culture, and white Americans, including those who don’t claim any special ancestral roots, are no exception.

As we observed in the previous chapter, American culture is built on unity and diversity—from many, one. Historically, the United States has been represented as a nation of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs)—people of northern European extraction, with mostly English, but also Scottish and Welsh, ancestry. This picture of American society never has been accurate. The boundaries of the United States always have included Native Americans (called First Nations in Canada), soon to be joined by Africans and Asians. Since its exploration by Europeans began, North America has included Spanish and French, as well as English, speakers. Today, migrants from many countries, along with the descendants of various immigrant groups, occupy North American soil. All contemporary Americans, to some extent, regardless of their national origin or ancestry (often mixed), participate in a common culture (patterned ways of behaving and thinking).

Cultural unity in American society is depicted in traditions, customs, and rituals, including Thanksgiving dinner and Valentine’s Day, graduation ceremonies and bridal showers, serial monogamy, and the Super Bowl. Americans, like members of any society, invent new traditions and values that reflect social transformations and local adaptations. Environmentalism is exemplified by recycling. Health concerns translate into safe-sex and fitness programs. Other prevalent patterns in American culture include peer influence, fictive kin ties (close relationships between unrelated persons that mimic biological kinship), and living among and with strangers. Because work is the key organizing condition of our social life, we spend most hours of our day with people we don’t love and, worse yet, often with people we don’t like! Millions of American children are reared in child care centers and by “blended families.” Retirement communities house adults who have become peripheral to the labor force and to the family. Support groups, through which Americans acquire comfort and a sense of belonging, have risen in association with numerous disorders, illnesses, and tragedies. Psychotherapists and other helping professionals have become the best friends money can buy. What other examples can you think of that support the argument that Americans in fact are, and have, a culture?
The multicultural movement has brought a new consciousness to historically marginalized North Americans, who now see culture as an equal opportunity good—something all people possess. In this view, an Italian festival in New York’s Little Italy is as much a signifier of culture as is *Carmen* at the opera house. Going to a concert by Lady Gaga is as much a cultural experience as is attending Sartre’s play *No Exit*. A Gay Pride celebration in Atlanta may rival Chicago’s St. Patrick’s Day parade in media attention. Literature on women’s culture occupies its own wall in bookstores. People with disabilities, as a social category, are distinguished by their abilities. To be sure, ranking of cultures persists. However, the realization that all people, including nonethnic Americans, have culture has never been stronger.

Integral to contemporary American mass culture is human diversity. To be mainstream today increasingly means to be multicultural—exposed to and tolerant of, if not active in, myriad customs, traditions, and rituals. Appropriation by Americans of symbols, styles, and artifacts external to their national origins is common. Our public and private lives are permeated by forces and influences that may have little to do with our ancestral cultures, and everything to do with a common experience at a particular moment in history.

People’s self-conscious, collective expression of a common culture is readily and invariably depicted in symbols. Visual markers of culture serve to construct a distinct identity, and to erect and maintain boundaries of exclusion. Artifacts, words, colors, and accessories, which people imbue with meaning and share with others, validate and strengthen a sense of peoplehood.

As you read the rest of this book, you will understand the powerful role that culture, an adaptive capacity of all humans, plays in biological survival, social reproduction, and political integration. Nationalism has proliferated in the world, as has multiculturalism—in the form of culturally defined affinity groups—in the United States and Canada. Any self-conscious collectivity, by mobilizing, uniting, and fighting for their human rights, expresses their humanity and their agency in a society that prides itself on being “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

> Culture and Its Aspects

Human beings share society (organized life in groups) with other animals. Culture, however, is distinctly human. Traditionally, anthropologists have used the term *culture* to refer to a way of life—traditions and customs—transmitted through learning, which play a vital role in molding the beliefs and behavior of the people exposed to them. Children learn these traditions by growing up in a society or nation, through a process called *enculturation*. Cultures include customs and opinions, developed over the generations, about proper and improper behavior. Cultural traditions answer such questions as: How do we do things? How do we make sense of the world? What is right and what is wrong? A culture tends to produce consistencies in behavior and thought among people who share that culture.

A critical feature of culture is its transmission through learning. For hundreds of thousands of years, humans have had at least some of the biological capacities on
which culture depends. These abilities are to learn, to think symbolically, to use lan-
guage, and to use tools and other cultural means of organizing their lives and adapting
to their environments.

The concept of culture long has been basic to *anthropology* (the study of human
biological and cultural diversity in time and space). More than a century ago, in his
classic book *Primitive Culture*, the British anthropologist Edward Tylor gave a defi-
nition of culture that still is quoted more widely than any other: “Culture . . . is that
complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any
other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor
1871/1958, p. 1). Tylor’s definition points to behavior and beliefs that humans obtain
not through biological heredity but by learning a specific cultural tradition. Again
enculturation is the process by which a child learns his or her culture.

**Culture Is Learned**

Each of us grows up in the presence of a set of rules and expectations that have been
both transmitted and transformed across the generations. The ease with which chil-
dren absorb any cultural tradition reflects the unique human capacity to learn. Cul-
tural traditions, or more simply, cultures, are transmitted through learning and lan-
guage. Each infant begins immediately, through observation and interaction with
others, to learn a cultural tradition. Sometimes culture is taught directly, as when par-

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Muslim men and boys worship in a mosque in Brunei, located in the northwest of the island of Borneo. What aspects of culture are illustrated?
ents tell kids, “Say thank you” or “Don’t talk to strangers.” Culture also is learned through observation; children pay attention to what goes on around them, including mass media messages. Children may change their behavior because other people tell them to do so. They attempt to please, imitate, and emulate. They also learn from experience—by seeing examples of what their culture considers right and wrong and of what happens to people who violate norms.

Culture also is absorbed unconsciously. Consider how we internalize norms about how far apart people should stand when they talk. No one ever instructs us to maintain a specific distance when we speak to someone. Instead people learn their culture’s idea of proper “social spacing” through a gradual process of observation, experience, and conscious and unconscious behavior modification. No one tells Latin Americans to stand closer together than North Americans do, but they learn to do so anyway as part of their cultural tradition.

Culture, Space, and Scale

Anthropologists used to conceptualize the world’s cultures as more or less distinct, unique, and separate in time and space. Today, we recognize the ongoing flows and linkages of people, technology, images, and information. The study of such flows and linkages is now part of the anthropological analysis. Reflecting today’s world—in which people, images, and information move about as never before—fieldwork must be more flexible and is done on a larger scale than previously. Early in the 20th century, the great ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski could focus on the culture of the Trobriand Islands and spend most of his field time in a particular community. Nowadays we cannot afford to ignore, as Malinowski did, the “outsiders” who increasingly impinge on the places we study (e.g., migrants, refugees, terrorists, warriors, tourists, developers). Integral to our analyses now are the external organizations and forces (e.g., governments, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, affinity groups) laying claim to land, people, rights, and resources throughout the world. Also important is increased recognition of power differentials and how they affect cultures, and of the importance of diversity within culture and societies.

In two volumes of essays edited by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997a, 1997b), several anthropologists describe problems in trying to locate cultures in bounded spaces. John Durham Peters (1997), for example, notes that, particularly because of the mass media, contemporary people simultaneously experience the local and the global. He describes them as culturally “bifocal”—both “near-sighted” (seeing local events) and “far-sighted” (seeing images from far away). Given their bifocality, their interpretations of the local are always influenced by information from outside. Thus, their attitude about a clear blue sky at home is tinged by their knowledge, through weather reports, that a hurricane may be approaching. The national news may not at all fit opinions voiced in local conversations, but national opinions find their way into local discourse.

The mass media, which anthropologists increasingly study, are oddities in terms of culture and space. Whose image and opinions are these? What culture or community do they represent? They certainly aren’t local. Media images and messages flow
electronically. TV brings them right to you. The Internet lets you discover new cultural possibilities at the click of a mouse. The Internet takes you to virtual places, but in truth the electronic mass media are placeless phenomena that are transnational in scope and play a role in forming and maintaining cultural identities.

Anthropologists increasingly study people in motion. Examples include people living on or near national borders, nomads, seasonal migrants, homeless and displaced people, immigrants, and refugees. Anthropological research today may take us traveling along with the people we study, as they move from village to city, cross the border, or travel internationally on business. As fieldwork changes, with less and less of a spatially set field, what can we take from traditional ethnography? Gupta and Ferguson correctly cite the “characteristically anthropological emphasis on daily routine and lived experience” (1997a, p. 5). The treatment of communities as discrete entities may be a thing of the past. However, “anthropology’s traditional attention to the close observation of particular lives in particular places” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, p. 25) has an enduring importance. The method of close observation helps to distinguish cultural anthropology from sociology, which relies more on the research method known as survey research, in which people typically are sampled, polled, or interviewed, rather than watched.

**Culture Is Shared**

Culture is transmitted and transformed across the generations—not only within communities, societies, and nations, but also across national boundaries. The individual members of any culture share memories, goals, objectives, beliefs, values, expectations, and ways of thinking and acting. Enculturation provides people with common experiences and knowledge.

Adults become agents in the enculturation of their children, just as their parents were for them. Culture constantly changes, but certain beliefs, values, and child-rearing practices persist. Consider a simple American example of enduring shared enculturation. As children, when we didn’t finish a meal, our parents reminded us of starving children in some foreign country. A generation earlier, our grandparents probably said something similar to our parents’ pronouncement. The specific country changes (China, India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Somalia). Still, American enculturators go on suggesting that by eating all our brussels sprouts, broccoli, or spinach we can justify our own good fortune, compared to a hungry foreign child.

Despite the American value of individualism—including the belief that people should make up their own mind and have a right to their opinion—little of what we think is original or unique. Because of enculturation, we share our opinions and beliefs with many other people. Illustrating the power of a shared cultural background, we are most likely to feel comfortable with people from our own culture. **Culture shock** refers to disturbed feelings that arise when one comes into contact with an unfamiliar culture, either in North America or abroad. It is a feeling of alienation, of being without some of the most ordinary and basic cues of one’s culture of origin. The feeling usually passes if one stays in the new culture long enough.
Culture Is Symbolic

Cultural learning is based on the unique human capacity to use symbols (signs that have no necessary or natural connection to the things they stand for). During enculturation, people gradually internalize a system of meanings and symbols that are part of their culture. Symbolic thought is crucial to humans and to culture. The anthropologist Leslie White saw culture as dependent upon symboling. For White, culture originated when our ancestors acquired the ability to use symbols “freely and arbitrarily to originate and bestow meaning upon a thing or event, and, correspondingly, . . . to grasp and appreciate such meaning” (White 1959, p. 3).

A symbol is something verbal or nonverbal, in a language or culture, that comes to stand for something else. There is no obvious, natural, or necessary connection between the symbol and that which it symbolizes. A pet that barks is no more naturally a dog than a chien, Hund, or mbwa, to use the words in French, German, and Swahili for the animal we call “dog.” Language, which makes symbolic thought possible, is a distinctive possession of human beings.

Symbols may also be nonverbal. Flags can stand for countries; and arches, for hamburger chains. Holy water is an important symbol for Roman Catholics. As is true of all symbols, the link between the symbol (water) and what is symbolized (holiness) is arbitrary. In itself water is not holier than milk, blood, or other natural liquids. Nor does holy water differ chemically from ordinary water. Holy water is a symbol within Roman Catholicism, which is an international cultural system. A natural thing has come to have a special meaning for Catholics. People who are enculturated in Catholicism (raised as Catholics) share common beliefs passed on through learning across the generations.

All human societies use symbols to create and maintain culture. The animals that are most closely related to us—chimpanzees and gorillas—have rudimentary precultural abilities. But no other animal has elaborated cultural abilities—to learn, to communicate, and to store, process, and use information—to the extent that humans have.

Culture and Nature

Culture takes the natural biological urges we share with other animals (e.g., hunger, thirst, sex) and teaches us to express them in particular ways. People have to eat, but culture teaches us what, when, and how. In many cultures people have their main meal around noon, but most North Americans prefer a large dinner. English people eat fish for breakfast, but North Americans prefer hotcakes and cold cereals. Brazilians put hot milk into strong coffee, whereas North Americans pour cold milk into a weaker brew. Midwesterners dine at 5 or 6 P.M., Spaniards at 10 P.M.

Cultural habits, perceptions, and inventions mold “human nature” in many directions. All people have to eliminate wastes from their bodies, but some cultures teach people to defecate standing, while others tell them to do it sitting down. A generation ago, in Paris and other French cities, it was customary for men to urinate almost publicly, and seemingly without embarrassment, in barely shielded outdoor pissoirs. Our “bathroom” habits, including waste elimination, bathing, and dental care, are parts of cultural traditions that have converted natural acts into cultural customs.
Our culture—and cultural changes—affect the ways in which we perceive nature, human nature, and the “natural.” Through science, invention, and discovery, cultural advances have overcome many natural limitations. We prevent and cure diseases like polio and smallpox, which felled our ancestors. We use Viagra to restore or enhance sexual potency. Through cloning, scientists have altered the way we think about biological identity and the meaning of life itself. Culture, of course, has not freed us from natural threats. Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and other natural forces regularly challenge our wishes to modify the environment through building, development, and expansion. Can you think of other ways in which nature strikes back at people and their products?

**Culture Is All-Encompassing**

All people have culture, and culture is all-encompassing. Sometimes we hear someone described as “a cultured person,” but all humans have culture in the anthropological sense. Culture includes much more than elite education, taste, refinement, sophistication, and appreciation of the fine arts. All people are cultured, not only artists and college graduates. The most significant cultural forces are those that affect us every day of our lives, especially those that influence children during enculturation. Culture encompasses experience that is sometimes regarded as trivial, such as exposure to popular culture. To understand contemporary North American culture, we must consider the importance of television, fast food, and sports. A rock star can be as significant as a symphony conductor, or more; a comic book, as relevant as a Pulitzer Prize–winning play.

**Culture Is Integrated**

Cultures are not haphazard collections of customs and beliefs but integrated, patterned systems. A culture trait is an individual item in a culture, such as a particular belief, tool, or practice. A culture pattern is a coherent set of interrelated traits. Many customs, institutions, and values form patterns. That is, they are connected and interrelated, so that if one changes, the others also change. During the 1950s, for example, the pattern was for most American women to have domestic careers as homemakers and mothers. Now it is assumed that women will get jobs outside the home. Related attitudes toward marriage, family, and children have also changed. The new pattern includes a later age at marriage, alternative child care systems, and more frequent divorce.

Cultures are integrated by key economic activities and social patterns. They may be integrated as well by enduring themes, values, and attitudes. Cultures train their individual members to share certain personality traits. A set of core values (key, basic, or central values) may integrate each culture and help distinguish it from others. For instance, the work ethic, individualism, achievement, and self-reliance are core values that have integrated American culture for generations. Different sets of values are found as patterns in other cultures.

**Culture and the Individual: Agency and Practice**

Generations of social scientists have theorized about the relationship between the “system,” on the one hand, and the “person” or “individual,” on the other. The “system”
can refer to various concepts, including culture, society, social relations, or social structure. Individual human beings always make up, or constitute, the system. But, living within that system, humans also are constrained (to some extent, at least) by its rules, and by the actions of other individuals. Cultural rules provide guidance about what to do and how to do it, but people don’t always do what the rules say should be done. People use their culture actively and creatively, rather than blindly following its dictates. Humans aren’t passive beings who are doomed to follow their cultural traditions like programmed robots. Instead, people learn, interpret, and manipulate the same rule in different ways—or they emphasize different rules that better suit their interests. Culture is contested: Different groups in society struggle with one another over whose ideas, values, goals, and beliefs will prevail. Even common symbols may have radically different meanings to different individuals and groups in the same culture. Golden arches may cause one person to salivate while another plots a vegetarian protest. The same flag may be waved to support or oppose a given war.

Even when they agree about what should and shouldn’t be done, people don’t always do as their culture directs or as other people expect. Many rules are violated, some very often (e.g., automobile speed limits). Some anthropologists find it useful to distinguish between ideal and real culture. The ideal culture consists of what people say they should do and what they say they do. Real culture refers to their actual observed behavior.

Culture is both public and individual, both in the world and in people’s minds. Social scientists are interested not only in public and collective behavior but also in how individuals think, feel, and act. The individual and culture are linked because human social life is a process in which individuals internalize the meanings of public (i.e., cultural) messages. Then, alone and in groups, people influence culture by converting their private (and often divergent) understandings into public expressions (D’Andrade 1984).

Conventionally culture has been seen as social glue transmitted across the generations, binding people through their common past, rather than as something being continually created and reworked in the present. The tendency to view culture as an entity rather than as a process is changing. Contemporary anthropologists now emphasize how day-to-day action, practice, or resistance can make and remake culture (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). Agency refers to the actions that individuals take, both alone and in groups, in forming and transforming cultural identities.

The approach to culture known as practice theory (Ortner 1984) recognizes that individuals within a society or culture have diverse motives and intentions and different degrees of power and influence. Such contrasts may be associated with gender, age, ethnicity, class, and other social variables. Practice theory focuses on how varied individuals and groups—through their ordinary and extraordinary actions and practices—manage to influence, create, and transform the world they live in. Practice theory appropriately recognizes a reciprocal relation between culture (the system—see above) and its components, such as individuals. The system shapes how individuals experience and respond to external events, but individuals also play an active role in how society functions and changes. Practice theory recognizes both constraints on individuals and groups and the flexibility and changeability of cultures and social systems.
Culture Is Instrumental, Adaptive, and Maladaptive

Culture is the main reason for human adaptability and success. Other animals rely on biological means of adaptation (such as fur or blubber, which are adaptations to cold). Humans also adapt biologically—for example, by shivering when we get cold or sweating when we get hot. But in addition to biological responses, people also have cultural ways of adapting. To cope with environmental stresses we habitually use technology, or tools. We hunt cold-adapted animals and use their fur coats as our own. We turn the thermostat up in the winter and down in the summer. Or we plan action to increase our comfort. We have a cold drink, jump in a pool, or travel to someplace cooler in the summer or warmer in the winter. People use culture instrumentally, that is, to fulfill their basic biological needs for food, drink, shelter, comfort, and reproduction.

People also use culture to fulfill psychological and emotional needs, such as friendship, companionship, approval, and being desired sexually. People seek informal support—help from people who care about them—as well as formal support from associations and institutions. To these ends, individuals cultivate ties with others on the basis of common experiences, political interests, aesthetic sensibilities, or visceral attraction.

On one level, cultural traits (e.g., air conditioning) may be called adaptive if they help individuals cope with environmental stresses. But, on a different level, such traits can also be maladaptive. That is, they may threaten a group’s continued existence. Thus chlorofluorocarbons from air conditioners deplete the ozone layer and, by doing so, can harm humans and other life. Many modern cultural patterns may be maladaptive in the long run. Some examples of maladaptive aspects of culture are policies that encourage overpopulation, poor food-distribution systems, overconsumption, and industrial pollution of the environment.

There Are Levels of Culture

Cultures exist within and beyond national boundaries. We may distinguish between different levels of culture: international, national, and subcultural. International culture applies to culturally defined groups that extend across national boundaries. Cultural traits and patterns spread through diffusion, migration, colonization, and the expansion of multinational organizations (e.g., the Catholic Church). For example, Catholics in different countries share experiences, symbols, beliefs, values, and behaviors transmitted by their church. The United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand share traits derived from a common British linguistic and cultural heritage. Other culturally defined international affinity groups include those with diasporic identities (e.g., Africa and its diaspora).

National culture refers to experiences, beliefs, customs, and values shared by people who have grown up in the same country, such as the United States, Canada, or Mexico. Although people who live in the same society—a nation, for example—share a cultural tradition, cultures also have internal diversity, which is the focus of this book. Individuals, families, communities, regions, classes, and other groups within a complex nation have different learning experiences as well as shared ones. Subcultures are the diverse cultural patterns and traditions associated with subgroups in
the same country. Subcultures (a problematic term, as we shall see below and in Chapter 4) may originate in ethnicity, class, region, religion, and other bases of affinity. The religious backgrounds of American Baptists, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims create subcultural differences between them. Although they share the same national culture, northerners and southerners differ in certain culture traits and patterns. This illustrates regional subcultures.

Nowadays, many scholars are reluctant to use the term subculture. They feel that the prefix “sub” is offensive because it means “below.” “Subcultures” may thus be perceived as “less than” or somehow inferior to a dominant, elite, or national culture. In this discussion of levels of culture, we intend no such implication. Our point is simply that countries contain many different culturally defined groups. As mentioned earlier, culture is contested. Various groups strive to promote the correctness and value of their own practices, values, and beliefs in comparison with those of other groups, or the country as a whole.

**Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism**

**Ethnocentrism** is the tendency to use one’s own cultural standards and values in judging the behavior and beliefs of people from different cultures. Ethnocentrism is a cultural universal. That is, people everywhere think that familiar explanations, opinions, and customs are true, right, proper, and moral. They regard different behavior as strange or savage.

The opposite of ethnocentrism is cultural relativism, the view that behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another. This position also can present problems. An extreme cultural relativist might contend that there is no superior, international, or universal morality—that the moral and ethical rules of all cultures deserve equal respect. In the extreme relativist view, Nazi Germany is evaluated as impartially as Athenian Greece. Anthropologists respect human diversity, and most anthropologists try to be objective, accurate, and sensitive in their accounts of diverse cultures. However, objectivity and sensitivity do not mean that we have to ignore certain international standards of justice and morality.

Some would argue that the problems with relativism can be solved by distinguishing between methodological and moral relativism. In anthropology, cultural relativism is not a moral position, but a methodological one. It states: To understand another culture fully, you must try to see how the people in that culture see things. What motivates them—what are they thinking—when they do those things? Such an approach does not preclude making moral judgments or taking action. When faced with Nazi atrocities, a methodological relativist would have a moral obligation to stop doing anthropology and take action to intervene. One can understand the motivations for the practice by looking at things from the point of view of those who engage in it. Having done this, one then faces the moral question of whether to intervene to try to stop it. We should recognize as well that different people and groups living in the same society—for example, women and men, old and young, the more and less powerful—can have widely different views about what is proper, necessary, and moral.
Universality, Generality, and Particularity

Anthropologists agree that learning is uniquely developed among humans and that culture is the main reason for the success of our species (*Homo sapiens*). Regardless of their genes, ancestry, or physical appearance, children can learn any culture. This point is illustrated by the fact that the ancestors of modern Americans and Canadians came to North America from different countries and continents, representing hundreds of different nations, cultures, and languages. However, the earliest colonists, later immigrants, and their descendants have learned to be Americans or Canadians. These diverse descendants now share, to some extent at least, a common national culture.

In studying cultural diversity, we may distinguish between the universal, the generalized, and the particular. Certain social and cultural features are universal, shared by people everywhere. Others are merely generalities, found in several or many but not all cultures. Still other traits are particularities, limited or unique to certain cultures.

**Universals** are the traits that tend to distinguish *Homo sapiens* from other species. Human social universals include kinship, family living, child care, and food sharing. Cultural universals include religion (belief in supernatural beings, powers, and forces) and marriage.

Between the universal and the particular or unique (see the next section) is a middle ground that consists of cultural generalities. These are regularities that occur in different times and places but not in all cultures. One reason for generalities is diffusion. Societies can share the same beliefs and customs because of borrowing or through (cultural) inheritance from a common cultural ancestor. Speaking English is a generality shared by North Americans and Australians because both countries had English settlers. Another reason for generalities is domination, as in conquest or colonial rule, when customs and procedures are imposed on one culture by another one that is more powerful. In many countries, use of the English language reflects colonial history. More recently, English has spread through diffusion to many other countries, as it has become the world’s foremost language for business and travel.

One cultural generality that is present in many but not all societies is the nuclear family, a kinship group consisting of parents and children. Many Americans view the nuclear family as a proper and natural group, but it is not universal. It was totally absent, for example, among the Nayars who lived on the Malabar Coast of India. The Nayars lived in female-headed households, and husbands and wives did not live together.

**Particularity: Patterns of Culture**

Cultural particularities are traits or features of culture that are not generalized or widespread; rather, they are confined to a single place, culture, or society. Yet because of cultural diffusion, which has accelerated through modern transportation and communication systems, traits that once were limited in their distribution have become more widespread. Traits that are useful, that have the capacity to please large audiences, and that don’t clash with the cultural values of potential adopters are more likely to diffuse than others are. Still, certain cultural particularities persist. One example would be a particular food dish (e.g., pork barbeque with a mustard-based
sauce available only in South Carolina, or the pastie—beef stew baked in pie dough—
characteristic of Michigan’s upper peninsula). Besides diffusion, which, for example, 
has spread McDonald’s food outlets, once confined to San Bernadino, California, 
across the globe, there are other reasons that cultural particularities are increasingly 
rare. Many cultural traits are shared as cultural universals and as a result of inde-
pendent invention. Facing similar problems, people in different places have come up 
with similar solutions. Again and again, similar cultural causes have produced simi-
lar cultural results.

At the level of the individual cultural trait or element (e.g., bow and arrow, hot 
dog, MTV), particularities may be getting rarer. But at a higher level, particularity is 
more obvious. Different cultures emphasize different things. Cultures are integrated 
and patterned differently and display tremendous variation and diversity. When cul-
tural traits are borrowed, they are modified to fit the culture that adopts them. They 
are reintegrated—patterned anew—to fit their new setting. MTV in Germany or Brazil 
isn’t at all the same thing as MTV in the United States. As was stated in the earlier 
section “Culture Is Integrated,” patterned beliefs, customs, and practices lend distinc-
tiveness to particular cultural traditions.

Consider universal life cycle events, such as birth, puberty, marriage, parent-
hood, and death, which many cultures observe and celebrate. The occasions (e.g., 
marriage, death) may be the same and universal, but the patterns of ceremonial 
observance may be dramatically different. Cultures vary in just which events merit 
special celebration. Americans, for example, regard expensive weddings as more 
socially appropriate than lavish funerals. However, the Betsileo of Madagascar take 
the opposite view. The marriage ceremony is a minor event that brings together just 
the couple and a few close relatives. However, a funeral is a measure of the deceased 
person’s social position and lifetime achievement, and it may attract a thousand peo-
ple. Why use money on a house, the Betsileo say, when one can use it on the tomb 
where one will spend eternity in the company of dead relatives? How unlike con-
temporary Americans’ dreams of home ownership and preference for quick and inex-
pensive funerals. Cremation, an increasingly common option in the United States, 
would horrify the Betsileo, for whom ancestral bones and relics are important rit-
ual objects.

Cultures vary tremendously in their beliefs, practices, integration, and pattern-
ing. By focusing on and trying to explain alternative customs, anthropology forces us 
to reappraise our familiar ways of thinking. In a world full of cultural diversity, con-
temporary American culture is just one cultural variant, more powerful perhaps, but 
no more natural, than the others.

Unifying Factors in Contemporary North American Culture

Culture is shared, but all societies have divisive as well as unifying forces. For exam-
ple, people of the same tribe are separated by their residence in different villages 
and membership in different kin groups. Nations, although united by government,
are typically divided by class, region, ethnicity, religion, and political interest groups. As we describe in more detail in Chapter 4, the idea of common culture can be used to mobilize people, to solidify group identity and solidarity, and to promote special interests.

In any society, a common cultural tradition can provide one basis for uniformity among its members. Whatever unity contemporary American culture has does not rest on a particularly strong central government. Nor is national unity based on common kinship, descent, or religion. In fact, many of the commonalities of behavior, belief, and activity that enable us to speak of contemporary American culture are relatively new. They are founded on and perpetuated by recent developments, particularly in business, transportation, and the media.

When we study contrasts between rural, urban, and suburban life, or relations among social class, ethnicity, and household organization, we are focusing on variation, a very important topic and the focus of this book. When we consider the active and creative use that each individual makes of popular culture, we also are describing cultural diversity. Despite increasing diversity in the United States and Canada, we can still talk about an American or a Canadian national culture. Through common experiences in their enculturation, especially through exposure to schools and the mass media, Americans and Canadians, respectively do come to share certain knowledge, beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and acting, as is true of any culture. Many shared

Common cultural traditions provide a basis for uniformity among members of a society or nation. Among the unifying factors in contemporary American culture are graduation celebrations (high school and college) and associated customs, such as tossing hats in the air.
aspects of national culture override differences among individuals, genders, regions, or ethnic groups.

The media, especially television, have helped bring nationalism and its symbols, including cultural contrasts with the United States, to prominence in Canada. In 2000, a TV commercial produced in Toronto for Molson Canadian beer gained instantaneous national prominence. The ad featured the character Joe Canadian delivering what came to be known as “The Rant,” which was soon to become a nationalist mantra for 30 million Canadians:

“I’m not a lumberjack or a fur trader; I don’t live in an igloo, eat blubber or own a dogsled.

“I have a prime minister, not a president. I speak English and French, not American.

“I can proudly sew my country’s flag on my backpack. [This refers to Canada’s gender-neutral school curriculum, in which sewing is taught to both boys and girls.]

“I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation.”

Images of maple leaves and beavers flashed on the screen as Joe reached his climax:

“Canada is the second-largest land mass, the first nation of hockey and the best part of North America. My name is Joe and I am Canadian.” (quoted in Brooke 2000)

The Rant seems to have spurred the government of Ontario, Canada’s most populous province, to announce that starting in September 2000, all students would start the day by singing “O Canada” and (as a member of the British Commonwealth) by pledging allegiance to the queen. Although The Rant was recited by ordinary Canadians from Vancouver to Halifax, one province did not join in this affirmation of national identity. In French-speaking Québec, which was governed by the separatist Parti Québécois, Canadian national symbols like the flag and anthem were officially ignored, and Molson Canadian beer was not even marketed (Brooke 2000).

It is fitting that anthropology, which originated as the study of non-Western societies, extend its lens to North American society and culture. We’ve seen that anthropology deals with cultural universals, generalities, and uniqueness. A national culture may be seen as a particular cultural variant, as interesting as any other. Techniques developed to interpret and analyze smaller-scale societies, where sociocultural uniformity is more marked, also can contribute to an understanding of Canadian or American life—the whole and its parts.

A native anthropologist is one who studies his or her own culture. Native anthropologists include Americans working in the United States, Canadians in Canada, French in France, and Nigerians in Nigeria. Many of us have turned to native anthropology after having first done fieldwork elsewhere. The academic training, fieldwork abroad, and cross-cultural focus that characterize anthropology tend to provide its practitioners with a degree of detachment and objectivity that most natives lack. On the other hand, life experience as a native also can be an advantage to the anthropologist embarking on a study of his or her own culture of origin. Nevertheless, much
more than when working abroad, the native anthropologist is both participant and observer, often emotionally and intellectually involved in the events and beliefs being studied. Native anthropologists should be wary of their biases as natives and should attempt to be as objective with their own culture as they are with others.

Knowledge of other cultures enables us both to appreciate and to question aspects of our own. Techniques developed to describe and analyze other cultures can be applied to North America as well. The next chapter will consider, among other topics, the creative use that individuals and groups make of cultural forces, including media images and other aspects of popular culture. Any cultural product (e.g., a ceremony, an artifact, an ideology, a media-borne image) can be considered a text. This term applies to something that can be creatively “read,” interpreted, and assigned meaning by anyone (a “reader”) who receives it. Such meanings often differ from what the originators of the text had in mind when they produced it. As they “read” and interpret various “texts” (cultural features), people constantly make and remake culture.

Because natives often see and explain their behavior very differently from the way social scientists do, Canadian and American readers may disagree with some of the analyses and interpretations presented in this book. In part this is because you are natives, who know much more about your own culture than you do about any other. Also, individuals and groups within a culture may perceive that culture very differently. American culture assigns a high value to differences in individual opinion—and to the belief that one opinion is as good as another.

A reminder about the all-encompassing nature of culture may be useful here. Culture means much more than refinement, cultivation, education, and appreciation of classics and fine arts. Native anthropologists cannot ignore popular culture, especially the mass media and their impact. That TVs outnumber toilets in American households is a significant cultural fact. Kottak’s observations about Michigan college students may be generalizable to other young Americans. They visit McDonald’s more often than they do houses of worship. Almost all have seen a Walt Disney movie and have attended rock concerts and football games. If these observations are true of young Americans generally, as we suspect they are, such shared experiences are major features of American enculturation patterns. Certainly any extraterrestrial anthropologist doing fieldwork in the United States would stress them.

American Pop, Civic, and Public Culture

Unlike the chapters that follow, this one has focused primarily on cultural unity among North Americans. We have stressed the importance of popular culture, reflecting experiences and enculturative forces common to many or most Americans. Further examples include Halloween, homecoming dances, reality shows, dinner-and-a-movie dates, and retirement parties. Activities and values that define us as a civic culture include general compliance with the legal system, participation in formal elections, and membership in voluntary and faith-based organizations and associations, as varied as these
may be in mission. Unity among Americans also is evident in public culture: generally accepted social behaviors, dress codes, speech, and other forms of expression that we enact in public spaces, including bars, parks, malls, and even grieving sites, such as Ground Zero. The United States and Canada, and increasingly European societies, are characterized not only by cultural variation within their populations, but by culture patterns and values shared by the citizens of a given nation-state (Shaffer 2008; Morrill, Snow, and White 2005).

We have witnessed major changes in the material conditions of North American life—particularly in work organization and technology, including transportation and information flows. Institutions such as sports, movies, TV shows, Internet sites, theme parks, and fast-food restaurants are powerful elements of national (and international) culture. They provide a framework of common expectation and experience that can override differences in region, class, formal religious affiliation, political sentiments, gender, ethnic group, and place of residence.

For various reasons, Americans can see themselves not just as members of a varied and complex nation but also as a population united by distinctive shared symbols, customs, and experiences. Despite its own internal diversity, then, American culture is one among many distinctive national cultures, part of the range of global cultural diversity.

Mechanisms of Cultural Change

We live in a world of increasing intercultural contact, in which the pace of cultural change has accelerated enormously. Cultures in contact typically get traits from each other through borrowing or diffusion. Diffusion, an important mechanism of cultural change, has gone on throughout human history because cultures have never been truly isolated. As the anthropologist Franz Boas (1940/1966) noted many years ago, contact between neighboring tribes has always existed and has extended over enormous areas. Diffusion is direct when two cultures trade, intermarry, or wage war on one another. Diffusion is forced when one culture subjugates another and imposes its customs on the dominated group. Diffusion is indirect when products and patterns move from group A to group C via group B without any firsthand contact between A and C. In the modern world much international diffusion is due to the spread of the mass media.

Acculturation, another mechanism of cultural change, is the exchange of cultural features that results when groups come into continuous firsthand contact. The original cultural patterns of either or both groups may be changed by this contact (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936). We usually speak of acculturation when the contact is between nations or cultures. Parts of the cultures change, but each group maintains a distinct identity. In situations of continuous contact, cultures exchange and blend foods, recipes, music, dances, clothing, tools, and techniques.

Independent invention—the process by which humans innovate, creatively finding new solutions to old and new problems—is another important mechanism of
cultural change. Faced with comparable challenges, people in different places have innovated in similar or parallel ways, which is one reason that cultural generalities exist. One example is the independent invention of agriculture in the Middle East and Mexico. In both areas people who faced food scarcity began to domesticate crops. Over the course of history, innovations have spread at the expense of earlier practices. Often a major invention, such as agriculture, triggers a series of subsequent interrelated changes. Thus, in both Mexico and the Middle East, agriculture led to many social, political, and legal changes, including notions of property and distinctions in wealth, class, and power.

The term globalization encompasses a series of processes, including diffusion and acculturation, working to promote change in a world in which nations and people are increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent. Promoting such linkages are economic and political forces, as well as modern systems of transportation and communication. The forces of globalization include international commerce and finance, travel and tourism, transnational migration, the media, and various high-tech information flows (see Scholte 2000; Appadurai 2001; Ong and Collier 2005). During the Cold War, which ended with the fall of the Soviet Union, the basis of international alliance was political, ideological, and military. More recent international pacts have shifted toward trade and economic issues. New economic unions (which have met considerable resistance in their member nations) have been created through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the European Union (EU).

Long-distance communication is easier, faster, and cheaper than ever, and extends to remote areas. Kottak can now e-mail or phone families in Arembepe, Brazil, which lacked phones, or even postal service, when he first began to study the community. The mass media help propel a globally spreading culture of consumption. Within nations and across their borders, the media spread information about products, services, rights, institutions, lifestyles, and the perceived costs and benefits of globalization. Emigrants transmit information and resources transnationally, as they maintain their ties with home (phoning, faxing, e-mailing, making visits, sending money). In a sense such people live multilocally—in different places and cultures at once. They learn to play various social roles and to change behavior and identity depending on the situation.

**The Uses of Culture**

Nowadays, “culture,” as a term and as a concept, is used liberally both by people in general and by professionals. When people want to assert certain unique qualities, or to justify patterns of behavior, they may claim, “It’s my culture!” Teens may distinguish themselves from other family members by claiming a “different culture.” Some students use their “culture of birth” by taking a test in their native language to avoid taking courses to fulfill a foreign language requirement.

Business stresses the importance of “corporate culture.” Marketers target “culture niches” to pitch products and services. Tharp describes “Generation N,” made up
of Latinos under 35 years of age who are not only mainstreming themselves but also “Hispanicizing” the American mainstream with their own celebrities and entertainment preferences. McDonald’s engages in “matrix marketing” to the “Mature Market,” African Americans, and Latinos in the United States with strategies and tactics presumed relevant to each population. Goya Foods, familiar with Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultural features in New York, enjoys a strong canned fruit share among Latinos. In 2007, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and African Americans boasted $2.2 trillion in purchasing power. Bank of America suffered a strong backlash for its pilot program offering credit cards to customers without Social Security cards in Los Angeles and Orange County, California. Subaru created two-minute movies about gay Subaru owners for the 24-hour gay network LOGO, and LeviStraus in 2007 created two provocative ads, one with a man and a woman, another with the same man but replacing the woman with another man (Morse 2009).

Everett Rogers (1995) points out that understanding the “culture of individuals” provides change agents with information needed to design and implement effective innovations. “Cultural competency” is a key to quality services in health, education, and welfare. Disparities in medical diagnosis and treatment affect the health status of various minorities. In the United States these minorities include African Americans, certain Spanish-speaking groups, Native North Americans, and some groups of Asian descent. In Canada they include Indians, or First Nations. Indians and Pakistanis are minorities in the United Kingdom, North Africans in France, Turks in Germany, Kurds in Turkey, and Ethiopian Jews in Israel (Geiger 2001). A primary reason for inequitable health care delivery is a lack of cultural awareness and competence by health care professionals.

The notion of “school culture” permeates speech, scholarship, administration, and teaching among American educators. Learning, curriculum development, leadership, and reform are linked to the culture of the school—its history, its social organization, its core values, and the people who define it (Deal and Peterson 1999; Kozaitis 2000). Attention to culture is intrinsic to economic development, social work, and public welfare services. Culturally compatible development requires participation by local people in plans that affect them (Kottak 1990a). Programs aimed at culturally defined “client populations” rely on cultural awareness for success (Hyland 2005; Green 1982).

Nowhere is the use of culture more evident than in organized efforts by self-identified affinity groups who demand human rights on the basis of “our culture.” The movement to valorize culture and identity within the African diaspora boasts négritude, a configuration of history, experience, ideology, and sentiment shared by blacks. The concept of sisterhood is equally powerful in the women’s liberation movement, the initial objectives of which included “the development of a women’s culture” (Newton 2000, p. 114). As people with disabilities forge their own civil rights movement, they emphasize the “celebration of separate culture” (Shapiro 1993, pp. 74–104).

Understanding contemporary social movements requires appreciation of the nature, construction, and uses of culture. In Chapter 3 we discuss globalization and the active and creative ways in which people rely on culture to negotiate, adapt, and influence social transformations.
## Key Terms

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CHAPTER 3

GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY

REFLECTIONS: CAN I WATCH MY CHANNEL?

❖ Globalization and Identity Politics
   Trade and Finance
   Neoliberalism and Antiglobalization
❖ Indigenous Peoples
   Identity in Indigenous Politics
❖ Multilocality and the Media
❖ Diasporas and Postmodernity
❖ Civil Society, NGOs, and Rights
   Movements
❖ Agency

CAN I WATCH MY CHANNEL?

Kottak visits the fitness center at a resort. Five television sets are on, each showing a different Comcast cable channel: Fox News, HLN, ESPN, CNBC, and a local channel. Kottak chooses a workout machine, gets earphones, and asks that the nearest TV be changed from Fox News to the Comedy Channel, where he plans to watch The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and The Colbert Report. He is pleased that no one protests.

Think about the range of programs available in that workout room and on cable and satellite TV more generally—the hundreds of choices available. What we choose to watch, in public and private, says something about us: about our mood, our gender, our political orientation, and other individual and social characteristics. What kinds of people watch Fox News versus CNN or MSNBC, Logo versus Spike, Syfy versus the History Channel? What differences are there between our private and our public choices?

From World War II through the early 1960s, the United States was represented as “one nation indivisible.” (The phrase “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954.) America was seen as a “melting pot,” united by mass culture, abetted by the spread of television. The draft provided a common experience for millions of men who were called up for military service. With the exception of the separate but unequal schools of the South prior to desegregation, a fairly uniform public school system taught kids nationwide to read the same stories about Dick, Jane, and their pets.

With TV a novelty and just two or three networks available, Americans shared common programming, images, and information. Mondays at 9 P.M. everyone watched I Love Lucy. The most celebrated female extradomestic labor in 1953 was Lucy Ricardo’s as she rushed to the hospital to give birth to Little Ricky. On Sunday evenings,
Ed Sullivan’s show attracted mass audiences by headlining such decade-dominating celebrities as Elvis Presley and the Beatles. The not-so-desperate housewives of the 1950s watched their “soaps” (soap operas), then bought the laundry products that sponsored those shows. They washed their clothes in machines purchased in downtown department stores that offered a range of newly available mass-produced appliances.

Today’s United States is remarkably different from what it was 60 years ago. Contributing to the transformations have been national movements for Civil Rights and Women’s Rights, and against the Vietnam War, as well as various kinds of backlashes to such movements. Union and unity have yielded to dissension and diversity. The trend toward diversification rests on many factors—political mobilization and identity politics (see below), increased immigration, and resistance to homogenization through mass media and education.

One key development in North American culture since the 1970s, especially evident in the media, is a general shift from massification to segmentation. An increasingly differentiated society celebrates diversity. The mass media join the trend, measuring various “demographics.” The media aim their products and messages at particular segments, rather than at an undifferentiated mass audience. Television, films, radio, music, magazines, and Internet forums tend to gear their topics, formats, and styles to particular homogeneous segments of the population (i.e., “interest groups,” “affinity groups,” or “target audiences”). In particular, cable and satellite TV, along with the remote control and recording devices, have helped direct television, the most important mass medium, away from the networks’ cherished mass audiences and toward particular viewing segments. Only a few shows, such as American Idol and the Superbowl, have managed to attract mass audiences that cross ethnic and regional boundaries, political parties, and socioeconomic classes, and that include all ages and both genders. A few televised events, such as the Academy Awards, the Summer Olympics, and the World Cup, continue to capture large international audiences. But in 1998, the final episode of Seinfeld, though it was hugely popular, could not rival the mass audience shares achieved by programs such as Roots, Lucy’s childbirth episode, or the final episode of M*A*S*H.

Cable and satellite permit special-interest audiences to choose among hundreds of targeted channels. They specialize in music (country, pop, rock, Latin, or “black entertainment”), sports, news (financial, weather, headline), comedy, science fiction, gossip, movies (commercial, “art,” “classic”), cartoons, old TV sitcoms, Spanish language programming, gay and lesbian issues, nature, travel, adventure, history, biography, and home shopping. Something for everyone, very little for everyone—E unibus plurum.

Special-interest audiences and groups are proliferating, as part of a pattern of increasing specialization and diversification—a key feature of contemporary lives. New technology has the capacity to tear all of us apart as it brings some of us together. The Internet (especially Facebook and Twitter), fax machines, and satellite dishes work internationally to establish virtual communities and instantaneous contact. National boundaries are permeable. New units form. People participate in multiple social systems and play various roles depending on the situation.

Cyberspace, the world navigable via the computer, is part of a larger high-tech communications environment, which may be called advanced information technology.
(AIT). Other elements of this environment include computer hardware and software, modems, cell phones, digital subscriber lines (DSL), wireless transmitters and receivers, cable and satellite TV, and faxing capability. One of the key features of AIT is its international scope. Along with modern transportation systems, AIT plays a key role in connecting people worldwide.

Particular cybergroups, including websites, online forums, and e-mail groups, can unite people from all over the world who share a common interest. Some groups are devoted to specific health concerns or political issues. Others focus on nations and their diasporic citizenries. They provide a common forum for scholars and others who are interested in a particular country, or for its citizens who have moved to various locales. Groups with a narrow focus may be based on work cultures and other affinity groups—groups of user-participants with common interests and/or characteristics (Harvey 1996). They may link members of a single organization, branches of that organization, or similar professionals (e.g., ear, nose, and throat physicians, or ENTs) all over the world. Transecting groups create direct communication channels between groups that previously had, or otherwise have, trouble communicating—for instance, physicians and patients.

Although AIT links the world, access to its riches is unequal both among and within nations. The “developing” nations have poorer access than do North America, western Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Even within a “developed” country such as the United States or Canada, socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural factors affect access to and use of cyberspace. There is privileged access to AIT by class, race, ethnicity, gender, education, profession, age, and family background. For example, young people tend to be more comfortable with AIT than older people are. Families with higher incomes tend to have better access to the whole range of high-tech items. Groups with more restricted access to AIT include minorities, the poor, older people, and residents of developing countries.

Social scientists have studied ways in which AIT fosters new social constructions of reality, and how computers help define notions of identity and the self. Virtual worlds, such as video games and computer role-playing games, are ways of extending oneself into various forms of cybersocial interaction (Escobar 1994). People can manipulate their identities by choosing various “handles,” their names in cyberspace (see Lange 2003). If one engages in online communication through multiple servers, such as a university gateway, a commercial service, and various interactive websites, one may have various handles and identities. People manipulate (“lie about”) their ages and genders and create particular cyberfantasies.

AIT can play a role in integrating physical communities (Kling 1996) through such mechanisms as locally-specific websites and e-mail or cell phone blasts about weather events and other matters of local interest. An even more important role may involve facilitating communication among affinity groups: relatives, friends, and people with common identities, experiences, interests, and concerns, ranging from work and business to ideology and politics. AIT is used on a daily basis for communication among co-workers and members of organizations. Its main role, however, seems to be to create and maintain links between physically dispersed people who have things, and come to have more things, in common.
GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

As new criteria of association and separation emerge, transnational institutions and identities are challenging existing governments. Identity politics describes the political mobilization of nonnational identities. As Robert D. Kaplan (1994) has noted, social and political identities based on the perception of sharing a common culture, language, or religion (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam) are becoming the basis of prime allegiance, rather than citizenship in a nation-state, which contains diverse social groups.

A key feature of the nation-state, or more simply, the state, is its territorial basis. Robert Carneiro sees the state as “an autonomous political unit, encompassing many communities within its territory” (1970, p. 733). States bring members of diverse groups together and oblige them to pledge allegiance to a government. Today, more and more people are aligning based on different kinds of loyalties.

One paradox of the contemporary world is that both integration and disintegration are increasing. Through the media, travel, and migration, parts of the world are linked more now than ever before. But dissolution also surrounds us. Countries have dissolved, along with political blocs (the Warsaw Pact countries) and ideologies (communism). Internal diversity (e.g., the existence of Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds in Iraq) poses a threat to many nation-states. Identity politics fractures countries into communities based on religion, race, class, ethnicity, language, age, gender, and sexual orientation.

Indonesian Muslim women rally against a controversial censorship bill. This rally is one local manifestation of an international Women’s Rights movement.
Trade and Finance

With the end of the Cold War, during the 1990s, the ideological, political, and military basis of international alliance shifted toward trade and economic issues. In North America and Europe, multinational economic unions came into conflict with national and partisan interests. New economic unions (which have met considerable resistance in their member countries) have been created through NAFTA (the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement), the WTO (World Trade Organization, founded in 1995), and the EU (European Union, established in 1993).

Finance is a fundamental transnational force, as capitalists look beyond national boundaries for places to invest. As Arjun Appadurai puts it, “Money, commodities, and persons unendingly chase each other around the world” (1991, p. 194). Many Latin American communities, especially in Mexico and the Caribbean, have lost their autonomy because their residents now depend on cash derived from international labor migration. The economy of the United States increasingly is influenced by foreign investment, especially from Britain, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, and China. The American economy also has increased its dependence on foreign labor, through both the immigration of laborers and the export of jobs.

Business, technology, and the media have increased the craving for commodities and images throughout the world. This has forced countries to open up to a global culture of consumption. Almost everyone today participates in that culture. Transnational finance has modified the economic control of local life (see Kennedy 2010). Even as more and more of our jobs are shipped overseas, much of America now belongs to outsiders. By the mid-1980s, for example, 75 percent of the buildings in downtown Los Angeles were owned at least in part by foreign capital (Rouse 1991). The website WalletPop.com documents the current majority foreign ownership of such familiar “American” brands as Anheuser-Busch, Good Humor, French’s mustard, Frigidaire, Adidas, Caribou Coffee, Church’s Chicken, Trader Joe’s, 7-Eleven, Holiday Inn, Dial soap, T-Mobile, Firestone, and Toll House Cookies. Also foreign-owned are such American architectural icons as New York’s Plaza Hotel, Flatiron Building, and Chrysler Building, along with the Indiana Toll Road and the Chicago Skyway. A Brazilian billionaire now owns a significant share in Burger King, which has over 12,000 outlets worldwide.

According to Bruce Bartlett (2010), the share of the U.S. national debt owned by foreigners has swollen since the 1970s, when it was only 5 percent. In and after the 1970s, oil-producing countries invested their profits in United States Treasury securities, because of their liquidity and safety. By 1975 the foreign share of the U.S. national debt had risen to 17 percent, where it remained through the 1990s, when China started buying large amounts of Treasury bills. By 2009, foreigners were financing almost half the total publicly held U.S. national debt.

Neoliberalism and Antiglobalization

The term neoliberalism encompasses a set of assumptions and economic policies that have become widespread during the last 30 years and that are being implemented in capitalist and developing countries, including postsocialist societies. Neoliberalism is
a new form of the old economic liberalism laid out in Adam Smith’s famous capitalist manifesto *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, soon after the start of the Industrial Revolution. Smith advocated laissez-faire economics as the basis of capitalism: The government should stay out of its nation’s economic affairs. Free trade, Smith thought, was the best way for a country’s economy to develop. There should be no restrictions on manufacturing, no barriers to commerce, and no tariffs. Such ideas were “liberal” in the sense of advocating no controls. Economic liberalism encouraged “free” enterprise and competition, with the goal of generating profits. Note the difference between this meaning of *liberal* and the one that has been popularized on American talk radio, in which “liberal” is used—usually as a derogatory term—as the opposite of “conservative.” Ironically, Adam Smith’s liberalism is today’s capitalist “conservatism.”

Economic liberalism prevailed in the United States until President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal during the 1930s. The Great Depression produced a turn to Keynesian economics, which challenged liberalism. John Maynard Keynes (1927, 1936) insisted that full employment was necessary for capitalism to grow, that governments and central banks should intervene to increase employment, and that government should promote the common good.

Especially since the fall of Communism (1989–1991), there has been a revival of economic liberalism, now known as neoliberalism, which has been spreading globally. Around the world, neoliberal policies have been imposed by powerful financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (see Edelman and Haugerud 2004). In many developing countries, corruption in state-controlled industries has been an overwhelming problem, and free markets have been seen as a way out of that.

Neoliberalism doesn’t differ much from Adam Smith’s original idea that governments should not regulate private enterprise and market forces. Neoliberalism entails open (tariff- and barrier-free) international trade and investment. Profits are sought through lowering of costs, whether through improving productivity, laying off workers, or seeking workers who accept lower wages. To obtain loans, the governments of postsocialist and developing countries have been required to accept the neoliberal premise that deregulation leads to economic growth, which eventually will benefit everyone through a process sometimes called “trickle down.”

Accompanying the belief in free markets and the idea of cutting costs is a tendency to impose austerity measures that cut government expenses. This means reduced public spending on education, health care, and other social services (Martinez and Garcia 2000). Throughout the world, neoliberal policies have promoted deregulation and privatization—the sale to private investors of state-owned enterprises, such as banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, utilities, schools, hospitals, and even fresh water. With its characteristic capitalist focus on individualism, neoliberalism places more emphasis on “individual responsibility” than on “the common good.” The effects of neoliberal policies vary among countries. In some countries, social programs are negligible to begin with, and health care benefits go mainly to the elites.

There has been significant opposition to the global imposition of neoliberalism, including regular protests at the meetings of the agencies promoting such policies.
One of the largest protests took place in December 1999 in Seattle, which witnessed a massive and violent demonstration against the WTO, which was meeting there. Protesters continue to show their disapproval of the policies of international agencies such as the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank. Each year, protests mark the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. In November 2009 there were clashes with police during a march by demonstrators protesting the opening of a WTO meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. The WTO had called that meeting of its 153 members to find ways to revive world trade and get the global economy out of recession (Huffington Post 2010).

Prominent among antiglobalization protesters have been trade union members, environmentalists, anticapitalists, and anarchists. WTO opponents claim that the agreements it produces foster the growth of wealth among corporations at the expense of farmers, workers, and others at the low end of the economy. Debt-relief advocates have urged the IMF and the World Bank to forgive loans to poor countries and to replace future loans with grants for local development programs. (In some cases, this has been done.) Environmentalists seek tougher environmental impact assessments for companies and borrowers. Human rights groups contend that international development policies help only big business, not poor countries and their citizens. Critics of the IMF accuse that agency of worsening financial crises in various countries by prescribing budget-slashing policies. Trade unionists advocate for global labor standards. The protesters fall into two camps: those who want the agencies disbanded and those who merely want them reformed (Miller 2000; Huffington Post 2010).

The antiglobalists agree that “governments and international institutions put the interests of big companies ahead of those of the public on poverty reduction, the environment, human rights and jobs” (Hay 2001). They would prefer a democratically elected international agency to the current ones, which are run by nonelected officials representing the world’s richest countries and corporations. IMF, World Bank, and G-8 officials respond by saying that progress and reform, though slow, are occurring.

**Multilocality and the Media**

We have seen that globalization describes the accelerating links between countries and people in a world system connected economically, politically, and by modern media and transportation. More and more people live multilocal and transnational rather than territorially confined, country-based lives. Globalization has transplanted citizens of many countries, including participants in low-skilled, low-wage services such as yard work and housework. Migrant Filipina domestic workers can be found in large cities in more than 130 countries. Lacking citizenship in their host countries, they construct a compensating “sense of place and sense of community in globalization” (Parrenas 2001). Familiar products and print media move from the Philippines to European countries, and multinational networks have developed to provide support services to members of this Filipina diaspora.

The mass media also promote transnational religious identities. Muslim identity, for instance, has been abetted by televised coverage of military actions by the United States (and other countries) in Islamic nations, including Kuwait, Iraq, and
Afghanistan. Even as they fuel identity politics, the media also propel a globally spreading culture of consumption, stimulating participation in the cash economy. Those who control the media are key gatekeepers. Assuming roles played historically by political and religious leaders, they regulate public access to information. The moguls, magnates, managers, and mouths of TV and radio, including talk-show hosts, have the power to direct public attention toward some issues and away from others. Politicians and government officials also attempt to use radio and television for their own ends, and ordinary people increasingly use the media (e.g., talk radio, the Internet) to bring their concerns to the attention of fellow citizens and policymakers.

The media spread awareness of options and alternatives in products, services, “rights,” institutions, and lifestyles, but they also fuel cynicism. Scandals about corruption in government, business, religion, and sports increase distrust of authorities, influencing electoral outcomes and policy. The flow of information also has encouraged people to clamor for rights and benefits and to demand more from familiar institutions. According to Jim Fisher-Thompson, radio coverage of African elections “encouraged people to go out and vote and to speak out when they saw polling officials or ‘government commandos’ trying to interfere in the election process” (2002).

As might be expected, governments are not eager to give up their gatekeeping authority. Many governments take steps to restrict information flows. In 1996 the U.S. Senate passed the Communications Decency Act, which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in 1997, as legislation aimed at pornography on the Internet. Iran’s parliament banned satellite dishes, as China has done, to limit exposure to information about external events, Western culture, and alternative models of society and government.

Many countries censor the Internet for political or moral reasons. Cuba makes all unauthorized Internet surfing illegal. Many Western countries limit access to child porn sites. China has a sophisticated selective censorship system—sometimes called the “Great Firewall of China” (Lynn 2009). China’s local search engine Baidu, which follows Chinese censorship rules, has overtaken Google in the Chinese market. In 2009 Baidu had 64 percent of the 2-billion-yuan ($293-million) Internet search market in China, compared with Google’s 31 percent. Despite censorship, China now has more people online than there are people in the United States (Lynn 2009).

Censorship can be a barrier to international business. The World Trade Organization favors freedom of access to the Internet for commercial reasons—to allow free trade. Many WTO member states have pledged not to interfere with transnational Internet services. WTO rules allow members to restrict trade to protect public morals or ensure public order, but those measures must disrupt trade as little as possible.

Maximizing Internet access promotes the neoliberal agenda of free trade. How about free thought? The media have the capacity to liberate, providing unfamiliar information and viewpoints, opening people’s minds, and allowing for the expression of dissident and subaltern voices. (Subaltern means lower in rank, subordinate, traditionally lacking an influential role in decision making.) However, the mass media also can and do reinforce stereotypes and unfounded opinions and close people’s minds to complexity and variety.
The media also promote fear—often manipulated for political reasons. Waves of internationally transmitted images and information reinforce the perception that the world is a dangerous place, with threats to security and order everywhere. The rise of cable and satellite TV and 24-hour newscasting has blurred the distinction between the international, the national, and the local, bringing all threats closer to home. Constant rebroadcasting magnifies risk perception. Geographical distance is obscured by the barrage of “bad news” received daily from so many places. Many viewers have no idea how far away the disasters and threats really are. Was that suspicious package found in Paris or Peoria? Did that bomb go off in Mumbai or Monterey?

Civil Society, NGOs, and Rights Movements

In postsocialist and developing countries, as well as in contemporary North America, the neoliberal agenda has included the promotion of civil society. This concept refers to voluntary collective action around shared interests, goals, and values. Civil society encompasses such organizations as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), registered charities, community groups, women’s organizations, faith-based and professional groups, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions, and advocacy groups. In theory, civil society is distinct from the state, family, and market. In practice, those boundaries are often complex, blurred, and negotiated (London School of Economics 2004).

Currently, the allocation of aid to many “developing countries” challenges their governments by increasing the share of funds given to NGOs, which have gained prominence as social-change enablers. NGOs often question government authority at various levels, sometimes militantly. Activities once performed by government are increasingly handled by NGOs; private voluntary organizations (PVOs), such as charities; and grass-roots organizations (GROs).

Also challenging existing nation-states are the “rights” movements (human, cultural, animal), which have emerged within the arena of identity politics. Minority groups demand certain “rights.” Larger political movements take up the cause, and media pressure can become intense. The idea of human rights challenges the nation-state by invoking a realm of justice and morality beyond and superior to particular countries, cultures, and religions. Human rights usually are seen as vested in individuals. They would include the rights to speak freely, to hold religious beliefs without persecution, and to not be enslaved or imprisoned without charge. The human rights movement condemns state-perpetrated injustices. Such rights are not ordinary laws, which particular governments make and enforce. Rather, human rights are seen as inalienable (countries cannot abridge or terminate them) and metacultural (larger than and superior to individual countries and cultures).

The doctrine of human rights challenges the state by appeal to a level above and beyond it. Cultural rights apply to units within the state. Cultural rights are
vested not in individuals but in identifiable groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. Cultural rights include a group’s ability to preserve its culture, to raise its children in the ways of its forebears, to continue its language, and to not be deprived of its economic base by the country in which it is located (Greaves 1995, p. 3). The province of Québec, for example, has enjoyed a special place among Canada’s 10 provinces because of its special linguistic and cultural history.

Certain rights are codified: Countries have agreed to them in writing. Four United Nations documents—the UN Charter; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—contain nearly all the human rights that have been internationally recognized. However, almost all these rights are seen as vested in individuals rather than groups. As Thomas Greaves (1995) notes, nation-states have been slow to recognize group rights (see Chapter 4). The concept of group rights may seriously challenge government sovereignty, by legitimating fundamental loyalties to segments within the state, thus undermining the state’s hegemony.

Many countries have signed pacts endorsing, for cultural minorities in nation-states, such group rights as self-determination, some degree of home rule, and the right to practice the group’s religion, culture, and language. Greaves (1995) points out that because cultural rights are mainly uncodified, their realization must rely on the same mechanisms that create them—pressure, publicity, and politics. Such rights have been pushed by a wave of political assertiveness throughout the world. We will see American manifestations of this process in Chapter 4. The media, NGOs, tribal associations, and other collectivities play a prominent part in the rights movements. The push for human rights has been fairly peaceful, working through the law and established political channels, in the western hemisphere. However, the battle to promote minority interests has been much more disruptive, involving warfare, ethnic conflict, separatism, and genocide in eastern Europe and Africa.

The notion of indigenous intellectual property rights (IPR) has arisen in an attempt to conserve each society’s cultural base—its core beliefs and principles. IPR is claimed as a group right: a cultural right, allowing indigenous groups to control who may know and use their collective knowledge and its applications. Much traditional cultural knowledge has touristic or other commercial value. Examples include ethnomedicine (traditional medical knowledge and techniques), cosmetics, cultivated plants, foods, folklore, arts, crafts, songs, dances, costumes, and rituals. According to the IPR concept, a particular group should determine how its indigenous knowledge and products are used and distributed, and the level of compensation required.

Indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit of Canada, increasingly fight for increased cultural autonomy. One major Inuit victory was a pact signed in December 1991, in which Canada agreed to set the boundaries for a self-governing Inuit homeland. On May 5, 1992, voters in Canada’s Northwest Territories authorized its split into two separate territories, one for the Inuit. Extending almost to Greenland, the eastern territory covers an area a third larger than Alaska. It is inhabited by 20,500 “Eskimos,” who prefer the name Inuit. The Inuit now administer this area, which they
call Nunavut, meaning “our land” (Farnsworth 1992; see also http://www.nunavut.com/basicfacts/english/basicfacts.html).

As in the rights discussion, issues involving autonomy are also debated at levels within the state (e.g., IPRs of minorities) and beyond the state. Challenging the state from above is the idea of global morality. This notion of a moral order that transcends the moral codes of particular societies has been abetted by environmentalist NGOs. One prominent example is the idea that resources within particular countries (e.g., Madagascar’s biodiversity, Brazil’s rain forests) actually belong to the world. Such a claim challenges national sovereignty, and, not surprisingly, nations reject it. Brazilians, for example, are incensed when northerners suggest that the Amazon is a global resource.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

The term and concept indigenous peoples gained legitimacy within international law with the creation in 1982 of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). This group, which meets annually, has representation from all six continents. The draft of the Declaration of Indigenous Rights, produced by the WGIP in 1989, was accepted by the UN for discussion in 1993. Convention 169, a document of the International Labor Organization (ILO) supporting cultural diversity and indigenous empowerment, was approved in 1989. Such declarations and documents, along with the work of the WGIP, have influenced governments, NGOs, and international agencies, including the World Bank, to express greater concern for, and to adopt policies designed to benefit, indigenous peoples. Social movements worldwide have adopted the term “indigenous peoples” as a self-identifying and political label based on past oppression but now legitimizing a search for social, cultural, and political rights (de la Peña 2005).

In Spanish-speaking Latin America, social scientists and politicians favor the term indígena (indigenous person) over indio (Indian)—the colonial term that the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors used to refer to the native inhabitants of the Americas. With the national independence movements that ended Latin American colonialism in the 19th century, the situation of indigenous peoples did not necessarily improve. For the white and mestizo (mixed) elites of the new countries, indios and their lifestyle were perceived as alien to (European) civilization. But Indians also were seen as redeemable by intellectuals, who argued for social policies to improve their welfare (de la Peña 2005).

Until the mid-to-late 1980s, Latin American public discourse and state policies emphasized assimilation and discouraged indigenous identification and mobilization. Indians were associated with a romanticized past, but marginalized in the present, except for museums, tourism, and folkloric events. Argentina’s Indians were all but invisible. Indigenous Bolivians and Peruvians were encouraged to self-identify as campesinos (peasants).

The past 30 years have seen a dramatic shift. The emphasis has shifted from biological and cultural assimilation—mestizaje—to identities that value difference,
especially Indianness. In Ecuador groups seen previously as Quichua-speaking peasants are classified now as indigenous communities with assigned territories. Other Andean “peasants” have experienced reindigenization as well. Brazil has recognized 30 new indigenous communities in the northeast, a region previously seen as having lost its indigenous population. In Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela, constitutional reforms have recognized those countries as multicultural (Jackson and Warren 2005). Several national constitutions now recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to cultural distinctiveness, sustainable development, political representation, and limited self-government. In Colombia, for example, indigenous communities have been confirmed as rightful owners of large territories. Their leaders and councils have the same benefits as any local government. Two seats in the Colombian senate are reserved for Indian representatives (de la Peña 2005).

In Latin America, the drive by indigenous peoples for self-determination has emphasized (1) their cultural distinctiveness; (2) political reforms involving a restructuring of the state; (3) territorial rights and access to natural resources, including control over economic development; and (4) reforms of military and police powers over indigenous peoples (Jackson and Warren 2005).
The indigenous rights movement, and government responses to it, takes place in the context of globalization, including transnational social movements focusing on such issues as human rights, women’s rights, and environmentalism. Transnational organizations have helped indigenous peoples to influence national legislative agendas. NGOs specializing in development and human rights have come to see indigenous peoples as clients. Many Latin American countries have signed international human rights treaties and covenants.

Latin America has experienced a general shift from authoritarian to democratic rule since the 1980s. However, ethnic and racial discrimination and inequalities persist. Indigenous organizing has a high toll, including assassinations of indigenous leaders and their supporters. Especially in Guatemala, Peru, and Colombia, there has been severe political repression, along with thousands of indigenous deaths, indigenous refugees, and internally displaced persons (Jackson and Warren 2005).

Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) explore a recent upsurge of the notion of autochthony (being native to, or formed, in the place where found), with an implicit call for excluding strangers, in different parts of the world. The terms autochthony and indigenous both go back to classical Greek history, with similar implications. Autochthony refers to “self and soil.” Indigenous literally means “born inside,” with the connotation in classical Greek of being born “inside the house.” Both notions stress the need to safeguard ancestral lands (patrimony) from strangers, along with the rights of first-comers to special rights and protection versus later immigrants—legal or illegal (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005).

During the 1990s, autochthony became an issue in many parts of Africa, inspiring violent efforts to exclude “strangers”—especially in Francophone (French-speaking) areas, but spilling over into Anglophone (English-speaking) countries as well. Simultaneously, autochthony became a key notion in debates about immigration and multiculturalism in Europe. Unlike “indigenous peoples,” the label autochthon has been claimed by majority groups in Europe. This term highlights the prominence that the exclusion of strangers has assumed in day-to-day politics worldwide (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005). One familiar example is the United States, as represented in discourse over illegal immigration.

Identity in Indigenous Politics

Essentialism describes an inaccurate view of identities as established, real, and frozen, to hide the historical processes and politics within which the identity or identities developed. Identities are not fixed; rather, they are fluid and multiple. People seize on particular, sometimes competing, self-labels and identities. Some Peruvian groups, for instance, self-identify as mestizos but still see themselves as indigenous. Identity is a fluid, dynamic process, and there are multiple ways of being indigenous. Neither speaking an indigenous language nor wearing “native” clothing is required. Identities are asserted at particular times and places by particular individuals and groups, and after various kinds of negotiations. Indigenous identity coexists with, and must be managed in the context of, other identity components, including religion, race, and gender. Identities always must be seen as (1) potentially plural, (2) emerging through
a specific process, and (3) ways of being someone or something in particular times and places (Jackson and Warren 2005).

**Diasporas and Postmodernity**

Appadurai characterizes today’s world as a “translocal,” “interactive system” that is “strikingly new” (1990, p. 1). Millions of people are on the move, as refugees, migrants, tourists, terrorists, pilgrims, proselytizers, laborers, businesspeople, development workers, employees of NGOs, soldiers, sports figures, and media-borne images. So significant a process is transnational migration that many Mexican villagers find “their most important kin and friends are as likely to be living hundreds or thousands of miles away as immediately around them” (Rouse 1991, p. 9). Yet we have seen that many migrants lead multilocal lives, as they regularly phone, e-mail, or visit their native communities; send back cash; or watch “ethnic TV” in North America. Dominicans in New York City, for example, have been described as living “between two islands”—Manhattan and Santo Domingo (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Many Dominicans, like migrants from other countries, migrate to the United States temporarily, seeking cash to transform their lifestyles when they return to their homelands.

With so many people “in motion,” the unit of anthropological study expands from the local community to the diaspora—the offspring of an area who have spread to many lands. Postmodernity describes our time and situation: today’s world in flux, with people on the move who have learned to manage multiple identities depending on place and context. In its most general sense, postmodern refers to the blurring and breakdown of established canons (rules or standards), categories, distinctions, and boundaries. The word is taken from postmodernism—a style and movement in architecture that succeeded modernism, beginning in the 1970s. Postmodern architecture rejected the rules, geometric order, and austerity of modernism. Modernist buildings were expected to have a clear and functional design. Postmodern design is “messier” and more playful. It draws on a diversity of styles from different times and places, including popular, ethnic, and non-Western cultures.

Postmodernism extends “value” well beyond classic, elite, and Western cultural forms. Postmodern is now used to describe comparable developments in music, literature, and visual art. From this origin, postmodernity describes a world in which standards, contrasts, groups, boundaries, and identities are opening up, reaching out, and breaking down.

**Agency**

As we discussed in Chapter 2, any cultural product can be considered a text. Because individuals “read”—that is, consume and process—texts differently, the meaning you derive or manufacture from the text often differs from what its creators intended. (The reading or meaning that the creators intended, or the one that the elites consider to be the right meaning, can be called the hegemonic reading.)
The active role that individuals play in interpreting, using, making, and remaking culture is called **agency**. Illustrating agency, “readers” constantly produce their own meanings, some of which may resist or oppose the hegemonic meaning of the text. Sometimes readers focus on antihegemonic aspects of a text. Enslaved people in the American South did this with reference to the Bible when they preferred the biblical story of Moses and deliverance to the hegemonic lessons of patience and obedience their masters taught them (e.g., the book of Job).

In his book *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), John Fiske argues that each individual’s use of popular culture is a creative act (an original “reading” of a text). (For example, *Glee*, Lady Gaga, the World Cup, the Superbowl, or *Avatar* mean something different to each of their fans.) As Fiske puts it, “The meanings I make from a text are pleasurable when I feel that they are *my* meanings and that they relate to *my* everyday life in a practical, direct way” (1989, p. 57). All of us creatively “read” magazines, books, music, television, films, celebrities, politicians, and other popular-culture products.

Also illustrating agency, individuals manipulate ideas and images to express resistance. Popular culture allows people to oppose, symbolically at least, the unequal power relations they face each day—in the home, at work, and in the classroom. Variant forms, interpretations, and readings of culture, sometimes harnessed by political movements, can express discontent and resistance by individuals and groups who are or feel oppressed. Can you think of examples?

Cultural meanings are neither intrinsic nor imposed. They are manufactured and revised locally. People assign their own meanings and value to the texts, messages, ideologies, and products they receive. Those meanings are influenced by their cultural backgrounds and experiences (but, as we have seen, individuals and groups within a society also vary in their interpretations, actions, and reactions). When external forces enter a society, they are **indigenized**—modified to fit the local culture. This is true of cultural forces as different as fast food, music, housing styles, science, terrorism, celebrations, and political ideas and institutions (Appadurai 1990).

For example, Michaels (1986) found the film *Rambo* to be popular among aborigines in the deserts of central Australia. They had manufactured their own set of meanings from the film, but their reading was very different from the one in the minds of the movie’s creators. The Native Australians saw Rambo as a representative of oppressed minorities, battling the white officer class. This reading expressed their negative feelings about white paternalism and existing race relations. The Native Australians also imagined that there were tribal ties and kin links between Rambo and the prisoners he was rescuing. All this made sense to them, based on their experience. Native Australians are disproportionately represented in their country’s jails, and their most likely liberator would be someone with a personal kin link to them. These readings of *Rambo* were relevant meanings produced **from** the text, not **by** it (Fiske 1989).

Some social commentators see contemporary flows of people, technology, finance, information, and ideology as a cultural imperialist steamroller. This view overlooks the role of agency—the selective, synthesizing activities of human beings as they deal with cultural forces, images, and messages, and as they mobilize against...
perceived injustices. Having examined cultural creation and exchange in the global context, we are ready to focus specifically on cultural unity and diversity—and agency—in contemporary North America.

**Key Terms**

- agency (43)
- civil society (37)
- cultural rights (37)
- diaspora (42)
- essentialism (41)
- hegemonic reading (42)
- human rights (37)
- identity politics (32)
- indigenized (43)
- intellectual property rights (IPR) (38)
- neoliberalism (33)
- nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (37)
- postmodern (42)
- postmodernism (42)
- postmodernity (42)
- subaltern (36)
- text (42)
CHAPTER 4

THE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

REFLECTIONS: WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

❖ The Power of Culture
❖ Conceptualizing Cultural Diversity
  Assimilation
  Pluralism
  Multiculturalism
❖ Theory of Multiculturalism
  Sociocultural Transformation
  Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream
❖ Multiculturalism: The Master Movement
❖ Critical Multiculturalism

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

“Where are you from? You have an accent,” remarked a bank clerk to Kozaitis after her statement “I’d like to open a new account, please.” An immigrant from Greece to the United States at 12 years of age, Kozaitis replied, “Do you mean, originally, or most recently?” “You just don’t sound like a southerner, that’s all; it’s a great accent,” noted Mr. Martinez, a man seemingly in his late twenties with an accent of his own, and oblivious to the bias of his remark. Kozaitis validated his question: “I was born and raised in Greece.” He smiled and nodded empathically as if to say, “I am a lot like you.” She anticipated his self-disclosure and, now with her ethnographer’s hat on, asked, “And you, where are you from?” He explained eagerly: “Well, I am from Mexico; from Spain really. But I was born in Mexico and lived there all my life. Well, almost; I came to the U.S. about nine years ago to go to college. So, culturally, I’m Mexican.” “Hmm, nine years in the U.S. . . . What about American?” probed Kozaitis. With authoritative conviction, Martinez exclaimed, “Hah! Americans have no culture! Actually, I consider myself Latino, but around here they call me Hispanic,” shrugging his shoulders and pointing to colleagues and customers in the bank.

Have you ever asked anyone, “Where are you from?” What prompted the question, and what information were you seeking? What answers did you anticipate? How do likely answers to this question, including those in the dialogue above, convey one’s identity, or identities, in the contemporary world, and in your society in particular?
People associate their “I” and “me” with country of birth, formative enculturation, and language—*primordial ties* to a particular place, at a particular time, and with particular others. For example, eighth graders in an urban middle school in Atlanta, whose parents migrated to Georgia from Mexico, and some of whom were born in Mexico, perceive their social identity as Mexican, “Because I was born in Mexico,” “Because I went to school in Mexico,” or “Because [in the United States] I speak more Spanish than English” (Kuperminc and Murphy 2003).

History, phenotype, religion, and heritage remain key markers of national and ethnic identity. For example, Filipinos may claim “Pinoy features” to distinguish themselves from other Asians in the United States. “Jewish” identity may denote cultural unity among Jews in a given country or the entire Jewish diaspora. For Greeks, the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens revitalized a national, imagined identity as “the first citizens of the world.”

The inclination to identify with a group is intrinsically human. So is the proclivity to differentiate among social groups. The ancient Greeks distinguished themselves as superior to barbarians (all those who were not Greek). A social hierarchy constructed in Rwanda under colonialism placed the Tutsi above the Hutu, but their positions were reversed when a Hutu government promoted genocide against the Tutsi. Affiliation with one group and differentiation from another are associated with differential access to power, wealth, and prestige. In today’s global village, “culture wars” and “identity politics” also are a matter of human rights.

Globalization is evident in the homogeneity of social institutions, cultural symbols, tastes, styles, and living standards, which societies and individuals share across international boundaries. Local diversity is expressed in contemporary forms of social organization, or affinity groups, and the proliferation of cultural identities. We carry social identities that others ascribe to us, for example, “She is an illegal alien,” as well as those that we ascribe to ourselves, such as, “I am a Palestinian Christian Orthodox.” As Mr. Martinez exemplifies above, in a complex and increasingly changing global system, knowing and expressing who we are, what we call home, and how to describe ourselves is a challenge.

Africans assert an identity that differentiates them from African Americans, with whom others may lump them but with whom they share little cultural common ground. Consider the professor from Nigeria who resents being “talked down to by white people who treat me like I am incompetent because I look black.” Recent immigrants to the United States from African countries differ historically, demographically, and culturally from African Americans, whose oppression under slavery remains a defining marker of their African and American heritage. Members of the African diaspora promote movements to shape their cultural identity and collective trajectory locally and globally, not only as “Africans,” but as peoples from different countries in Africa (Arthur 2000).

Increasing immigration, migration, and flows of refugees the world over generate “identity crises,” and collective movements to secure the safety of communities vulnerable to socioeconomic and political exclusion (Giddens 1991). With primordial identities, we now observe transnational identities, political identities, and “identities of struggle.” The state, once the prime mover of nation-building and identity ascription,
is now the product of self-defined nations and identity groups that actively influence and reshape the state.

Mr. Martinez’s reference to being “from Spain really,” but “born in Mexico,” speaks to a globalization and identity rooted in the interests of European economic and political elites. His denial of American culture, and preference to be “Latino,” expresses his subjective, self-ascribed identity with the Latino/a movement, which mobilizes Spanish-speaking Americans to claim and assert a community of their own. Simultaneously he rejects the label “Hispanic” as an invalid and imposed category (e.g., from the census). Today, on a worldwide basis, as well as in our own society, political movements take the form of identity politics. The collective agency of affinity groups shapes the multicultural society, of which you are now citizens.

The Power of Culture

North Americans construct identities on the basis of culture. That is, people use culture (shared experience, knowledge, and values) to organize society into multiple groups with political, economic, educational, and moral goals. The coexistence of these culturally-defined groups within a nation-state constitutes a multicultural society. For example, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Bosnians, and Guatemalans in the United States or Canada may be organized and identified on the basis of their heritage and shared cultural practices and beliefs. Along with numerous other identity groups, they contribute to a “national culture.”

A conventional view of culture holds that it is the social glue that binds people with a common past through its transmission from one generation to the next. Early anthropologists, who studied small-scale, technologically simple societies, portrayed culture as passive, enduring, and inherited. They saw culture as tradition, something unifying individuals to form a whole, politically homogeneous society.

A newer anthropological focus on contemporary populations and social processes shows culture not as a static, age-old way of life, but as a dynamic force capable of segmenting society into varied subgroups. Culture is a given of our human past, but it also is the very basis on which humans rely to create and construct new social identities in the present.

The new emphasis, and a focus of this book, is on the role of human agency. This refers to the actions that individuals, especially leaders and mobilizers of culturally-defined groups, take to create multiple cultural identities.

Multiculturalism (from here on abbreviated as MC) is a volatile force. Based on the idea of culture as power, MC has social, ideological, political, and economic dimensions. It pervades the worlds of work, government, public service, and personal relations. We confront elements of MC when we study, vote, socialize, and watch television. MC influences marketers of products, lobbyists advocating political change, physicians recommending treatment plans, architects designing accessible office buildings, and executives seeking to enhance workplace diversity.
MC is a pervasive yet ambiguous type of social organization in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and the subject of extensive research across the social sciences and humanities (Adams 2008; Kolig 2010; Overmyer-Velazquez 2010; Stein 2007; Tierney 2010). MC reflects large-scale population movements, including immigrants, migrants, and refugees, who bring along and share aspects of their natal cultures with fellow newcomers and hosts. The media transmit a myriad of cultural elements to their audiences (Parekh 2006, 2008; Modood 2007; Kiviso 2002). Because of its political implications, especially its threat to conventional elites, MC has advocates, opponents, and critics (Prato 2009; Barry 2001; Turner 1993; May and Sleeter 2010).

In this book we present MC as a demographic fact, a social condition, an idea, a movement, and a part of our economy. We also explore the causes of its emergence, and the mechanisms of its complexity and perpetuity.

> **Conceptualizing Cultural Diversity**

Basic to modern nation-states is socioeconomic stratification—differential access to resources, including the means of production. Stratification and segmentation by conventional elites (the division of society into discrete classes) produce a multiplicity of ranked cultural units, along with evaluations of their intrinsic worth. Efforts by contemporary culturally diverse elites to expose, challenge, and change this ranking system constitute the crux of the movement known as MC (Goodwin and Jasper 2009).

Cultural diversity refers to variation in institutions, traditions, language, customs, rituals, beliefs, and values. All nations have such internal variation. Recent settlers of North America trace their origins to Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Within the United States and Canada, many groups claim a particular heritage (e.g., ethnic roots) that distinguishes them from other such groups and from a mainstream, dominant national culture (Schaefer 2009; Fong 2008; Takaki 1993). Today almost 13 percent of the population of the United States is foreign-born. The diversity among these immigrants is amplified by their ties to and overlapping identities with their country of birth (Foner 2003; U.S. Census 2005). Other kinds of groups within the United States are based on shared occupational status and identity. Still other expressions of diversity are contrasts among rural, urban, and suburban lifestyles.

Another set of groups is defined by perceptions of reality, or cognitive ties—what people know or think they know. Knowing complements two other kinds of social alignment: (1) being—social links corresponding to primordial ties such as kinship, descent, caste, or religion—and (2) doing—membership reflecting the civic ties that characterize nation-states, such as residence and participation in a district, county, state, province, or other governmental or administrative unit and its affairs, including work (Geertz 1963). In contemporary North America, cognitive ties compete, and coexist, with primordial and civic ties. These three means of social organization breed a variety of cultural units.

Diversity within the United States and Canada, and increasingly in all western European countries, is now a social fact. MC, by contrast, particularly its political
manifestation, is a recent North American achievement. MC stands for (1) the acknowledgment of variation, (2) the belief that all culturally organized segments merit equal value, scholarly interest, and political representation, and (3) the practice of seeking economic, political, and cultural parity by and for marginalized groups.

MC emphasizes the role that culture plays in protecting vulnerable individuals in complex, postmodern societies. It recognizes individual freedom to define oneself and to claim particular identities. Consider the words of Gloria Anzaldua, a Chicana, Tejana, feminist lesbian who was raised on the U.S.-Mexican border: “If going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—una cultural mestiza—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (Anzaldua 1987, pp. 21–22). MC differs from its predecessors, assimilation and pluralism. Each term corresponds to a way of dealing with diversity and a period in North American history.

Assimilation

Assimilation refers to the merging of groups and their traditions within a society that endorses a single common culture. Assimilation requires minorities to adopt the traits of the dominant culture. Assimilation was encouraged during the Great Immigration around 1900 and through World War II. This model applied mainly to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) who have dominated the United States
since its English colonization, and to the European immigrants who followed, including Germans, Irish, Italians, and Russians. Native North American Indians, the first settlers of the Americas, and the enslaved Africans who began to arrive in the 17th century were not easy candidates for assimilation. These groups, who were clearly different in physical appearance (phenotype) from the whites, were excluded from full assimilation. “White ethnics,” by contrast, such as Greeks and Italians, were encouraged to embrace the motto *E pluribus unum*, to forge one nation out of many nationalities.

The idea of a melting pot assumes that immigrants want to emulate the dominant group and seek to melt into one people. Blending is neither democratic nor selective. Rather, assimilation assumes that all groups that have had lower or marginal status would choose, and ought, to adopt dominant traits as their own. However, the assimilationist model has several flaws. Absorption into a mass culture means erasing prior cultural traits and identities—changing names, dress, speech, values, and behavior. Such adjustments foster “passing” or “fitting in.” Assimilation requires internal, psychological allegiance to the dominant group, as well as external, physical similarity. People who look like the dominants are most likely to blend in. Consider the first-generation American-born descendant of Greek peasants, Demetrios Demosthenis. By graduating from an Ivy League college, changing his name to James Demos, and dressing in preppy garb, he manages to become the “Ralph Lauren poster child.” However, these markers in themselves don’t get him far on Wall Street. His stature of 6 feet, fair skin, light-brown hair, and midwestern English combine to give him the stamp of social approval.

Assimilation rejects the value of native or ethnic customs. Allegiance to indigenous customs is incompatible with mainstream success. Loyalty to traditions from the old country declines as immigrants and their offspring negotiate upward mobility. Moreover, evident *racial* differences and categories do not assimilate. Race isn’t as malleable as ethnicity is. The African-American physician may be mistaken for a secretary in her own medical office. A journalist who immigrated from Cuba at age seven, later educated at Columbia University, remains the “token Latino” in his agency. Following a phone conversation with his new roommate (who he has learned via Instant Messaging is “Asian”), an American-born first-year college student of “mixed” Asian and European extractions remarks with surprise, “He doesn’t *sound* Asian!” Racism may not always be conscious or deliberate, but it contaminates the culture of organizations and jeopardizes the integrity of individuals.

The assimilationist model fosters individuals, not groups. That is, individuals may blend; groups do not. Theoretically, a Yugoslav in the United States can assimilate to the dominant culture, as can an immigrant from Pakistan or an American from rural Appalachia. However, Yugoslavs, Pakistanis, and rural Appalachians do not assimilate into the mainstream collectively.

The assimilationist model assumes and emphasizes a single and proper cultural core. This presumption of a normative national pattern of values and behavior differentiates numerous marginal and peripheral groups. From these “subcultures,” the elite may select “qualified” individuals to join the privileged class, offering them access to resources and cultural capital.
Pluralism

Pluralism, not to be confused with the concept “plural society” to be discussed in Chapter 5, holds that ethnic and racial difference should be allowed to thrive, so long as such diversity does not threaten dominant values and norms. This view emerged in the 1970s, in the context of migration from eastern and southern Europe and Asia, and growing participation by African Americans and Hispanics in the labor force, higher education, and the Civil Rights movement. Unlike assimilation, pluralism embraces racial as well as ethnic differences. However, its emphasis is on moral relativism, a social ethic rooted in tolerance of diversity, rather than acceptance and appreciation of collective behavior that may contradict or threaten a dominant culture.

Notions derived from social Darwinism underlie pluralism. One is the idea that social groups compete for resources and power and that they win or lose based on intrinsic qualities that make particular groups more or less fit than others. Pluralism interprets the relative fortune of groups through stereotypes involving their assumed strengths and weaknesses. East Indians, for example, may be perceived as ambitious, but the family orientation of Mexican Americans may be seen as impeding their mobility.

While tolerating diversity, pluralism maintains the need for a dominant culture. It also accepts stratification and inequality of different classes and racial and ethnic categories. Pluralists may admire President Obama’s academic achievements, but the presence of a “black” president and an African-American first lady in the White House may threaten their sense of America proper. Also, pluralism regards ethnic boundaries as firm, cultural borders as static, and identities as fixed. Pluralists speak of “the Italians,” “Asians,” and “blacks”—promoting a monolithic image of each group while ignoring diversity and cultural fluidity within each social category.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism differs from assimilation and pluralism by (1) recognizing a multiplicity of legitimate cultural cores or centers, (2) acknowledging cultural criteria beyond ancestry or nationality as the source of group formation, and (3) promoting democratization and equity among groups. Assimilation and pluralism are founded on the maxim E pluribus unum (From many, one). MC, by contrast, introduces a new ethos: In one, many. The MC society is constituted not by various traditions blending into one, but by the coexistence of many heritages and newly invented traditions within a single nation-state. Perpetuation of heritages and newly constructed traditions provide continuity, order, and meaning to newcomers, while making it possible for them to participate as citizens in a common civic culture as constituted by the host state.

MC is manifest in many forms. First is MC as fait accompli, a neutral condition describing present-day society and rooted in demographic reality. The vital statistics of our population depict its global origins, phenotypical variety, occupational diversity, and mosaic of cultural traits. Heterogeneity is a social fact. In a generation North America has undergone a fundamental transformation. Increasingly our society is organized according to the conceptualization, regulation, and management of different cultural categories.
Second is MC as ideology, a doctrine that influences our economic, political, and social systems. As a new moral order, MC pushes society toward sociocultural equity. For example, MC advocates for visitability, homes designed with at least one no-step entrance and wider doorways to accommodate visitors with disabilities and older adults. The various segments of our population, along with their institutions, behavior, and beliefs, are seen as having legitimacy and value.

Third, MC is manifest in policy and laws that seek to redress economic, political, and social inequities. MC combats discrimination based on such factors as origin, sex, and age. As policy, MC supports legal rights that government and private industry extend to persons by virtue of their citizenship and their membership in a cultural category. MC influences all domains of society, including education and the media. Diversity is mainstreamed in workshops and school curriculum reform and through media images.

MC as decorum permeates personal relations. Business transactions, romantic liaisons, friendships, and casual conversations are regulated by political correctness (PC), the unwritten, and often-flawed code of etiquette of contemporary society. At best PC helps people control their biases during cross-cultural interactions. At worse it stifles communication across individuals and groups who otherwise might benefit from enhanced mutual understanding.

The most salient manifestation of MC is as identity, a psychosocial and political orientation that individuals construct and that is shared by people united by a common status or experience. MC as identity is expressed in the formation of affinity groups. These groups rival such institutions as the biological family, neighborhood, and local community as “the nursery of human nature” (Cooley 1909). Affinity groups take their place alongside older reference groups such as political parties, religious affiliations, unions, and professional organizations (Hyman 1942).

Affinity groups have emerged from, and often because of, subcultural status. Implicit in the term subcultures is a hierarchical relation between those units and a national culture. They are identified as subcultures by a dominant, and presumably more valuable, culture of comparison. The prefix sub denotes “below,” therefore “less than,” a higher culture. MC, by contrast, conceptualizes “the other” as simply different, in a conscious attempt to establish equity between varied segments of the population. Marginalized affinity groups depend on action and politics for their existence. They are consciously constructed by people who share a common experience of living. They proliferate as black diaspora women, Asian Pacific homosexual men, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and hundreds of other identities.

MC has overt and covert forms. This distinction affects the ways in which diversity is recognized and mobilized. Overt diversity includes variation in skin color, sex, or age. Such markers as mode of dress and accent also denote difference, and symbols alert us to variation in our midst. Indian women may use a velvety dot (bindia) on their forehead to show they are married. Jewish men may wear a yarmulke. Poor people may wait in the rain to get into a soup kitchen. External markers, including phenotype, subject groups to evaluation. The Canadian census includes a category called “visible minorities.” When valuation is based mainly on appearance, however, it is likely to be flawed or unfair. It may entail enhanced status for some or denial of rights for others.
Covert diversity also can be genuine and powerful. Orientations that may be concealed include class, religion, sexual orientation, country of origin, and natal region. Bearers of hidden traits are advantaged by their ability to “pass,” or to control their expression situationally and contextually. Consider the lesbian who presents herself as “straight” in a competition for a job. But pretending takes a psychological toll. The dominant etiquette may suggest that certain identities remain concealed. But consciousness raisers and mobilizers (community organizers) bring such covert identities to the surface and use them for affirmative action. Other people may then resent the public expression of formerly concealed identities by social movements aimed at what they perceive to be “special rights.” Taking pride in once-hidden identities, activists may strive to make the identity apparent—for example, through organization, speech, mannerisms, or dress.

MC is a new social contract in the making. Its chief organizing principle is culture. Political activism has spread awareness of difference within North America. MC validates the past and present contributions of various culturally defined groups. For example, black activists have stressed key roles that African Americans have played in the economic development of the United States. MC exposes inequality, such as educational and economic disparities when Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans are compared with other Americans. MC also advocates academic parity—for example, the inclusion of women’s or African-American studies in the core undergraduate curriculum.

**Theory of Multiculturalism**

Central to MC as a form of social integration is its relation to political power and its effectiveness in promoting change. In its most popular and palatable form, MC acknowledges human diversity. Its ethical relativism assumes that cultural variation should be lateral rather than hierarchical. In other words, the various culturally defined groups within the multicultural society should be valued equally, with equal rights and status, rather than existing in a hierarchy, in which some groups rank higher than others.

**Sociocultural Transformation**

Technological change is the prime mover of social and cultural transformation. Simple technology is associated with slow change, whereas complex technical advances speed the alteration of economic, political, and social institutions (White 1949/1969; Harris 1979; Lenski, Lenski, and Nolan 1991). The Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the mid-18th century, led to the rapid concentration of people in cities. Contemporary technological progress, especially in transportation and the electronic media, has produced the Information Revolution. Human life is now determined chiefly by access to and application of technology and ideas in a global market economy. Concomitant with developing forms of economic and social organization are systems of meaning that people adopt to shape, define, and justify their lives. One of the most compelling features of contemporary societies is the role that culture, particularly human action and symbolism, plays in organizing and integrating our lives.
In nonindustrial societies, primordial attachments, including heritage, territory, descent, and marital alliances, are the main forms of sociocultural integration. Such societies may offer a fairly coherent moral code and congenial way of life for their members. Hunting and gathering groups feature homogeneity, social and cultural unity, and political and economic equality, with stratification limited to gender and age. Members share resources, quality of life, and a common system of meaning.

Following the invention of agriculture, an increase in economic specialization was accompanied by the growth of social and political stratification. Agrarian communities were linked to cities, nation-states, and market economies. Kinship diminished as a cultural force, as formal economic, political, and religious institutions assumed a larger role in regulating interpersonal relations. Formal education supplemented enculturation as a socializing force. This also increased specialization and social inequality.

Later, with the Industrial Revolution, the dominant source of collective consciousness became people’s relation to the production and consumption of goods in a market-oriented society. Occupational identities, loyalties, and ties assumed a new prominence. Economic specialization intensified, along with the formality and complexity of government, education, and religion.

Today’s high-tech economy, based on services and information processing, has produced new forms of social organization. People now have social identities based not only on “who they are” and “what they do” but also on “what they know.” Senses of self and of belonging are increasingly fueled by ideational energy. People who share political, psychological, and cognitive orientations establish new groups and identities. In North America, identities based on culture coexist with identities that have more conventional roots, such as ancestry, territory, and original homeland.

Globalization erodes old comfort zones, while communities develop new ones to meet their needs. Large-scale forces are pushing people worldwide into a general state of fragmentation, imbalance, disequilibrium, insecurity, and confusion. Correspondingly, people struggle, using culture as an organizing strategy, to build a congenial way of life and a coherent identity based on shared experience and meaning.

**Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream**

MC expresses our need to belong. Today’s North Americans are building relations, bonds, and loyalties through common knowledge. We may call this form of integration **ideational solidarity**. The need to belong and to resist inequality translate into voluntary group construction, with the creation of charters for collective rights (Featherstone 1990; King 1991).

The global organization of work moves people and cultural content across national boundaries, creating a diverse workforce (Johnston 1994). People may sever existing ties and create new ones. Individuals often abandon, or modify, old patterns of behavior and thought and invent others for a new location (Wolf 1982). Today, social integration relies less on a shared past and territory, or descent, than it does on a shared present and political position.

What do we mean when we speak of culture as an integrative, mobilizing force? A culture may develop when individuals who share experiences and interests unite and organize. Individual interests and rights are merged, articulated, and valorized.
as group interests and collective rights. The psychosocial plight of persons becomes the social plight of a group, a process that transforms the personal into the political (Calhoun 1994). For example, while the American Association of Retired Persons advocates for the rights of all senior citizens, leaders of the Gray Panthers, the Older Women’s League (OWL), and the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare represent the interests of particular segments of the elderly population (Quadagno 2008).

When a personal predicament is articulated as a sociocultural phenomenon, it often warrants economic accommodation and attains political legitimacy. For example, when a gay man seeks validation and protection as an American citizen, he does not talk about his sexual behavior. Rather, he marches in a pride parade with thousands of other “Queer Nationalists” and displays a sign that reads: “It’s about Human Rights, Stupid!” MC is more than human diversity, personal preference, and artifacts. It is the political organization of culture in contemporary nation-states. A striking feature of contemporary society is the active role that people play in constructing and defining culture.

Individuals who are mobilizing agents constitute another determinant of MC. These are elite members of minority groups, who also belong to the national elite. Often they are artists and intellectuals with access to major social institutions, especially education and the media. Their effectiveness reflects their strength and advantages as the privileged of the underprivileged. They have the technical means, including the written word, to contest inequity. In doing so, they give voice to a group of “others”
marked by ethnicity, race, gender, and other social classifications. In 1990, leaders created the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a law that went into effect in 1992. It ensures that people with conditions that limit their capacity to walk or to see have access to employment, transportation, and public spaces.

The commercialization of MC has also influenced North American society. Corporations consider the gay market, the Hispanic market, and the senior market as they produce and advertise goods, services, and information. Clever marketers have generated xenomania, love of anything foreign, from ethnic prints, jewelry, food, and music, to spiritualism. At home, Americans may display foreign artifacts, such as African masks in an Irish Catholic household.

The commoditization of culture and the marketing of MC also benefits people who produce and sell items associated with their own native culture, heritage, or present culture of reference. Shops specializing in African goods, Native American objects, and international gifts are a booming business in metropolitan centers. Ethnic enclaves and areas with concentrated gay and lesbian populations have specialty shops for local customers and interested visitors. Confirming diversity’s mass appeal are catalogs that target goods, services, and ideas to specific cultures. Americans are consumers, and MC is a hot commodity.

Over the past several decades, social movements have produced significant changes in North America. Here some 150 people march in Boston’s second Disability Pride Day. The event aims at celebrating the lives of people with disabilities, educating the general public, and demonstrating that disability is a natural part of the human experience. Speakers at the event stressed rights to equal access and participation in society. This photo shows that people of many backgrounds, ages, and identities are unified politically by the disability movement.
Effective multicultural marketing recognizes in-group variation. For example, retailers do not stock each Hispanic-oriented store in exactly the same way. Products may be geared toward middle-class Cuban shoppers in Miami, immigrants from Mexican towns in Los Angeles, and students of Puerto Rican ancestry in New York. Some retail executives try to tweak stores, region by region. According to one merchandise manager, a “Southern Californian Mexican-American is very different from a San Antonio Mexican-American” (Steinhauer 1997).

Mainstream companies also target gay men and lesbians as part of their efforts to reach particular consumer segments. Stuart Elliott (1997) noted that images associated with gay men and lesbians have become increasingly prevalent in print advertisements for products as disparate as Absolut vodka, American Express traveler’s checks, Subaru automobiles, and Gardenburger vegetable patties. Such images also are turning up on TV, in commercials aimed at general audiences as well as gay and lesbian consumers.

The Centers of Cultural Production

The United States features an elaborate system of classifying and ranking groups. People are divided into status groups, including sociocultural peripheries organized by varied social and cultural criteria of membership. The society is culturally diverse, with social segments that remain symbolically subordinate to a ruling elite. A dominant culture of comparison is formed by occupants of a center, who possess a standardized set of credentials and qualifications. To borrow from Marx’s paradigm, they own and control the means and relations of cultural production.

People on the subordinate periphery of production provide services that are necessary but considered less lucrative or less prestigious. For example, in “research universities,” teaching often is devalued and assigned to a subordinate and peripheral “teaching track.” Faculty whose primary workload is instruction typically receive lower salaries and inferior prestige. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the “visitors” or part-time instructors (PTIs). Like all “guest workers,” they are denied citizenship rights and privileges, despite their years of formal education and doctoral degrees. Another dubious tactic of research universities is to produce more Ph.D.s than there are tenure-track jobs available. The presence of “teaching faculty,” despite their treatment as “second-class citizens,” increases credit hour generation and tuition money for the university. These teaching minorities also meet the university’s primary responsibility to the public: the education of an informed and skilled citizenry. Consider comments by a nationally recognized expert speaking to an audience of faculty, students, and staff. He asserted that millions in funded research is the defining feature of a research university. He justified the inequitable distribution of material and symbolic rewards among entrepreneurial researchers and teaching faculty by ascribing to the latter the compensatory internal gratification of teaching. They do it, he said, “just because they love it.”

The culture of power in contemporary North America is increasingly hétéromorph, that is, varied in appearance. Activists tend to stereotype the center as a monolithic world of wealthy WASP males. Actually, the emerging culture of power, thriving on cultural capital, selects for certain types of individuals, frequently regardless of sex, age, origin, class of birth, regional roots, sexual orientation, race, or religion. Such
people are distinguished by actual or potential commercial success in the world of cultural production. The worth that society grants them is based on certain constants: creativity, production, competition, and profit. The market value of imagination increases when it is articulated as information, viewpoint, design, technology, service, standard of production, and criteria for defining and improving the human condition. The polarity between the privileged and the underprivileged is marked less and less by conventional contrasts like black and white, male and female, or straight and gay. A more compelling dichotomy is that between the chosen and the rejects—the culturally fit, as determined by the postmodern industrial complex, and all others.

The center reinforces its legitimacy by constantly affirming its superior quality, morality, and value. Intrinsic to this process are media manipulation of particular group images and the deliberate devaluation (“dissing”) of certain social segments.

The battle to maintain credibility by the dominant group may use naturalization: Social stratification is linked to biological and psychological factors. Intrinsic features of biology and psychology are invoked to justify discrimination against those who fail to meet standards of production. The idea of a natural hierarchy has been used to justify sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and ageism.

Another way to justify the subordination of groups is rationalization, the scientific justification of inferiority, which the center presents as fact. The value of the cultural content associated with ranked segments is measured against the dominant culture of comparison. By constructing skewed definitions of other groups, the dominant one sets the standard for human worth and justifies the rewards amassed.

Justifications of stratification are imbued with a myth, a master fiction that supports inequality among groups. The master fiction of contemporary market societies, including our own, emphasizes the opposition of culture and subculture. Before MC, culture had been presented as mass, official, formal, real, desirable, and true. By contrast, subculture referred to folklore, to alternative, unofficial, exotic, limited, segmental, or vulgar patterns of behavior and thought. The dominant culture reinforced the assumed relation between cultural value and commercial success.

**Agency and Resistance**

But this has changed. In a multicultural society, minority cultures that have been deemed inferior by dominant standards of value respond by creating centers and standards of their own. Leaders of those communities, whose inherent “bifocality” informs them of the operative rules in both the dominant and the minority group, mobilize their members to invest and develop inwardly, in opposition to outgroup definitions of humanity. These manifestations of MC contradict what Antonio Gramsci (1971) referred to as the “spontaneous consent” that subordinates give to the centralized, dominant culture in nation-states. Rather, MC demonstrates the effects of planned, collective resistance to state policies that do not meet the needs, or represent the interests, of many Americans.

Individuals are more easily assimilated and accommodated than are clusters. They are also more easily ignored. It is more difficult to assimilate, or obliterate, culturally organized communities. They demand and receive political attention on the basis of difference. Persistence of a dominant culture in contemporary nation-states
breeds many other culturally organized groups who compete for resources, legal protection, and a meaningful life.

Illustrating agency and resistance, Mirta Ojito (1997) describes how hundreds of residents of New Britain, Connecticut, created an organization called Puerto Rican Organization for Unity and Dignity (PROUD) to combat prejudice there. The impetus was a report in which some local business leaders blamed Puerto Ricans for the city’s lack of economic progress. They said Puerto Rican workers were lazy and unreliable, with poor family values and language skills. The only solution for New Britain, they said, was to rid the city of the Puerto Ricans, who, they claimed, strained the city’s public housing and financial resources.

The report caused such a stir that several business leaders apologized for their comments, and two of them lost their leadership positions. Not content with these acts of contrition, Puerto Ricans in New Britain contacted the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, a national advocacy group based in New York, which, in turn, asked the federal government to investigate the handling of public money (which had financed the report) in New Britain.

Historically, New Britain has been a city of immigrants (Irish, Germans, Italians, Poles, and Puerto Ricans), with the last ones to arrive traditionally blamed for alleged shortcomings. By the late 1990s, however, with the loss of jobs in the hardware industry, the city’s economic situation had never been bleaker. Anti-immigrant sentiment had become so pronounced, according to PROUD, that some New Britain business leaders felt emboldened to vent private feelings in a public document (Ojito 1997).

The report spurred heated meetings, demonstrations, and the formation of PROUD. In a letter to town leaders, members of PROUD made several demands. They sought to serve on public boards and city commissions and to have a voice in the city’s economic planning. The anti-Hispanic rhetoric in the report ignited the Hispanic community, propelled its mobilization, and forced businesspeople to pay attention. Puerto Ricans made up 16 percent of New Britain’s population in the 1990 census, increasing to 27 percent in 2000. PROUD forced the city to recognize the purchasing power and voting significance of an organized Puerto Rican population.

The increasing political sophistication of Puerto Ricans in New Britain, moving from anger to specific demands and, later, to active participation, is similar to what has happened among Hispanic groups across the United States. “It’s like someone lit a keg and it is ready to go,” observed Lisa Navarrete, the public information director of the National Council of La Raza, the largest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. Ms. Navarrete pointed to 1996 voting records (5.2 million Hispanic votes were cast in the presidential election nationwide, a jump of more than a million from 1992) as an example of how Hispanic citizens are influencing politics (Ojito 1997). Hispanics cast 8 percent of all votes in the 2004–2010 U.S. presidential and midterm elections, compared with 5 percent in 1996 (Migration News 2000; Ramos 2005; Fenner 2010).

MC depends on political clout and human agency, the organized efforts of leaders of disadvantaged groups (and their followers). Their role as culture makers has created patterns of thought that question, contradict, and often defy a mainstream center. However, their work does not eliminate a center altogether. Rather, it constructs a new dominant core by infusing it with personnel and influences from varied peripheries. Another
The Multicultural Society

structural manifestation of MC is the creation of multiple centers, or culturelets, within the nation-state. Transformation of the center forces Americans to adjust by constructing such smaller structures based on culture, through which they achieve participation and social integration, and within which they meet emotional and spiritual needs.

Identity Politics
Integral to MC is identity politics, reflecting the beliefs, behavior, and action of culturally diverse and organized categories of men and women who create political realities. Identity politics demonstrates the power of culture to transform society, and culture as power to reconstruct it. Diverse groups of people, whose human rights and political interests have been ignored by a previous, much more homogeneous, power structure, now strive for cultural recognition, social integration, and moral equity. MC and identity politics threaten the conventional nation-state. Moreover, advocacy for the integration of minority interests, customs, and beliefs challenges the status quo and threatens the power of the conventional ruling class. Activist feminists, leaders of color, gays and lesbians, and descendants of the urban and rural poor promote identity politics to ensure inclusion of the “minority perspective” in the national forum.

For example, the family persists as a social institution in the United States, but what constitutes a family has changed drastically in the last 30 years, to include multiple households based on varied relationships. Economic shifts require changes in the organization of kinship, and the actions and circumstances of diverse human beings generate an array of actual families. In addition, the leaders and members of the feminist and gay movements have promoted the social acceptance and moral validation of varied family types.

Education is another social battlefield for identity politics. A college education offers competitive advantages in securing desirable and gainful employment. However, the curriculum and pedagogy, what we are taught and how, depend a great deal on individuals—researchers, scholars, artists, teachers, and mentors. In a multicultural society, due chiefly to recruitment and retention efforts by university administrators, faculties are increasingly diverse in socioeconomic background, national origin, ethnic identity, gender orientation, and religious affiliation. Here the personal becomes political as faculty members rely on “academic freedom” (the right to express their ideas in the classroom or in writing, free from political, religious, or institutional restrictions) to diversify the curriculum and accommodate different learning styles.

If global economic forces diversify and stratify societies, local cultural agents integrate and organize communities. Unique to the development of a multicultural society is the malleability of its social institutions and the increasing influence of minority elites in their organization, function, and expression as citizens of a diversifying, yet shared civic culture.

The Multicultural Paradox
Intrinsic to the making and meaning of the North American mainstream is the multicultural paradox: the interplay of homogeneity and heterogeneity, on the one hand, and essentialism and constructionism, on the other. Homogeneity refers to
biological, social, and cultural similarities of a group, and heterogeneity refers to biological, social, and cultural differences of a group. Essentialism is a belief in natural and fixed characteristics of human categories, such as females as caring or male homosexuals as creative.

The multicultural paradox is evident when nationalists (traditional elites) seek to deny rights to certain groups. Official leaders’ assumptions of a national homogeneity downplay cultural variation. Also, popular assumptions about inferior essences—biological or innate traits—promote discrimination within a socially constructed hierarchy.

Using essentialist notions, multiculturalists draw all marginalized individuals into a collective. Like all leaders, identity politicians recognize the variation and stratification within affinity groups. However, in efforts to gain rights, they claim homogeneity. This strategy promotes the proliferation of interest groups, all arguing for changing policy to allow a more equitable distribution of resources.

As Stephen notes, “The fact that political recognition of women and other marginalized sectors of nations such as indigenous peoples requires political action on the basis of essentialized identity categories points to at least an initial strategy based on affirmative action rather than on abstract notions of universal citizenship” (2005, p. 75). Traditional elites exclude minorities on the basis of essential heterogeneity (their different essences), while new elites emphasize essential homogeneity (their common essences) to push inclusion in the mainstream. Many academics, especially anthropologists, are antiessentialists. They deny that gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity can be understood on the basis of biologically fixed essences. In contrast, both nationalists and multiculturalists see essentialism and homogeneity as true, imagined, or strategic to their political missions. New is the extent to which self-conscious, proactive construction of nature and nurture has become the property of historically underrepresented minorities within a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism: The Master Movement

A social movement is most likely to succeed when its agents have the power to name, define, and interpret events and experiences. Market and media elites produce images and texts that appeal to the masses who, in turn, consume them. The success of the MC movement depends chiefly on its agents’ power to articulate political demands and collective interests by (1) using incidents—evidence—actual events and circumstances to expose prejudice, including racism, sexism, and ageism, (2) publicizing explanations—causes of social inequality, and (3) transmitting interpretations—the meanings of cultural inequities—to ruling elites and masses alike for critical consumption and action.

As a master social movement, MC encompasses all the particular movements in progress, such as the Afrocentric movement and the women’s movement. MC seeks rights and benefits for all minority groups on the peripheries of society. This effort has fueled awareness of stratification in North America and an appreciation of culture as an agent in social change. As a movement, MC emphasizes conscious, directed change. The new elites who represent the varied affinity groups act as change agents—leaders of social reform who mobilize popular participation by fellow members to secure rights on the basis of their culture.
Advocates fight for parity for all segments of the population. This focus differs from the civil rights outlined by the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedoms to individuals. The prospect of extending civil, or human, rights to all distinct groups in one nation-state is more challenging. But the technology of our Information Age facilitates communication and collaboration for a common cause or mission.

Over the past several decades, social movements have produced significant changes in North America. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s eliminated legal segregation and gained rights for African Americans. The Women’s Liberation movement sought for women the same economic, social, and political rights that men enjoy. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 spurred federal action against institutional discrimination based on race and sex. Later, affirmative action was implemented to ensure more equal representation of African Americans, women, and other minorities in the economy and education, spheres historically dominated by white men. To enhance equity in the labor force, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) investigates discriminatory practices within social institutions.

Collective efforts to secure full civil rights for those who define themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have helped change the ways in which Americans view and judge love, psychosexual orientation, sexual behavior, gender identity, and marriage. Legislation to protect the legal rights of domestic partners, including people of the same sex who live together and declare long-term commitment, is gaining acceptance, especially among young Americans—as is gay marriage. Also pursuing organized efforts are people with disabilities, the elderly, and other groups who find that formal institutions do not meet their interests and their needs.

There are several reasons for the rise and success of the MC movement. First is actual or perceived differential access to resources. For example, women now judge their success and comparable worth in the labor market by comparison with men (England 1992). The global women’s movement continues to fight against sexism to ensure greater political participation by women (Davis, Leijenaar, and Oldersma 1991). African Americans compare their representation in our economy, education, and social life with that of other Americans as they battle interpersonal and institutional racism (Wilson 1984; Lichter 1989). Afrocentrism draws on race and culture as organizing principles, promoting African patterns and perspectives as a strategy in seeking the cultural integrity of African Americans (Robinson 1997; Asante 1987, 1988).

Second is actual or perceived economic alienation. Economic factors encourage eventual retirement from official labor participation and thus from the social ties linked to a job. The American economy rewards production, speed, efficiency, and profit. These criteria tend to devalue and marginalize groups that don’t measure up to market demands, including the frail elderly and some people with disabilities. The disabilities civil rights movement combats inaccurate views of people with disabilities and fosters their socioeconomic integration. These efforts have resulted in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Shapiro 1993).

Third is actual or perceived inequality in citizenship rights. Failure to extend legal protection to all citizens spurs organized corrective efforts. For example, the gay movement battles homophobia and negative stereotypes of gays, lesbians, and
bisexuals, and fights to extend their civil and constitutional rights (Mohr 1988). The success of this movement owes much to the composition of its personnel, its concentration of white, educated men and women, who are generally members of the middle and upper classes. The collective capacity to articulate the movement’s mission as a question of human rights transforms sexual orientation from a private matter into a public issue.

Fourth is actual or perceived inferior cultural status. Besides their economic and political disadvantages, certain categories of Americans also suffer from prejudice and discrimination on the basis of their traditions and customs. Rural Americans, the poor, southerners, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans are differentiated from dominant cultural norms because of their cultural difference. They are also subordinated and discriminated against for their presumed cultural inferiority. A Puerto Rican who speaks with an accent is more likely to be judged unqualified for public office than one without an accent. Similarly, expression of certain agrarian values, for example, “freedom from supervision, flexibility of work pace, and daily independence,” subjects farmers to prejudice and limits the degree of integration and political parity farm workers can achieve in large-scale agribusiness (Barlett 1993, p. 79).

Native Americans have faced cultural subordination since the early settlers from Europe distinguished “primitive” native culture from “progressive” European culture. Recently, Native Americans have organized to reclaim lands, to demand control over reservations, to construct their own social standing in national society, and to assert pride in their cultural heritage and identity (Churchill 2002; Josephy 1982; Fost 1991).

As a political movement, MC seeks to promote the interests of all groups that have faced discrimination. Some disadvantaged social segments lack the resources and personnel that political movements require. The Afrocentric movement, the women’s movement, and the gay movement have succeeded because the ranks of each include a strong elite, which effectively advances the political agenda.

The particular movements by self-defined collectivities combine to create a master movement. Seeking economic prosperity, political legitimacy, cultural integrity, personal security, and human worth, the multicultural society has several stances and goals. It questions the superiority and value of a monocultural center. It focuses energies on “decentering,” on recognizing a multiplicity of cultural cores within a single society. MC challenges the naturalized hierarchy of groups. MC recognizes permeable group boundaries, fluid social identities, and multiple memberships and statuses. It reinforces the expression of personal identity through culturally organized groups. It encourages in-group cultural production and representation of collective agony and rage as prerequisites to collective action. MC promotes the use of culture as a source of power—identity politics that rely on numbers and political consensus. It generates practices for self-protection, preservation, and reproduction. It advocates cultural relativism in society consistent with humanitarian principles and universal morality. MC is rooted in a rapidly integrating world system with a proliferation of culture-based groups. The discontent felt by such groups and the mobilization by minority elites foster collaboration aimed at social reform.
The goal of this final section is to examine some of the reactions to MC and some of its misuses (e.g., overreliance on political correctness). MC may be a demographic reality, but not all citizens condone it. Even when we acknowledge diversity as a social fact; partake in public displays of cultural symbols, cuisines, traditions, and rituals; embrace “ethnic” in-laws and co-workers; and support human rights for all, we may crave a sense of security that comes only with the sense of belonging without question to our own familiar social group.

Older Americans and those who have been insulated from intercultural associations often express nostalgia for a real or imagined past. An 82-year-old migrant to Atlanta from Louisiana proclaimed, “In those days we knew what was American, and what was not!” During the 2010 midterm election, white politicians repeatedly asserted their intent to “take back our country”—presumably from such people as Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and their many black, Latino, gay, young, female, and coastal supporters. An affinity for a common past and sociocultural sameness is a human universal. It’s no wonder that when the reality of diversity and multiculturalism surrounds them, many Americans seek refuge in primordial sameness—similar to the autochthony discussed in the previous chapter.

Those who adhere to an image of “our country” as ideally monocultural resist the proliferation and advancement of culturally-identified groups. They see segmentation and fragmentation as a threat to a national, civic culture. In fact, American society is not constituted by bounded, separate, impermeable units of human beings. The United States and Canada are—and have always been—countries populated by people who possess, express, and disseminate multiple values, beliefs, and practices in an ongoing process of cultural exchange. Erroneous beliefs in a hostile “takeover” by minorities do more to threaten our national integrity than the fact of cultural diversity does to impede an integrated society.

Culturally identified groups don’t threaten or erode a civic, national culture. Rather it is the anonymity, alienation, and loneliness of our postmodern society and capitalist economy that inspire citizens to mobilize in a collective effort to create meaningful relationships. As we saw in Chapter 2, Americans do construct a shared, unified civic culture and public identity. This common “American” culture rests on common institutions and experiences. Those include our public education system and exposure to the same media and to sports, public policies, and national tragedies such as 9/11 and the Oklahoma City bombing (Shaffer 2008).

Critical MC promotes equity in legal and human rights and benefits for all. MC doesn’t advocate that Korean nurses who speak with an accent must be promoted because they are “Korean” and have an accent. Rather it advocates that these otherwise qualified professionals must not be denied employment or promotion because of their ethnic and linguistic particularities. Critical MC seeks the protection of human beings from arbitrary and capricious interpersonal and institutional discrimination (Amstutz 2008).

Critical MC includes class as a principal axis of sociocultural differentiation and stratification. MC promotes the rights of all citizens who are denied economic security,
political safety, and educational access, including the white working class and the rural poor. The “underclass,” “working poor,” and “welfare sector,” along with the “wealthy,” all are sociocultural segments that are as subject to evaluation, judgment, and treatment by society’s mainstream as any other collectivity.

Critical MC acknowledges the presence of differentiation and subordination (e.g., sexism, ageism, racism) within the social groups on behalf of which it advocates. It also recognizes that support for ethnic minorities must take note of potential in-group violations of human rights. In the United Kingdom, for example, Muslims have demanded separate court systems and exemption from laws concerning forced marriage, marital rape, and domestic violence (Macey 2009). Advocates of critical MC would object to such exemptions and special treatment.

Critical MC also aims to avoid the pitfalls of a multiculturalism that perpetuates political correctness at the cost of structural social reforms needed to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources. Uncritical forms of MC can chill freedom of speech. Critical MC fosters open and safe communication by citizens of all political persuasions as they attempt to make sense of a highly complex and complicated multicultural world without fear of punishment. Conservative Bill O’Reilly’s remark “Muslims killed us on 9/11” on ABC’s The View on October 14, 2010, prompted two of the show’s cohosts, Joy Behar and Whoopi Goldberg, to walk off in protest. Later that week, National Public Radio fired Juan Williams, a liberal news analyst, who in a conversation with Bill O’Reilly on the O’Reilly Factor remarked that seeing people in “Muslim garb” on airplanes made him uneasy. The stage was set for O’Reilly and other conservatives to patronize Williams, “the only black man on NPR,” by assuring him that “we’ve got your back” and that “everybody likes you now,” all the while demonizing NPR as a symbol of “the left.”

Classism, racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and other axes of exclusion have necessitated identity politics as a strategy by members of subordinated populations to claim their human rights. However, an organic and equitable multicultural society requires more than identity politics and political correctness. It requires policies and practices that reinforce a safe, secure, and meaningful life for all its citizens.

**Key Terms**
- affinity groups (52)
- assimilation (49)
- cognitive ties (48)
- culturelets (60)
- essentialism (61)
- heterogeneity (61)
- heteromorphic (57)
- homogeneity (60)
- ideational solidarity (54)
- identity (52)
- identity politics (60)
- mobilizing agents (55)
- multicultural paradox (60)
- multicultural society (47)
- multiculturalism (51)
- pluralism (51)
- racial (50)
CHAPTER 5

ETHNICITY

REFLECTIONS: “HOW ETHNIC!”

❖ Ethnicity and Social Statuses
  Status Shifting
❖ Ethnic Groups, Nations, and Nationalities
  Nationalities and Imagined Communities
❖ Ethnic Tolerance and Accommodation
  Cultural Assimilation

“HOW ETHNIC!”

Consider the expression “How ethnic!” What images, associations, and meanings come to mind? Does this phrase convey certain physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture, or facial features? What cultural attributes, for example, speech, dress style, or religious beliefs, do you think of as being ethnic? Is ethnicity absolute and salient, or tentative and conditional?

Now utter the phrase yourself. Pay attention to your intonation. What impressions, sentiments, and judgments surface when you observe or imagine ethnicity? Do you feel liberated, threatened, disgusted, or amused? In what ways do these feelings and values inform your behavior and attitude toward people and artifacts? Are you likely to show empathy or antagonism toward a classmate who is ethnic? Do you find it easier to attend an ethnic festival or to pursue a romantic relationship with a person who is labeled ethnic? How do you justify your opinions and actions with respect to ethnic people? Do you feel ethnic yourself?

The remark “How ethnic!” was uttered by a couple of restaurant patrons to describe, and to judge, the maitre d’ who escorted them to their table. The subject was convinced the comment was derogatory. He knew that their description was misguided. Since the patrons were Caucasian, he wondered if they were referring to his dark skin, his accent, or his body type. Could it be his occupation? It surely was not his uniform; he was dressed in a tuxedo.

Regardless of the cues that may have sparked their impression, the subject was left feeling devalued—different and less than. Behind the ethnic image was an immigrant from India, a member of a high caste, and the son of two physicians. His father
had been dean of a medical school. He had been raised among an intellectual elite. Himself an internist, he had taken a temporary restaurant job to help support his family, while he and his wife awaited a residency license to practice medicine in the United States. One’s objective, visible ethnic status doesn’t always correspond to one’s subjective identity.

Traditions, customs, and ceremonies that are the bedrock in one society may be modified or ignored by immigrants who settle in another. Behavior that confirms a woman’s status in an Indian caste system changes when she migrates to North America as an urban professional. Lifestyle requirements in a new society vary, and may even contradict how people act in their country of birth, despite the constancy of ethnic identity. For example, a Filipina science teacher in Brazil lives differently from a Filipina pianist in Chicago. Both live differently from the way a Filipina housekeeper in Athens, Greece, lives. Difference in the cultural life of each is linked to class, profession, and the host society, but all identify ethnically as Filipinas.

Ethnic groups do select particular symbols, rituals, sacred laws, and special feast days to help them preserve a sense of a shared heritage. For Greek Americans, higher education and economic success American-style are primary objectives. Yet they may also be adamant about transmitting the Greek language and Orthodox religion to their American-born children. Middle- and upper-class African Americans sometimes draw on Black English Vernacular (BEV) to reinforce in-group solidarity and affirm shared experience in multicultural America.

Adoption of American core values and practices may incorporate people who ascribe to themselves a Guatemalan, a Chinese, or a Nigerian identity into the educational and economic elite of the United States. It is common for people who claim attachment to an ethnic group or an ethnic identity to behave and think like mainstream Americans. Consider the predicament of a group of Asian college women who maintain strong loyalties to in-group dietary, sexual, and social rules. However, as college students, they participate in spring break, student protests, internships, and the junior-year-abroad program. These habits facilitate alliances with non-Asian peers and secure them a place in mainstream American college culture. One American-born student of Pakistani immigrant parents describes his life as a “double closet.” Beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that he shares with his family and other Pakistanis are unknown to his American friends, teachers, and colleagues. Conversely, his parents and relatives are oblivious to his “other life”—habits and customs of the American college scene.

Today many people live by two or more cultural codes of conduct, depending on the society that hosts them at different times in their lives. Mexicans who work seasonally in the United States maintain a sense of binationalism—affiliation with two nation-states. Dominicans who live and work in the United States have formed a transnational community—cultural patterns, loyalties, and social relations that are regionally rooted but linked to larger systems. An American ambassador stationed in Costa Rica for four years contends with a dual track in the enculturation of his adolescent children. They must learn and practice customs native to Costa Rica and also observe American traditions and rituals. Brazilian immigrants in New York City
They work as low-wage employees to earn enough money to be able to return to Brazil and maintain a middle-class lifestyle there (Margolis 1994).

Ethnicity no longer implies lower class, or inferior social status. Recent waves of migration from Asia, particularly India, Japan, and the Philippines, include a high percentage of physicians, engineers, scientists, and academics. These middle- and upper-middle-class professionals maintain regular contact with friends, relatives, and colleagues in their country, or culture, of birth. They are proficient in their native language. They may speak it preferentially, remain active in the politics of their homeland, and observe native holidays and feast days. This increasingly large segment of the American population identifies itself, and is identified by others, as ethnic. However, a close examination of lifestyle also reveals strong allegiance to mainstream American habits and values. Ethnic diversity is as prevalent among mainstream Americans as it is American mainstream culture among ethnic-identified individuals and groups. In fact, some of the more lavish exhibits of ethnic identity come from individuals and groups who have high status within the North American cultural hierarchy. As one middle-class professional immigrant put it, “We can afford to be ethnic!”
We know from previous chapters that culture is a powerful organizing force that is shared, learned, symbolic, patterned, all-encompassing, adaptive, and maladaptive. Now we consider more closely and specifically the relation between culture and ethnicity. Ethnicity is based on cultural similarities and differences in a society or nation. The similarities are with members of the same ethnic group; the differences are between that group and others.

As with any culture, members of an ethnic group share certain beliefs, values, habits, customs, and norms because of their common background. They define themselves as different and special because of cultural features. This distinction may arise from language, religion, historical experience, geographic isolation, kinship, or race (see Chapters 7 and 8). Markers of an ethnic group may include a collective name, belief in common descent, a sense of solidarity, and an association with a specific territory, which the group may or may not hold (Ryan 1990, pp. xiii, xiv).

According to Fredrik Barth (1969), ethnicity can be said to exist when people claim a certain ethnic identity for themselves and are defined by others as having that identity. Ethnicity means identification with, and feeling part of, an ethnic group and exclusion from certain other groups because of this affiliation. Ethnic feeling and associated behavior vary in intensity within ethnic groups and countries and over time. A change in the degree of importance attached to an ethnic identity may reflect political changes (Soviet rule ends—ethnic feeling rises) or individual life cycle changes (young people relinquish, or old people reclaim, an ethnic background).

We saw in Chapter 2 that people may participate in multiple levels of culture. The various culturally organized segments of a society, including ethnic groups in a nation, have different learning experiences as well as shared ones. Cultural diversity within a nation is associated with ethnicity, class, region, religion, and other factors. Individuals often have more than one group identity. People may be loyal, depending on circumstances, to their neighborhood, school, town, state or province, region, nation, continent, religion, ethnic group, or interest group (Ryan 1990, p. xxii). In a complex society like the United States or Canada, people constantly negotiate their social identities. All of us wear different hats, presenting ourselves sometimes as one thing, sometimes as another.

In daily conversation, we hear the term status used as a synonym for prestige. In this context, “She’s got a lot of status” means she’s got a lot of prestige; people look up to her. Among social scientists, that’s not the primary meaning of “the term.” Social scientists use status more neutrally—for any position, no matter what the prestige, that someone occupies in society. In this sense, status encompasses the various positions that people occupy in society. Parent is a social status. So are professor, student, factory worker, Democrat, shoe salesperson, homeless person, labor leader, ethnic group member, and thousands of others. People always occupy multiple statuses (e.g., Hispanic, Catholic, infant, brother). Among the statuses we occupy, particular ones dominate in particular settings, such as son or daughter at home and student in the classroom.

An ascribed status is one that people have little or no choice about occupying. Age is an ascribed status; people can’t choose not to age. Race and ethnicity usually
are ascribed; people are born members of a certain group and remain so all their lives. An **achieved status**, by contrast, is one that isn’t automatic but comes through traits, talents, actions, efforts, activities, and accomplishments.

In many societies an ascribed status is associated with a position in the social/political hierarchy. **Minority groups** are subordinate. They have inferior power and less secure access to resources than do **majority groups**, which are superordinate, dominant, or controlling. Minorities need not have fewer members than the majority group does. Women in the United States and blacks in South Africa have been numerical majorities but minorities in terms of income, authority, and power. Often ethnic groups are minorities. When an ethnic group is assumed to have a biological basis, it is called a **race**. Discrimination against such a group is called **racism**. (See Scupin 2003; Kuper 2005. Chapters 7 and 8 consider race in biological and social perspective.)

Minority groups are obvious features of stratification in the United States. The 2009 poverty rate was 9.4 percent for non-Hispanic whites, 25.8 percent for blacks, and 25.3 percent for Hispanics (U.S. Census 2010). Census data confirm the inequality that continues to affect African Americans and Hispanics. Inequality shows up consistently in unemployment figures and in median household income. In 2007, median household incomes in the United States stood at $33,916 for African Americans and $38,679 for Hispanics. That same year it was $52,115 for non-Hispanic whites and $66,103 for Asians. The 2007 median income for whites was 54 percent higher than that of African Americans, up from 48 percent higher in 2000 (U.S. Census 2010). The more fortunate are growing even more so.

The number of Hispanics in the United States grew by 33 percent between 2000 and 2008. The national origins of American Hispanics or Latinos/as, who numbered 35.3 million people in 2000 and 46.9 million in 2008, are shown in Figure 5–1.

![FIGURE 5–1 American Hispanics/Latinos, 2008

SOURCE: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010, Table 6.](image-url)
Status Shifting

Sometimes statuses, particularly ascribed ones, are mutually exclusive. It’s hard to bridge the gap between black and white or male and female. Sometimes, taking a status or joining a group requires a conversion experience, acquiring a new and meaningful identity, such as becoming a “born again” Christian or “coming out of the closet.”

Some statuses aren’t mutually exclusive but contextual. People can be both black and Hispanic or both a mother and a senator. One identity is used in certain settings, another in different ones. We call this the situational negotiation of social identity. When ethnic identity is flexible and situational (Leman 2001), it can become an achieved status. B. Benedict (1970), Despres (1975), and B. Williams (1989) all stress the fluidity and flexibility of ethnicity (see also Jackson and Warren 2005).

Hispanics, for example, may move through levels of culture (shifting ethnic affiliations) as they negotiate their identities. Hispanic is an ethnic category based mainly on language. It includes whites, blacks, and racially mixed Spanish speakers. There are also Native American, and even Asian, Hispanics. Hispanic lumps together millions of people of diverse geographic origin—Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and other Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean. Latino/Latina is a broader category, which can also include Brazilians (who speak Portuguese).

Mexican Americans (Chicanos/as), Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans may mobilize to promote general Hispanic issues (e.g., opposition to English-only laws), but they act as three separate interest groups in other contexts. Cuban Americans are richer on average than Chicanos and Puerto Ricans are, and their class interests and voting patterns differ. Cubans often vote Republican, but Puerto Ricans and Chicanos/as are more likely to favor Democrats. Some Mexican Americans whose families have lived in the United States for generations have little in common with new Hispanic immigrants, such as those from Central America. Many Americans, especially those fluent in English, claim Hispanic ethnicity in some contexts but shift to a general American identity in others.

It would appear that the label “Hispanic” is used chiefly by northeasterners in the United States, and by the U.S. Census Bureau. This practice is misleading because it implies that all Spanish-speaking groups have the same cultural identity and that they are all of Spanish extraction. We know that Spanish-speaking populations in the United States and Canada also claim Native American and African ancestry. Furthermore, they distinguish themselves not only according to region or country of origin but also with political labels that signify in-group cultural construction. For example, the label “Latino/a” includes all peoples of Latin American origin, while the classification “Chicano/a” refers specifically to a political and ideological consciousness among Mexican Americans (Russell 1994).

As social categories, including ethnic labels, proliferate in our increasingly diverse society, some people have trouble deciding on their social identity, on a label that fits. One day a Korean-American student asked Kottak, following his lecture on the social construction of race and ethnicity (see Chapter 8), what she was, in ethnic terms. She had been born and raised in the United States by parents from Korea. She
told Kottak about visiting Korea, meeting her relatives there, and being considered by them—and feeling herself—American. She finds it hard to feel Korean. In the United States she is labeled Asian, Oriental, or Asian American. But she doesn’t feel much in common with other Asians and Asian Americans, like Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians. After the discussion, she concluded that a reasonable ethnic label for her was Korean American. Happily, she had found an ethnic identity, important in the contemporary United States.

\section*{Ethnic Groups, Nations, and Nationalities}

What is the relation between an ethnic group and a nation? The term \textit{nation} was once synonymous with a tribe or an ethnic group. All three of these terms referred to a single culture sharing a single language, religion, history, territory, ancestry, and kinship. Thus one could speak interchangeably of the Seneca (American Indian) nation, tribe, or ethnic group. Now \textit{nation} has come to mean a \textit{state}, an independent, centrally organized political unit, a government. \textit{Nation} and \textit{state} have become synonymous. Combined in \textit{nation-state} they refer to such an autonomous political entity, a country, like the United States or Canada (see Farner 2004).

Because of migration, conquest, and colonialism, most nation-states are not ethnically homogeneous, and the term \textit{nation-state} is then a misnomer. A 2003 study by James Fearon found that about 70 percent of all countries have an ethnic group that forms an absolute majority of the population; the average population share of such groups is 65 percent. The average share of the second largest group, or largest ethnic minority, is 17 percent. Only 18 percent of all countries, including Brazil and Japan, have a single ethnic group that accounts for 90 percent or more of their population.

There is substantial regional variation in countries’ ethnic structures. Strong states, particularly in Europe (e.g., France), have deliberately and actively worked to homogenize their diverse premodern populations to a common national identity and culture (see Gellner 1983). Although countries with no ethnic majority are fairly rare in the rest of world, this is the norm in Africa. The average African country has a plurality group of about 22 percent, with the second largest slightly less than this. Rwanda, Burundi, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe are exceptions; each has a large majority group and a minority that makes up almost all the rest of the population. Botswana has a large majority (the Tswana) and a set of smaller minorities (Fearon 2003).

Most Latin America and Caribbean countries contain a majority group (speaking a European language, such as Portuguese in Brazil and Spanish in Argentina) and a single minority group—“indigenous peoples.” “Indigenous peoples” is a catchall category encompassing several small Native Americans tribes or remnants. Exceptions are Guatemala and the Andean countries of Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, with large indigenous populations.

Most countries in Asia and the Middle East/North Africa have ethnic majorities. The Asian countries of Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand contain a large lowland majority edged by more fragmented mountain folk. Such oil-producing countries in the Middle East as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Kuwait contain an ethnically homogeneous group of citizens who form either
a plurality or a bare majority; the rest of the population consists of ethnically diverse noncitizen workers. Several countries in the Middle East/North Africa contain two principal ethnic or ethnoreligious groups: Arabs and Berbers in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia; Muslims and Copts in Egypt; Turks and Kurds in Turkey; Greeks and Turks in Cyprus; and Palestinians and TransJordan Arabs in Jordan (Fearon 2003).

Nationalities and Imagined Communities

Ethnic groups that once had, or wish to have or regain, autonomous political status (their own country) are called nationalities. In the words of Benedict Anderson (1991), they are “imagined communities.” Even when they become nation-states, they remain imagined communities because most of their members, though feeling deep comradeship, will never meet as an actual community (Anderson 1991, pp. 6–10). They can only imagine that they all participate in the same social entity.

Anderson traces western European nationalism, which arose in England, France, and Spain, back to the 18th century. He stresses that language and print played a crucial role in the growth of European national consciousness. The novel and the newspaper were “two forms of imagining” communities (consisting of all the people who read the same sources and thus witnessed the same events) that flowered in the 18th century (Anderson 1991, pp. 24–25).

Over time, political upheavals and wars have divided many imagined national communities that arose in the 18th and 19th centuries. The German and Korean homelands were split after wars, according to Communist and capitalist ideologies. World War I dispersed the Kurds, who remain only an imagined community. Forming a majority in no state, Kurds are a minority group in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Similarly, Azerbaijanis, who are related to Turks, were a minority in the former Soviet Union, as they still are in Iran.

Migration is another reason certain ethnic groups live in different nation-states. Massive migration in the decades before and after 1900 brought Germans, Poles, and Italians to Brazil, Canada, and the United States. Chinese, Senegalese, Lebanese, and Jews have spread all over the world. Some of these (e.g., descendants of Germans in Brazil and the United States) have assimilated to their host nations and no longer feel connected to the imagined community of their origin.

In creating multitribal and multiethnic states, colonialism often erected boundaries that fit poorly with prior cultural divisions; but colonial institutions also helped create new imagined communities beyond nations. A good example is the idea of négritude (black association and identity) developed by dark-skinned intellectuals from the Francophone (French-speaking) colonies of West Africa and the Caribbean.

Ethnic Tolerance and Accommodation

Ethnic diversity may be associated with positive group interaction and coexistence or with conflict (discussed below). There are nation-states in which multiple cultural groups live together in reasonable harmony.
**Cultural Assimilation**

Assimilation was discussed in the previous chapter as a historically specific ideology for dealing with cultural diversity. Assimilation describes the process of change that a minority ethnic group may experience when it moves to a country where another culture dominates. By assimilating, the minority adopts the patterns and norms of its host culture. It is incorporated into the dominant culture to the point that it no longer exists as a separate cultural unit. Not only is the assimilationist model historically specific, it is also culturally specific. Some countries, such as Brazil, are more assimilationist than others are. Germans, Italians, Japanese, Middle Easterners, and East Europeans started migrating to Brazil in the late 19th century. These immigrants all assimilated to Brazilian culture, which has Portuguese, African, and Native American roots. The descendants of the immigrants speak the national language (Portuguese) and participate in national culture. During World War II, Brazil, which was on the Allied side, forced assimilation by banning instruction in any language other than Portuguese, especially in German.

**The Plural Society**

Assimilation is not inevitable. Ethnic distinctions can persist despite generations of interethnic contact. Through a study of three ethnic groups in Swat, Pakistan, Fredrik Barth (1958/1968) challenged an old idea that interaction always leads to assimilation. He showed that ethnic groups can be in contact for generations without assimilating and can live in peaceful coexistence.

Barth (1958/1968, p. 324) used the term plural society, which he extended to the entire Middle East, for a society combining ethnic contrasts and economic interdependence. (Do not confuse this term with the concept of pluralism, discussed in Chapter 4.) Barth borrowed the term from J. S. Furnivall (1944), who first used it to describe the Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia. It also has been used for Caribbean societies (Smith 1965). Furnivall's plural Indonesia consisted of three main ethnic groups: the colonialists (the Dutch), the dominated natives (the Indonesians), and a middle group of merchants and small-scale businesspeople (Chinese immigrants). The comparable groups in the Caribbean were European colonialists, enslaved Africans and their descendants, and Asian (especially Indian) immigrants. Furnivall saw domination and potential conflict as inevitable features of the plural society, which he believed would shatter without strong colonial rule.

Barth (1958/1968, p. 324) offered a more optimistic take on plural societies. Specifically, he saw a plural society as one that combines ethnic contrasts, ecological specialization—that is, use of different environmental resources by each ethnic group—and the economic interdependence of those groups. In Barth’s view, ethnic boundaries are most stable and enduring when the groups occupy different ecological niches. That is, they make their living in different ways and don’t compete. Ideally, they should depend on each other’s activities and exchange with one another. When different ethnic groups exploit the same ecological niche, the militarily more powerful group will normally replace the weaker one. If they exploit more or less the same niche, but the weaker group is better able to use marginal environments, they may
also coexist (Barth 1958/1968, p. 331). Given such niche specialization, ethnic boundaries, distinctions, and interdependence can be maintained, although the specific cultural features of each group may change. By shifting the analytic focus from individual cultures or ethnic groups to relations between cultures or ethnic groups, Barth (1958/1968, 1969) has made important contributions to ethnic studies.

Multiculturalism and Ethnic Identity

As we saw in Chapter 4, the view of cultural diversity in a country as something good and desirable is a key feature of multiculturalism (MC). The multicultural model is the opposite of the assimilationist model, in which minorities are expected to abandon their traditions and values, replacing them with those of the majority. MC promotes the affirmation and practice of cultural/ethnic traditions. A multicultural society socializes individuals not only into the dominant (national) culture but also into an ethnic culture. Thus in the United States, millions of people speak both English and another language, eat both American and ethnic foods, celebrate both national and ethnic religious holidays, and study both national and ethnic group histories. MC succeeds best in a society whose political system promotes freedom of expression and in which there are many and diverse culturally organized groups.

In the United States and Canada, MC is of growing importance. As we saw in the previous chapter, this reflects an awareness that the number and size of ethnic
groups have grown dramatically in recent years. If this trend continues, the ethnic composition of the United States will change dramatically (see Figure 5–2).

Even now, because of immigration and differential population growth, whites are outnumbered by minorities in many urban areas. For example, of the 8,274,527 people living in New York City in 2007, 25 percent were black, 27 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Asian, and 36 percent “other”—including non-Hispanic whites. The comparable figures for Los Angeles (which had 3,770,950 people) were 10 percent black, 48 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Asian, and 31 percent “other,” including non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census 2006b). Table 5–1 illustrates ethnic diversity in Canada, based on the most recently available census figures—2006.

In October 2006, the population of the United States reached 300 million people, just 39 years after reaching 200 million, and 91 years after reaching the 100 million mark (in 1915). The country’s ethnic composition has changed dramatically in the past 40 years. The 1970 census, the first to attempt an official count of Hispanics, found they represented no more than 4.7 percent of the American population, compared with 15.4 percent in 2008. The number of African Americans increased from 11.1 percent in 1967 to 12.8 percent in 2008, while (non-Hispanic) whites (“Anglos”) declined from 83 to 66 percent. In 1967 fewer than 10 million people in the United States (5 percent of the population) had been born elsewhere, compared with more than 38 million immigrants (12 percent) today. The U.S. population grows about 1 percent annually. It rose

![Figure 5–2 Ethnic composition of the United States](image_url)

**FIGURE 5–2  Ethnic composition of the United States**
The proportion of the American population that is white and non-Hispanic is declining. The projection for 2050 shown here comes from a U.S. Census Bureau report issued in March 2004. Note especially the dramatic rise in the Hispanic portion of the American population between 2008 and 2050.

Is it any wonder that diversity and multiculturalism have entered the North American mainstream?

In 1973, 78 percent of the students in American public schools were white, and 22 percent were minorities: blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and “others.” By 2004, only 57 percent of public school students were white, and 43 percent were minorities.

TABLE 5–1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>31,241,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Isles origins</td>
<td>11,098,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other North American origins</td>
<td>10,408,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>10,066,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European origins</td>
<td>9,919,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>6,570,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>5,000,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>4,941,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European origins</td>
<td>4,372,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>4,354,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>3,179,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European origins</td>
<td>2,998,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern European origins</td>
<td>2,723,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and Southeast Asian origins</td>
<td>2,212,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal origins</td>
<td>1,678,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1,445,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,346,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian origins</td>
<td>1,316,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Indian</td>
<td>1,253,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>1,209,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern European origins</td>
<td>1,120,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch (Netherlands)</td>
<td>1,035,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavian origins</td>
<td>1,009,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>984,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Indian</td>
<td>962,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean origins</td>
<td>578,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>500,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab origins</td>
<td>470,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>400,960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


by 2.7 million in 2008: 1.9 million (70 percent) from an excess of births over deaths, the rest from immigration (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010, Table 4). Is it any wonder that diversity and multiculturalism have entered the North American mainstream?

In 1973, 78 percent of the students in American public schools were white, and 22 percent were minorities: blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and “others.” By 2004, only 57 percent of public school students were white, and 43 percent were minorities.
minorities. If current trends continue, minority students will outnumber (non-Hispanic) white students by 2015. They already do in California, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas (Dillon 2006).

Immigration, mainly from southern and eastern Europe, had a similar effect on classroom diversity, at least in the largest American cities, a century ago. A study of American public schools in 1908–1909 found that only 42 percent of those urban students were native-born, while 58 percent were immigrants. In a very different (multicultural versus assimilationist) context, today’s American classrooms have regained the ethnic diversity they demonstrated in the early 1900s, when Kottak’s Austro-Hungarian-born father and grandparents migrated to the United States.

One response to ethnic diversification and awareness has been for many whites to reclaim ethnic identities (e.g., Albanian, Serbian, Lithuanian) and to join ethnic associations. Some such groups are new. Others have existed for decades, although they lost members during the assimilationist years of the 1920s through the 1950s.

MC seeks ways for groups to understand and interact that depend on respect for differences. MC stresses the interaction of ethnic groups and their contribution to the country. It assumes that each group has something to offer and learn from the others, and it uses legal and political means to advance these beliefs.

We see evidence of varied ethnicity and multiculturalism all around us. Seated near you in the classroom are students whose parents were born in other countries. Islamic mosques have joined Jewish synagogues and Christian churches in American cities. To help in exam scheduling, colleges inform professors about the main holidays of many religions. You can attend ethnic fairs and festivals; watch ethnically costumed dancers on television; eat ethnic foods, even outside ethnic restaurants; and buy ethnic foods at your supermarket. Some such foods (e.g., bagels, pasta, tacos) have become so familiar that their ethnic origin is fading from our memories. There is even a popular shrine celebrating the union of diversity and globalization: At Disneyland and Walt Disney World, we can see and hear a chorus of ethnically costumed dolls drone on that “it’s a small world after all.” All these exemplify growing tolerance and support of ethnic groups in contemporary society.

Several forces, some considered in previous chapters but meriting restatement here, have propelled North America away from the assimilationist model toward MC. First, MC reflects the recent large-scale migration, particularly from the less-developed countries to the developed nations of North America and western Europe. MC is related to globalization: People use modern means of transportation to migrate to nations whose lifestyles they learn about through the media and from tourists who increasingly visit their own countries.

The decline of many Third World governments breeds insecurity, and violence and genocide within states create refugees. Also fueling migration is rapid population growth, coupled with insufficient jobs (both for educated and uneducated people), in the less-developed countries. As traditional rural economies decline or mechanize, displaced farmers move to cities, where they and their children are often unable to find jobs. As people in the less-developed countries get better educations, they seek more skilled employment. They hope to partake in an international culture of consumption that includes such modern amenities as refrigerators, televisions, and automobiles.
Contrary to popular belief, the typical migrant to the United States or Canada isn’t necessarily poor and unskilled; rather, he or she is often middle class and fairly well educated. Educated people migrate for several reasons. Often they can’t find jobs to match their skills in their countries of origin (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Margolis 1994). Also, they are knowledgeable enough to manipulate international regulations. Many migrants have been raised to expect a lifestyle that their own nations can offer to just a few. On arrival in North America or western Europe, immigrants find themselves in democracies where citizens are allowed, or even encouraged, to organize for economic gain and a fair share of resources, political influence, and cultural respect. The most-educated immigrants often become political organizers and advocates of MC.

Ethnic identities are used increasingly to form organizations aimed at enhancing the group’s economic competitiveness and political clout (B. Williams 1989). Michel Laguerre’s (1984) study of Haitian immigrants in New York City shows they made no conscious decision to form an ethnic group. Rather, they had to mobilize to deal with the discriminatory structure (racist in this case, since Haitians tend to be black) of American society. Ethnicity (their common Haitian creole language and cultural background) was the basis for their mobilization. Haitian ethnicity then distinguished them from American blacks and other ethnic groups seeking similar resources and recognition. In studying ethnic relations, it is not enough to look at the cultural content of the ethnic group. Equally important are the structural constraints and the political/economic context in which ethnic differentiation develops.

Chapter 4 showed us that, although ethnic groups often face discrimination, their members are not passive victims. Immigrants tend to be dynamic, creative, and courageous people, determined to enhance their chances in the modern world system. Ethnic groups mobilize for political action, often with economic goals. Their members also consciously manipulate multiple identities. Individual choice and purpose are evident in everyday expressions of ethnicity.

In a study of Yemeni Arabs in New York City, Staub (1989) stresses that Yemeni immigrant ethnicity is not static, but achieved, situational, and flexible. Still, specific cultural content is also evident: traditional concepts (e.g., honor and shame), ethnic poetry, distinctive foods, dialects, local and regional history, exclusive ethnic social and political clubs, ethnic political events (called festivals), and dancing. They preferred Yemeni ethnic identity to the more general label Arab.

One side effect of the new immigration and the rise of MC has been to inspire old ethnic groups to strengthen their identity and fight for their rights. One example is Native American success, in the United States and Canada, in reclaiming traditional property rights. In Michigan and Wisconsin, for example, Indians have used the court system to establish privileged hunting and fishing rights, at the expense of hunters, sport fishers, and commercial fishers.

In the face of globalization, much of the world, including the entire democratic West, is experiencing an ethnic revival. The new assertiveness of long-resident ethnic groups extends to the Basques and Catalans in Spain, the Bretons and Corsicans in France, and the Welsh and Scots in the United Kingdom. And, as we have seen, the United States and Canada have been leading the movement toward the multicultural society.
Roots of Ethnic Conflict

Ethnicity, based on perceived cultural similarities and differences in a society or nation, can be expressed in peaceful multiculturalism or in discrimination or violent interethnic confrontation. Culture is both adaptive and maladaptive. The perception of cultural differences can have disastrous effects on social interaction. The roots of ethnic differentiation—and therefore, potentially, of ethnic conflict—can be political, economic, religious, linguistic, cultural, or racial (see Kuper 2005). Why do ethnic differences often lead to conflict and violence? The causes include a sense of injustice because of resource distribution, economic or political competition, and reaction to discrimination, prejudice, and other expressions of threatened or devalued identity (Ryan 1990, p. xxvii).

Prejudice and Discrimination

Ethnic conflict often arises in reaction to prejudice (attitudes and judgments) or discrimination (action). Prejudice means devaluing (looking down on) a group because of its assumed behavior, values, capabilities, or attributes. People are prejudiced when they hold stereotypes about groups and apply them to individuals. Stereotypes are fixed ideas, often unfavorable, about what members of a group are like. Prejudiced people assume that members of the group will act as they are “supposed to act” (according to the stereotype) and interpret a wide range of individual behaviors as evidence of the stereotype. They use this behavior to confirm their stereotype (and low opinion) of the group.

Discrimination refers to policies and practices that harm a group and its members. Discrimination may be de facto (practiced, but not legally sanctioned) or de jure (part of the law). An example of de facto discrimination is the harsher treatment that American minorities, compared with other Americans, tend to get from the police and the judicial system. This unequal treatment isn’t legal, but it happens anyway. Segregation in the southern United States and apartheid in South Africa are two examples of de jure discrimination which are no longer in existence. In the United States de jure segregation has been illegal since the 1950s. The South African apartheid system was abandoned in 1991. In both systems, by law, blacks and whites had different rights and privileges. Their social interaction (“mixing”) was legally curtailed. Slavery, of course, is the most extreme and coercive form of legalized inequality; people are treated as property.

We also can distinguish between attitudinal and institutional discrimination. With attitudinal discrimination, people discriminate against members of a group because they are prejudiced toward that group. For example, in the United States members of the Ku Klux Klan have expressed their prejudice against blacks, Jews, and Catholics through verbal, physical, and psychological harassment.

The most extreme form of anti-ethnic (attitudinal) discrimination is genocide, the deliberate elimination of a group through mass murder. The United Nations defines genocide as acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such” (Ryan 1990, p. 11). Strongly prejudicial attitudes (hate) and resulting genocide have been directed against people viewed as
Discrimination refers to policies and practices that harm a group and its members. This protest sign, hoisted in New Orleans’ lower 9th ward, shows that at least some community residents see ethnic and racial bias in the fact that African Americans in that city bore the brunt of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation.

standing in the way of progress (e.g., Native Americans) and people with jobs that the dominant group wants (e.g., Jews in Hitler’s Germany, Chinese in Indonesia).

In other examples of genocide, dictator Joseph Stalin’s assault on ethnic groups in the Soviet Union led to their forced relocation, mass starvation, and murder. Twenty million people died. The Turks massacred 1.8 million Armenians during World War I. Nazis murdered 6 million Jews. More recently, the Indonesian government waged a genocidal campaign against the people of East Timor. Yet more recent examples of genocide occurred in Bosnia, Iraq, Sudan, Rwanda, and Burundi.

Institutional discrimination refers to programs, policies, and institutional arrangements that deny equal rights and opportunities to, or differentially harm, members of particular groups. This form of discrimination usually is less personal and intentional than attitudinal discrimination is, but it may be based on a long history of inequality that also includes attitudinal bias. One example of institutional discrimination is what Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai call environmental racism, “the systematic use of institutionally based power by whites to formulate policy decisions that will lead to the disproportionate burden of environmental hazards in minority communities” (1991, p. 4). Thus, toxic waste dumps tend to be located in areas with non-white populations.

Environmental racism is discriminatory but not always intentional. Sometimes toxic wastes are deliberately dumped in areas whose residents are considered unlikely to protest, because they are poor, powerless, disorganized, or uneducated. In other cases property values fall after toxic waste sites are located in an area. The wealthier
people move out, and poorer people, often minorities, move in, to suffer the consequences of living in a hazardous environment.

African Americans and Hispanics on average have shorter lives, greater infant mortality, and higher murder rates than whites do, for institutional reasons. They are more likely than whites to live in impoverished, high-crime areas with inadequate access to health care and to opportunities and services generally. This current lack of access reflects a long history of discrimination, both attitudinal and institutional.

Another example of institutional discrimination is that social and economic shifts harm certain groups more than others. African Americans have been hurt especially by the change from a manufacturing economy to one based on services and information processing. Factories, where people with a high school education used to find well-paid (usually unionized) employment, were traditionally located in cities. Now they have moved to the suburbs, necessitating a difficult and costly commute for city dwellers, including many African Americans. The service jobs now available to comparably educated people in urban areas tend to pay much less than the old manufacturing jobs did. Many minorities have not benefited as much from a changing American society as majority groups or even new immigrants have.

**Chips in the Mosaic**

Although the multicultural model is increasingly prominent in North America, ethnic competition and conflict are also evident. We hear increasingly of conflict between new arrivals, like Central Americans and Koreans, and long-established ethnic groups, like African Americans. Ethnic antagonism flared in South-Central Los Angeles in spring 1992, in rioting that followed the acquittal of the four white police officers who were tried for the videotaped beating of Rodney King (Abelmann and Lie 1995).

Angry blacks attacked whites, Koreans, and Hispanics. This violence expressed frustration by African Americans about their prospects in an increasingly multicultural society. A New York Times/CBS News poll conducted just after the Los Angeles riots, found that blacks had a bleaker outlook than whites did about the effects of immigration on their lives. Only 23 percent of the blacks felt they had more opportunities than recent immigrants, compared with twice that many whites (Toner 1992).

Were they right? A 1997 report by the National Academy of Sciences found that competition with immigrants did slightly reduce the wage and job prospects of low-skilled American workers, especially high school dropouts. In New York City and Los Angeles, some black workers had lost their jobs to immigrants. Elsewhere, however, immigration had little impact on the opportunities of blacks, because most blacks did not live in places with large concentrations of immigrants (Pear 1997).

The report found that immigrants had “a negative fiscal impact at the state and local level, but a larger positive impact at the federal level, resulting in an overall positive impact for the United States” in the long run. This is because immigrants tend to arrive as young workers and “will help pay the public costs [i.e., Social Security and Medicare] of the aging baby-boom generation” (Pear 1997). In the main, the report concluded, most Americans are enjoying a healthier economy as a result of the increased supply of labor and lower prices that result from immigration.
But in the short run and in certain areas, such benefits may remain hidden, leading to interethnic conflict. South-Central Los Angeles, where most of the 1992 rioting took place, is an ethnically mixed area that used to be mainly African American. As blacks moved out, there was an influx of Latin Americans (Mexicans and Central Americans). The Hispanic population of South-Central Los Angeles increased by 119 percent in a decade, as the number of blacks declined by 17 percent. By 1992 the neighborhood had become 45 percent Hispanic, almost equaling the black population (48 percent). Many store owners in South-Central Los Angeles were Korean immigrants.

Korean stores were hard hit during the 1992 riots, and more than a third of the businesses destroyed were Hispanic-owned. A third of those who died in the riots were Hispanics. These mainly recent migrants lacked deep roots to the neighborhood. As Spanish speakers, they faced language barriers (M. Newman 1992). Many Koreans also had trouble with English.

Koreans interviewed on ABC’s Nightline on May 6, 1992, recognized that blacks resented them and considered them unfriendly. One man explained, “It’s not part of our culture to smile; in Asia people who smile are considered airheads” (he hesitantly chose the word). African Americans interviewed on the same program did complain about Korean unfriendliness. “They come into our neighborhoods and treat us like dirt.” These comments suggest a shortcoming of the multicultural perspective: Ethnic groups (blacks here) expect other ethnic groups in the same nation-state to assimilate to some extent to a shared (national) culture. The African Americans’ comments invoked a general American value system that includes friendliness, openness, mutual respect, community participation, and fair play. Los Angeles blacks wanted their Korean neighbors to act more like generalized Americans and good neighbors.

Harassment of and violence against racially and ethnically defined groups remain prevalent in North America, as in many other countries. Following the terrorist attack on America on September 11, 2001, many people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent have been victimized unjustly by “racial and ethnic profiling.” Civilians and law enforcement officers have harassed people whose physical appearance or cultural markers suggest Middle Eastern origins. In response, some religious leaders have organized interfaith services to emphasize a common spirituality among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, a movement toward a “religiously pluralistic America” (Goodstein and Niebuhr 2001).

**Aftermaths of Oppression**

Other reasons for ethnic conflict include such forms of discrimination as genocide, forced assimilation, ethnocide, and cultural colonialism. A dominant group may try to destroy the cultures of certain ethnic groups (ethnocide) or force them to adopt the dominant culture (forced assimilation). Many countries have penalized or banned the language and customs of an ethnic group, including its religious observances. One example of forced assimilation is the anti-Basque campaign that the dictator Francisco Franco (who ruled between 1939 and 1975) waged in Spain. Franco banned Basque books, journals, newspapers, signs, sermons, and tombstones and...
imposed fines for using the Basque language in schools. His policies led to the formation of a Basque terrorist group and spurred strong nationalist sentiment in the Basque region (Ryan 1990, 1995).

A policy of **ethnic expulsion** aims at removing groups that are culturally different from a country. There are many examples, including Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s. Uganda expelled 74,000 Asians in 1972. The neofascist parties of contemporary western Europe advocate repatriation (expulsion) of immigrant workers (West Indians in England, Algerians in France, and Turks in Germany).

A policy of expulsion may create **refugees**—people who have been forced (involuntary refugees) or who have chosen (voluntary refugees) to flee a country, to escape persecution or war. For example, Palestinian refugees moved to camps in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 (Ryan 1990, 1995).

**Colonialism**, another form of oppression, refers to the political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended time (Bell 1981). The British and French colonial empires are familiar examples of colonialism. We can extend the term to the former Soviet empire, once known as the Second World.

Using the labels “First World,” “Second World,” and “Third World” is a common, although clearly ethnocentric, way of categorizing nations that may be defined here. The **First World** refers to the “democratic West,” traditionally conceived in opposition to a Second World ruled by communism. The First World includes Canada, the United States, western Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. The **Second World** refers to the former Soviet Union and the socialist and once-socialist countries of eastern Europe and Asia. Proceeding with this classification, the less-developed or “developing” countries make up the **Third World**.

The frontiers imposed by colonialism weren’t usually based on, and often didn’t reflect, preexisting cultural units. In many countries, colonial nation-building left ethnic strife in its wake. Thus, over a million Hindus and Muslims were killed in the violence that accompanied the division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Problems between Arabs and Jews in Palestine began during the British mandate period.

Multiculturalism may be growing in North America, but the opposite is happening in the former Soviet empire, where ethnic groups (nationalities) are demanding their own nation-states. The flowering of ethnic feeling and conflict as the Soviet Union disintegrated illustrates that years of political repression and ideology provide insufficient common ground for lasting unity. **Cultural colonialism** refers to internal domination by one group and its culture/ideology over others. One example is the domination over the former Soviet empire by Russian people, language, and culture, and by communist ideology. The dominant culture makes itself the official culture. This is reflected in schools, the media, and public interaction. Under Soviet rule, ethnic minorities had very limited self-rule in republics and regions controlled by Moscow. All the republics and their peoples were to be united by the core doctrine of socialist internationalism. One common technique in cultural colonialism is to flood ethnic areas with members of the dominant ethnic group. Thus, in the former Soviet
Union, ethnic Russian colonists were sent to many areas to diminish the cohesion and clout of the local people.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), founded in 1991 and headquartered in Minsk, Belarus, is what remains of the once-powerful Soviet Union (see Yurchak 2005). In Russia and other formerly Soviet nations, ethnic groups (nationalities) have sought, and continue to seek, to forge separate and viable nation-states based on cultural boundaries. This celebration of ethnic autonomy is part of an ethnic florescence that—as surely as globalization and transnationalism—is a trend of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

**Key Terms**

- achieved status (70)
- ascribed status (69)
- attitudinal discrimination (80)
- colonialism (84)
- cultural colonialism (84)
- discrimination (80)
- environmental racism (81)
- ethnic expulsion (84)
- ethnic group (69)
- ethnicity (69)
- ethnocide (83)
- First World (84)
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- majority groups (70)
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- nation (72)
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- plural society (74)
- prejudice (80)
- race (70)
- racism (70)
- refugees (84)
- Second World (84)
- state (72)
- status (69)
- stereotypes (80)
- Third World (84)
CHAPTER 6

RELIGION

REFLECTIONS: “WHEN I WEAR THE HIJAB, I KNOW THAT I BELONG”

❖ Church and State
   Politics and Religion
   Protestant Values and the Rise of Capitalism
   Social Control
❖ Religion and Solidarity
   Ritualized Changes in Status and Identity
   New and Alternative Religious Movements
❖ Religion and Change
   Secular Religion
   The World’s Major Religions

“WHEN I WEAR THE HIJAB, I KNOW THAT I BELONG”

On a sunny day in December, with 6 inches of snow on the ground and the temperature near freezing, Kozaitis was driving through the hinterlands of Ohio in a car with four other women. All were dressed in solid black, including thick head scarves folded over and across the chin. The group received long and suspicious stares from curious onlookers when they stopped to fill the tank with gas. One young man asked, “What kind of believers are you?” What could these spectators have been thinking?

Kozaitis and her family were on their way to a monastery to attend a memorial service for her uncle who died 40 days earlier (the required length of time for this postdeath ritual). In Greece black symbolizes mourning the death of a loved one. Depending on the age and relationship of the deceased, Greek women, especially those who ascribe to rural customs, may wear black for life (Loring and Tsiaras 1982). However, an intergenerational group of women wrapped in black attire, without a touch of makeup to conceal their gloomy, anxious-looking faces, and speaking an unfamiliar language, may be out of context in rural Ohio.

North Americans display many cultural markers, including accessories that symbolize religious affiliation or identity. Friday evenings, Orthodox Jewish men and boys wear a yarmulke, while women wear snoods. A crucifix may adorn the neck of a Christian Arab student in Dearborn, Michigan. Patrons at a Russian restaurant in Washington DC, wear an obruchalnoe koltso on the ring finger of their right hand. Young Muslim women studying in a university library in New York City stand out from their peers due to the hijab that covers their head. Nuns wearing layers of black clothing and a wimple welcome a group of schoolchildren and their teacher at a monastery in North Carolina. A priest dressed in a cassock conducts a death ritual in
a cemetery. Amish men with beards, dressed in black straight-cut suits, coats, and hats, cross a snowy road on a horse-and-buggy in Ohio.

We live in a society in which Christianity is the dominant organized religion. As a multicultural nation-state, however, we acknowledge the existence of multiple religions. Often we find the religious rites, rituals, and symbols associated with other faiths fascinating. However, Islam, the religious system of Muslims, remains unfamiliar, ambiguous, or threatening to most Americans.

Westerners perceive the veils that Christian nuns wear as images of “sincere religiosity, purity, and peace” (Roald 2001, p. 254). In contrast, ignorance of the multiple meanings of the *hijab*, combined with ethnocentrism, results in prejudiced interpretations of the veil by the masses, as well as by feminists who seek to “save” Muslim women from what they view as a mechanism of oppression. Lila Abu-Lughod dispels misconceptions of the veil as a mark of sexism. She argues that women redefine the function and meaning of the veil as a symbol of agency and empowerment to claim a cultural and a political identity (2002).

In the West since the 19th century, “the veil has symbolized the inferiority of Muslim cultures.” In Muslim societies “veiling is a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings.” As a patriarchal mechanism, veiling serves to regulate and control a woman’s life. However, “Muslim women, like all other women, are social actors, employing, reforming, and changing existing social institutions, often creatively, to their own ends” (quotes from Hoodfar 2008, p. 434). For example, highly
educated and independent women may choose to wear the veil as an act of resistance to patriarchy, and a symbol of national and ethnic pride.

Homa Hoodfar’s ethnography of Muslim women in Canada reveals their resistance to popular constructions of Islam as an inferior religion, and of Muslims as backwards and dangerous. Through individual and collective efforts, these women seek to integrate Muslims within the dominant Canadian mainstream. Hoodfar notes that “since the veil, in Canadian society, is the most significant visible symbol of Muslim identity, many Muslim women have taken up the veil not only for personal conviction but to assert the identity and existence of a confident Muslim community and to demand fuller social and political recognition” (2008, p. 447).

According to Lazreg, young Muslim women in the United States redefine the veil as “a symbol of rebellion” against tradition. Wearing the hijab becomes a way of reclaiming, asserting, and protecting their ethnic and religious identity in a society that embraces cultural diversity (2009). Subjected to discrimination, harassment, and alienation at school or places of employment, women who see themselves as a visible minority adopt the hijab as visible membership in an affinity group in which they feel secure.

Religious symbols provide humans with emotional and intellectual affirmation of their values and beliefs. Such symbols reinforce a collective identity and community among individuals. As Victor Turner observed, and we demonstrate here, sacred symbols possess a multivocal nature (they have many meanings) that human beings interpret and to which they respond according to their understanding or misunderstanding of such symbols.

Religion is a human universal; however, its functions, rituals, and symbols express and reflect varied histories, ecological requirements, social systems, political interests, cultural practices, and psychological needs. The hijab, a symbol of Islam, can represent religiosity, patriarchy, or women’s independence among Muslims, while it stirs xenophobia (fear of strangers) among westerners.

How might we increase the likelihood that diverse ethnic and religious symbols don’t threaten our national unity as a multicultural society, and that their bearers have a right to their religious expression and cultural integrity? Would we settle for anything else?

**Church and State**

Religion is a cornerstone of North American diversity. Our system of religious pluralism evolved as people fled countries where religious difference and dissent were not respected. Those founders, seeking to preserve religious freedom, also brought strong, and still influential, religious values to the New World. Like ethnicity and national heritage, religion is the basis of identities, organization, and common activity—sometimes with the goal of changing public policy. Increasingly, religion and religious views have entered the political realm, where ads have gone so far as to declare that a vote for a particular candidate is “a sin against God.” On the political left, leaders have targeted evangelicals and warned against fundamentalist involvement in politics. On the right, candidates campaigning as “concerned Christians” have accused those who oppose their views of Christian-bashing.
The U.S. Constitution says government should be neutral but accommodating toward religion. Churches are, however, subject to laws and regulations that affect the rest of the community, including the tax code. Religious institutions are exempt from taxes on funds raised for activities directly related to their religious mission or that serve a charitable purpose. This exemption includes money raised to support the acquisition and upkeep of a place of worship and staff compensation. Funds raised for charitable activities, such as food drives for the hungry or collections for overseas victims of persecution, also are exempt from taxation. Electoral politics, however, is not a tax-free activity. Contributions to political candidates are not tax-deductible, and groups that work to elect candidates are not tax-exempt. Religious groups have the right to engage in such activity, but they cannot continue to operate as tax-exempt organizations, although some of them have attempted to do so.

The government of the United States is supposed to guarantee and protect religious liberty without establishing religion. Rooted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the doctrine that government must show neither official approval nor disapproval of religion. The principle of government neutrality means not favoring one religion over another or over no religion at all. Most Americans say they believe in God, and most also have some kind of religious affiliation. But the U.S. government holds no official religious view and is enjoined against seeking to promote one. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor stated this principle in a 1984 case:

The Establishment Clause prohibits government from making adherence to a religion in any way relevant to a person’s standing in the political community. Government can run afoul of that prohibition in two principal ways. One is excessive entanglement with religious institutions.... The second and more direct infringement is government endorsement or disapproval of religion. Endorsement sends a message to non-adherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community. Disapproval sends the opposite message. (quoted in Freeman 1994)

Article VI, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution declares that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States” (Freeman 1994). Both left and right occasionally have ignored that constitutional mandate. One example was in 1988, when a presidential candidate said he would appoint only Christians or Jews to his cabinet. He wouldn’t feel comfortable with an advisor from some other background, he said. Such a blanket exclusion of Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists, for example, regardless of their personal qualifications, violated the Constitution’s prohibition on religious tests.

Castelli (1984) and Freeman (1994) argue for the need to respect religious differences, views, and values in political debates. Whether Roman Catholic, Christian fundamentalist, New Age religionist, or witch, no American should be excluded from politics or publicly denigrated because of his or her religious views. Yet some leaders who claim to be victims of religious bigotry themselves are guilty of belittling opponents because of religious differences. Politicians routinely insult minority religions or religious views—for example, “New Age philosophy”—in an attempt to marginalize their opposition.
Politics and Religion
With religion as with other components of multiculturalism, we recognize diversity within cultural segments and formal institutions and that different groups have their own agendas. Castelli (1984) and Freeman (1994) suggest that political leaders typically claim to represent a broader constituency than they actually do represent. One example is politicians who refer to their backers as Christians and who claim to speak for those Christians. This claim also may suggest that people with different views are not real Christians. In fact, Christians, even evangelicals, belong to diverse denominations and have varied political opinions.

Still, many southern white Protestant fundamentalists share with feminists, gay rights activists, and African-American leaders the perception that dominant social institutions (such as government and the media) have little use and respect for their beliefs, practices, and values. Like the other groups, fundamentalists (the “Religious Right”) also coalesce (most notably as the Christian Coalition) and work to influence electoral outcomes and public policy. Such people see themselves as the real American mainstream (the silent majority), whose voice too long has been silenced by special-interest groups (e.g., homosexuals) clamoring for special rights and by cultural elites (liberals) seen as controlling media and the government. Other affinity groups and identity politicians fear, oppose, and preach against the Religious Right as ardently as the Christian Coalition does against its perceived enemies. Here religion links up with media and politics, especially through the spread of religious TV (televangelism) and talk radio.

Religion and Solidarity
Previous chapters have stressed the role of political mobilization in forming social identities and culturally organized groups. Historically, religion has been a potent force for social union and division. Like ethnic identities, those based on religion can both unite us, as members of a congregation or social body, and create division by separating us from other congregations.

The anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace defined religion as “belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces” (1966, p. 5). The supernatural is the extraordinary realm outside (but believed to impinge on) the observable world. It is nonempirical and inexplicable in ordinary terms. It must be accepted “on faith.” Supernatural beings—gods and goddesses, ghosts, and souls—are not of the material world. Nor are supernatural forces, some of which may be wielded by beings. Other sacred forces are impersonal; they simply exist. In many societies, however, people believe they can benefit from, become imbued with, or manipulate supernatural forces (see Bowie 2006; Crapo 2006).

Another definition of religion (Reese 1999) focuses on bodies of people who gather together regularly for worship. These congregants or adherents subscribe to and internalize a common system of meaning. They accept (adhere to or believe in) a set of doctrines involving the relationship between the individual and divinity, the supernatural, or whatever is taken to be the ultimate nature of reality. Anthropologists have
stressed the collective and shared nature of religion, the emotions it generates, and the meanings it embodies. Émile Durkheim (1912/2001), an early scholar of religion, stressed religious effervescence, the bubbling up of collective emotional intensity generated by worship. Victor Turner (1969/1995) updated Durkheim’s notion, using the term communitas, an intense community spirit, a feeling of great social solidarity, equality, and togetherness. The word religion derives from the Latin religare—“to tie, to bind,” but it is not necessary for all members of a given religion to meet together as a common body. Subgroups meet regularly at local congregation sites. They may attend occasional meetings with adherents representing a wider region. And they may form an imagined community with people of similar faith throughout the world.

Like ethnicity and language, religion creates social divisions within and between societies and nations. Religion both unites and divides. Participation in common rites may affirm, and thus maintain, the social solidarity of one religion’s adherents. But as we know from daily headlines, religious difference also may be associated with bitter enmity. Religion, by either definition offered above, exists in all human societies. It is a cultural universal. However, it isn’t always easy to distinguish the supernatural from
the natural, and different societies conceptualize divinity, supernatural entities, and ultimate realities very differently.

According to Roy Rappaport (1974), several features distinguish religious rituals from other kinds of behavior and thus make religion different from the other forces of social unity and division examined so far. Rituals are formal; that is, they are stylized, repetitive, and stereotyped. People perform them in special (sacred) places and at set times. Rituals include liturgical orders, set sequences of words and actions invented prior to the current performance of the ritual in which they occur.

One example of religious ritual in a sacred place is the hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca, the most sacred of Muslim sites. The hajj can be taken by any member of a family, but many families go together. The hajj is expected of all Muslims, depending on their financial and physical capabilities (Bhardwaj 1998). Pilgrims to Mecca, where the prophet Muhammad was born, visit its many holy sites. The Kaaba, a building that Abraham and Ishmael, the patriarchs of Islam, are believed to have built, stands in the center of Mecca’s great mosque, as does the Black Stone, reportedly given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. Another important shrine is a well reportedly used by Hagar, Ishmael’s mother. Pilgrims usually carry out their journey during the lunar year’s last month, Dhu al-Hijja, in the Islamic calendar. Several symbolic rituals are performed by pilgrims, including wearing a white shroud, later saved to be their burial garb, and the circling seven times of the Kaaba. People gain a sense of solidarity through their common identity as pilgrims. Muslims who have completed the hajj may use celebratory titles, Hajji and Hajjah (for men and women, respectively), throughout their lives. Some 2 million pilgrims travel to Mecca annually (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Rituals convey information about the participants and their traditions. As they are reenacted year after year, generation after generation, rituals translate enduring messages, values, and sentiments into observable actions. Rituals are social acts. Inevitably, some participants are more committed than others are to the beliefs that lie behind the rites. However, just by taking part in a joint public act, the performers signal that they accept a common social and moral order, one that transcends their status as individuals. Participation in a ritual can thus be a powerful force for mobilization.

**Ritualized Changes in Status and Identity**

Rituals called rites of passage are often associated with a change from one place, condition, status, or stage of life to another. Found worldwide, such rites can be individualistic or collective. An example of an individualistic rite of passage was the Vision Quest of Native Americans, especially the Indians who lived in the Great Plains of North America. In order to move from boyhood to manhood, a youth separated himself from his community. During isolation in the wilderness, often with fasting and drug consumption, the young man would see a vision, which would become his personal guardian spirit. He would return to his community and be regarded as an adult. The rite of passage had changed his identity. Contemporary rites of passage include confirmations, baptisms, bar and bat mitzvahs, and fraternity hazing. Passage
rites make a public statement about changes in status, such as from boyhood to manhood or from nonmember to sorority sister.

All rites of passage have three phases: separation, margin, and aggregation. In the first phase, people withdraw temporarily from ordinary society. In the third, they reenter society, having completed the rite. The margin phase is the most interesting. It is the period between states, the limbo during which people have left one place or state but have not yet entered the next. This is called the liminal phase of the rite (V. W. Turner 1969/1995). Liminality has certain characteristics. Liminal people occupy ambiguous social positions. They exist apart from ordinary distinctions and expectations. They are in a time out of time, cut off from ordinary society. A series of contrasts may serve symbolically to demarcate liminality from regular life (see Table 6–1).

Often, passage rites are collective, with a group of people enduring them together. Examples include teenage boys being jointly circumcised, fraternity or sorority initiates, men at military boot camps, football players in summer training camps, and women becoming nuns. The most notable social aspect of collective liminality is communitas (V. W. Turner 1969/1995), an intense community spirit, a feeling of great

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<td>Contrasts between Liminality and Ordinary Social Life</td>
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<td>Liminality</td>
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<td>Nakedness or uniform dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual continence or excess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization of sex distinctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregard of personal appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unselfishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacredness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of pain and suffering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

solidarity, equality, and togetherness. People experiencing liminality together form a community of equals. The distinctions that existed before and that will exist afterward are temporarily forgotten. Liminal people face the same conditions, are treated the same, and must act alike. Liminality may be marked ritually and symbolically by reversals of ordinary behavior. For example, sexual taboos may be intensified or, conversely, sexual excess may be encouraged.

Baptism is a liminal ritual for Protestants (more or less so depending on the specific church). The baptismal rite may involve sacred instruction prior to the ritual, the wearing of uniform clothing (e.g., a white robe), transition from the unbaptized state to the baptized state (involving spiritual rebirth), silence (during the ritual), acceptance of discomfort (being dunked in cold water), and communitas with others being baptized at the same time.

Liminality is basic to every passage rite. Furthermore, in certain societies, including our own, liminal symbols may be used to set off one religious group from another and from society as a whole. Such permanent liminal groups (e.g., sects, brotherhoods, cults) are found most characteristically in complex societies—nation-states. Such liminal features as humility, poverty, equality, obedience, sexual abstinence, and silence may be required for all sect or cult members. Those who join such a group agree to its rules. As if they were undergoing a passage rite—but in this case a never-ending one—they may rid themselves of their previous possessions and cut themselves off from former social links, including those with family members. Identity as a member of the group is expected to transcend individuality. Cult members often wear uniform clothing. They may try to reduce distinctions based on age and gender by using a common hairstyle (shaved head, short hair, or long hair). Often, in cults (as in the military), the individual, so important in American culture, is submerged in the collective. This is one reason Americans are so fearful and suspicious of cults. In a variety of contexts, liminal features mark diversity by signaling the distinctiveness or sacredness of groups, persons, settings, and events. Liminal symbols mark entities and circumstances as extraordinary, outside and beyond ordinary social space and routine social events.

**Religious Diversity**

Overwhelmingly, the United States remains a Protestant country. Yet, in the face of large-scale immigration from Roman Catholic countries, its Protestant population share has declined substantially, from 67 percent in 1967 to 52 percent in 2008 (Table 6–2). Still, in both years the number of Protestants substantially exceeded that of Catholics, who make up a quarter of the population. In Canada, by contrast, Catholics outnumber Protestants, a difference that has grown more substantial in recent years. In both countries, reflecting immigration, especially from Asia, membership in the “other” religious category has increased—to 6 percent in the United States in 2008, versus just 2 percent in 1967. The number of censused people who did not offer a religious preference also has risen in both countries, to 15 percent in the United States and 19 percent in Canada (Table 6–2).
The organized religions represented in the United States and Canada include, but are not limited to, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Christianity dominates in both countries, representing about three-quarters of the population. In order, Canada’s other major organized religions are Judaism (1.2 percent), Islam (0.9 percent), Buddhism (0.6 percent), and Hinduism (0.6 percent). In the United States, the order of membership is the same, but the percentages are lower (see Table 6–3).

Table 6–3 documents the growth and decline of membership in various religious groups in the United States between 1990 and 2008. Among Christians, self-described Evangelicals increased the most—almost fourfold (395 percent—to over 2 million), followed by Buddhists (294 percent), Hindus (256 percent), and Muslims (256 percent). Next came over 30 million Americans with “no religion specified” (232 percent). Following them were some 17 million Americans who self-identified merely as “Christians” (209 percent). Next came over 5 million Pentecostals (174 percent) and 2 million agnostics (167 percent). All these categories had growth rates higher than that of the American population as a whole (130 percent).

Groups with growth rates below that of the overall American population were Mormons, Catholics, “Total Christians,” and Baptists. Membership in several traditional mainstream religions actually declined. Fewer people claimed to be Presbyterians, Lutherans, Jews, Methodists, and Episcopalians in 2008 than in 1990. Plunging most dramatically were those labeled “Protestant”—from over 17 million in 1990 to 5 million in 2008—a 70 percent decline. It would seem that many Americans who self-identified as Protestants in 1990 had assumed the “Christian” label by 2008.

Both the United States and Canada have marked regional variation in religious affiliation. In Canada the province of Québec has the largest concentration of Roman Catholics. In the United States the Jewish population, only 2 percent nationally, is significantly larger in New York state (8.4 percent in 2008) and New York City. Southerners (75 percent) are more likely to belong to a church than are midwesterners (72 percent), easterners (67 percent), or, especially, westerners (60 percent), as shown in Table 6–4. However, the rate of actual church attendance is similar throughout the
### Table 6–3

**Growth/Decline of Religions in the United States, 2008 versus 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion specified</td>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>30.43</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Christian”</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Population</td>
<td>175.44</td>
<td>228.18</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormons</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>46.00</td>
<td>57.20</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Christian</td>
<td>151.23</td>
<td>173.40</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>33.96</td>
<td>36.15</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>14.19</td>
<td>11.37</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopalian</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Protestant”</td>
<td>17.21</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6–4

**U.S. Church, Synagogue (etc.) Membership (in Percentages) by Age Group and Region, 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE GROUP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

country. The most Christian states are Utah, whose population is almost 80 percent Christian, with the nation’s largest concentration of Mormons, and North Dakota (almost 76 percent Christian). The least religious state is Nevada. Less than a third of the population there belongs to a congregation.

Religious affiliation also varies with age (Table 6–4). Older people are more likely to belong to a congregation than younger people are. The proportion of affiliated people is 68 percent among those 18–29 years old, rising to 82 percent among Americans 65 and older. This is probably both a cohort effect and an age effect. That is, older people tend to be more religious both because they grew up at a more religious time in American history and because there is a tendency to seek religious consolation and think about the afterlife as the end of life draws nearer.

The World’s Major Religions

Information on the world’s major religions is provided in Table 6–5 (number of adherents) and Figure 6–1 (percentage of world population). Based on people’s claimed religions, Christianity is the world’s largest, with some 2.1 billion adherents. Islam,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6–5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religions of the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese traditional religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primal-indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African traditional and diasporic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jainism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cao Dai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenrikyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Paganism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarian-Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rastafarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with some 1.3 billion practitioners, is next, followed by Hinduism, then Chinese traditional religion (also known as Chinese folk religion or Confucianism), and Buddhism. More than a billion people claim no official religion, but only about a fifth of them are self-proclaimed atheists. Worldwide, Islam is growing at a rate of about 2.9 percent annually, versus 2.3 percent for Christianity, whose overall growth rate is the same as the rate of world population increase (Adherents.com 2001; Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance 2002).

Within Christianity, there is variation in the growth rate. There were an estimated 680 million “born-again” Christians (e.g., Pentecostals and Evangelicals) in the world in 2001, with an annual worldwide growth rate of 7 percent, versus just 2.3 percent for Christianity overall. (This would translate into 1.3 billion Pentecostals/Evangelicals by 2011.) The global growth rate of Roman Catholics has been estimated at only 1.3 percent, compared with a Protestant growth rate of 3.3 percent per year (Winter 2001). Much of this explosive growth, especially in Africa, is of a type of Protestantism that would be scarcely recognizable to most Americans, given its incorporation of many animistic elements.

The website Adherents.com classifies 11 world religions according to their degrees of internal unity and diversity. Listed first in Table 6–6 are the most cohesive/unified groups. Listed last are the religions with the most internal diversity. The list is based

\[ \text{Note: Total adds up to more than 100% due to rounding and because upper bound estimates were used for each group.} \]

\[ \text{FIGURE 6–1 \hspace{1em} Major world religions by percentage of world population, 2005} \]
mainly on the degree of doctrinal similarity among the various subgroups. To a lesser extent it reflects diversity in practice, ritual, and organization. (The list includes majority manifestations of each religion, as well as subgroups that the larger branches may label “heterodox.”) How would you decide whether a value judgment is implied by this list? Is it better for a religion to be highly unified, cohesive, monolithic, and lacking in internal diversity, or to be fragmented, schismatic, multifaceted, and abounding in variations on the same theme? Over time, such diversity can give birth to new religions—for example, Christianity arose from Judaism, Buddhism from Hinduism, Baha’i from Islam, and Sikhism from Hinduism. Within Christianity, Protestantism developed from Roman Catholicism.

Protestant Values and the Rise of Capitalism

Different religions promulgate different values. North America is overwhelmingly Christian, and Protestantism is the dominant religion in the United States. Despite the proliferation of Protestant sects and other religions, the English-derived Protestant values of the founders of the United States continue to influence American society and culture.

Robert Bellah (1978) coined the term “world-rejecting religion” to describe most forms of Christianity, including Protestantism. World-rejecting religions arose in ancient civilizations, along with literacy and a specialized priesthood. These religions are so named because of their tendency to reject the natural (mundane, ordinary, material, secular) world and to focus instead on a higher (sacred, transcendent) realm of reality. The divine is a domain of exalted morality to which humans can only aspire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6–6</th>
<th>Classical World Religions Ranked by Internal Religious Similarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most Unified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taoism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salvation through fusion with the supernatural is the main goal of such religions. To some extent at least, most Americans have been influenced by such religious doctrines.

Notions of salvation and the afterlife dominate Christian ideologies. However, most varieties of Protestantism lack the hierarchical structure of earlier monotheistic religions, including Roman Catholicism. With a diminished role for the priest (minister), salvation is directly available to individuals. Regardless of their social status, Protestants have unmediated access to the supernatural. The individualistic focus of Protestantism offers a close fit with capitalism and with American culture. Protestantism has coevolved with the former for some 400 years and with the latter for over 200 years.

In his influential book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920/1958), the social theorist Max Weber linked the spread of capitalism to the values preached by early Protestant leaders. Weber saw European Protestants, and eventually their American descendants, as more successful financially than Catholics. He attributed this difference to the values stressed by their religions. Weber saw Catholics as more concerned with immediate happiness and security. Protestants were more ascetic, entrepreneurial, and future-oriented, he thought.

Capitalism, said Weber, required that the traditional attitudes of Catholic peasants be replaced by values fitting an industrial economy based on capital accumulation. Protestantism placed a premium on hard work, an ascetic life, and profit seeking. Early Protestants saw success on earth as a sign of divine favor and probable salvation. According to some Protestant credos, individuals could gain favor with God through good works. Other sects stressed predestination, the idea that only a few mortals had been selected for eternal life and that people could not change their fates. However, material success, achieved through hard work, could be a strong clue that someone was predestined to be saved.

The English Puritan variety of Protestantism, eventually transferred to North America, stressed work and discouraged leisure, worldly pleasures, and the enjoyment of life: “An idle hand is the Devil’s workshop.” Waste of time was a deadly sin because labor was a duty demanded by God. The Puritans valued the simplicity of the middle-class home, condemning ostentation as worldly enjoyment. Profits, the fruits of successful labor, could be given to the church or reinvested; but they could not be hoarded, because excess wealth might lead to temptation. People could increase their profits as long as they remembered the common good and avoided harmful, illegal, greedy, or dishonest activity.

According to Weber, the change in world view (ways in which a people makes sense of its place in the context of the world) produced by the Protestant Reformation nourished the development and spread of modern industrial capitalism. However, residues of the traditional Catholic peasant mentality resisted and slowed the pace of change. Early Protestants who produced more than they needed for subsistence and tried to make a profit stirred up the mistrust, hatred, and moral indignation of others. Facing such suspicion and possible ostracism from the community, successful innovators had to have strong character to persevere and maintain the confidence of their customers and workers.

Weber also argued that rational business organization required the removal of industrial production from the home, its setting in peasant societies. Protestantism
made such a separation possible by emphasizing individualism: Individuals, not families or households, would be saved or not. Interestingly, given the connection that is usually made with morality and religion in contemporary American discourse about family values, the family was a secondary matter for Weber’s early Protestants. God and the individual reigned supreme.

Today of course, in North America as throughout the world, people of many religions and with diverse world views are successful capitalists. Furthermore, traditional Protestant values often have little to do with today’s economic maneuvering. Still, there is no denying that the individualistic focus of Protestantism was compatible with the severance of ties to land and kin that the Industrial Revolution demanded. These values remain prominent in the religious background of the people of the United States.

Social Control

If the faithful truly internalize a system of religious rewards and punishments, their religion becomes a powerful means of controlling their beliefs, behavior, and what they teach their children. Religion has meaning to individuals. It helps them cope with adversity and tragedy and provides hope that things will get better. Sinners can repent and be saved, or they can go on sinning and be damned. Lives can be transformed through spiritual healing or rebirth.

Many people engage in religious activity because they believe it works. Prayers get answered. Faith healers heal. Sometimes it doesn’t take much to convince the faithful that religious actions are efficacious. Many Native American people in southwestern Oklahoma use faith healers at high monetary costs, not just because it makes them feel better about the uncertain, but because it works (Lassiter 1998). Each year legions of Brazilians visit a church, Nosso Senhor do Bomfim, in the city of Salvador, Bahia. They vow to repay “Our Lord” (Nosso Senhor) if healing happens. Showing that the vows work, and are repaid, are the thousands of ex votos, plastic impressions of every conceivable body part, that adorn the church, along with photos of people who have been cured.

Religion works through sacred force. It also works by getting inside people and mobilizing their emotions—their joy, their wrath, their righteousness. Collective “effervescence” emerges in religious contexts (Durkheim 1912/2001); intense emotion bubbles up. People feel a deep sense of shared joy, meaning, experience, communion, belonging, and commitment to their religion.

The power of religion affects action. When religions meet, they can coexist peacefully, or their differences can be a basis for enmity and disharmony, even battle. Religious fervor has inspired Christians on crusades against the infidel and has led Muslims to wage jihads, holy wars against non-Islamic peoples. Throughout history, political leaders have used religion to promote and justify their views and policies.

To ensure proper behavior, religions offer rewards, such as the fellowship of the religious community, and punishments, such as the threat of being cast out or excommunicated—“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.” Many religions promise rewards for the good life and punishment for the bad. Your physical, mental, moral, and spiritual health, now and forever, may depend on your beliefs and behavior.
Religions, especially the formal organized ones typically found in state societies, often prescribe a code of ethics and morality to guide behavior. The Judaic Ten Commandments lay down a set of prohibitions against killing, stealing, adultery, and other misdeeds. Crimes are breaches of secular laws, as sins are breaches of religious strictures. Some rules (e.g., the Ten Commandments) proscribe or prohibit behavior; others prescribe behavior. The Golden Rule, for instance, is a religious guide: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Moral codes are ways of maintaining order and stability. Codes of morality and ethics are constantly repeated in religious sermons, catechisms, and the like. They become internalized psychologically. They guide behavior and produce regret, guilt, shame, and the need for forgiveness, expiation, and absolution when they are not followed.

Religions also maintain social control by stressing the temporary and fleeting nature of this life. They promise rewards (and/or punishment) in an afterlife (Christianity) or reincarnation (Hinduism and Buddhism). Such beliefs serve to reinforce the status quo. People can accept what they have now, knowing they can expect something better in the afterlife or the next life, if they follow religious guidelines. Under slavery in the American South, the masters taught portions of the Bible, such as the story of Job, that stressed compliance. The slaves, however, seized on the story of Moses, the promised land, and deliverance.

Religion helps maintain social order, but it also can be an instrument of change, sometimes even revolution. As a response to conquest or foreign domination, for example, religious leaders often undertake to alter or revitalize a society. In its Islamic Revolution, Iranian ayatollahs marshaled religious fervor to create national solidarity and radical change. We call such movements nativistic movements (Linton 1943) or revitalization movements (Wallace 1956).

Antimodernism describes the rejection of the modern in favor of what is perceived as an earlier, purer, and better way of life. This viewpoint grew out of disillusionment with Europe’s Industrial Revolution and subsequent developments in science, technology, and consumption patterns. Antimodernists typically consider technology’s use today to be misguided, or think technology should have a lower priority than religious and cultural values.

The modern and the antimodern are key ingredients in Benjamin R. Barber’s (1992, 1995) contention that tribalism and globalism are the two key—and opposed—principles of our age. Tribalism, which Barber sums up with the term “Jihad” (borrowed loosely from Islam, where it means quest or struggle), is an antimodern force pitting culture against culture, tribe against tribe, and religion against religion. For Jihad’s antagonist, Barber coins the term “McWorld,” which subsumes the modern forces that promote global integration and uniformity, including the diffusion of music, computers, and fast food—MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s. Barber argues that Jihad and McWorld operate today with equal force in opposite directions. Jihad is driven by parochial hatreds; McWorld, by universalizing markets.
Jihad resists McWorld, which spans nations, cultures, and ideologies. Groups like Al Qaeda exist in perpetual rebellion against McWorld and its perceived values and consumption patterns. To its warriors and adherents, Jihad offers an identity and a sense of community. But that social solidarity is grounded in exclusion, separation, opposition, and anger. Solidarity is achieved through war against outsiders. In places like Afghanistan under Taliban rule, solidarity may entail submission to an arbitrary hierarchy, fanaticism in beliefs, and the absorption or destruction of the individual self for the goals of the group.

Religious fundamentalism, a form of contemporary antimodernism, can be compared to other revitalization movements. Fundamentalism (see Antoun 2001) describes antimodernist movements in various religions. Ironically, religious fundamentalism itself is a modern phenomenon, based on a strong feeling among its adherents of alienation from the surrounding (modern) culture. Fundamentalists seek order based on strict adherence to purportedly traditional standards, beliefs, rules, and customs. Christian and Islamic fundamentalists recognize, decry, and attempt to redress change, yet they also contribute to change. In a worldwide process, new religions challenge established churches. In the United States, for example, conservative Christian TV hosts have been influential broadcasters and opinion shapers. In Latin America evangelical Protestantism is winning millions of converts from Roman Catholicism.

Fundamentalists assert an identity separate from the larger religious group from which they arose. Their separation reflects their belief that the founding principles on which the larger religion is based have been corrupted, neglected, compromised, forgotten, or replaced with other principles. Fundamentalists advocate strict fidelity to the “true” religious principles of the larger religion. They also seek to rescue religion from absorption into modern, Western culture, which they see as already having corrupted the mainstream version of their religion—and others. In Christianity, fundamentalists are “born again,” as opposed to “mainline,” “liberal,” or “modernist” Protestants. In Islam they are jama'at (in Arabic, enclaves based on close fellowship) engaged in jihad (struggle) against a Western culture hostile to Islam and the God-given (shariah) way of life. In Judaism they are Haredi, or “Torah-true,” Jews. All such groups see a sharp divide between themselves and other religions, and between a “sacred” view of life and the “secular” world and “nominal religion.”

Fundamentalists strive to protect a distinctive doctrine and way of life and of salvation. A strong sense of community is created, focused on a clearly defined religious way of life. The prospect of joining such a community may appeal to people who find little that is distinctive or vital in their previous religious identity. Fundamentalists get their converts, mainly from their larger religion, by convincing them of its lack of authenticity.

Many fundamentalists are politically aware citizens of nation-states. Often they believe that government processes and policies must recognize the way of life set forth in Scripture. In their eyes, the state should be subservient to God. The governments of many Muslim countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, are Islamic, and include people with fundamentalist beliefs, as is also true of many countries where Christians predominate.
Fundamentalists may or may not be correct in seeing a rise in secularism in contemporary North America. Between 1990 and 2008, the number of Americans giving no religious preference grew from 7 to 15 percent. In Canada the comparable figure rose from 12 to 19 percent (Table 6–2). Of course, people who lack a religious preference aren’t necessarily atheists. Many of them are believers who don’t belong to a church. According to U.S. Census Bureau figures for 2008, about 3.6 million Americans (just 1.6 percent of the population) self-identified as atheists or agnostics. Many fewer (no more than 100,000) call themselves “secular” or “humanists.”

Still, atheists and secular humanists do exist, and they, too, are organized. Like members of religious groups, they use varied media, including print and the Internet, to communicate among themselves. Just as Buddhists can peruse Tricycle: The Buddhist Review, secular humanists can find their views validated in Free Inquiry, a quarterly identifying itself as “the international secular humanist magazine.” Secular humanists speak out against organized religion and its “dogmatic pronouncements” and “supernatural or spiritual agendas” and the “obscurantist views” of religious leaders who presume “to inform us of God’s views” by appealing to sacred texts (Stinfels 1997).

New and Alternative Religious Movements

Is American society really growing more secular, as fundamentalists claim? A considerable body of research suggests that levels of American religiosity haven’t changed much over the past century (see Finke and Stark 2005). To be sure, there are new religious trends and forms of spiritualism. Some Americans have turned to charismatic Christianity. In the United States and Australia, respectively, some people who are not Native Americans or Native Australians have appropriated the symbols, settings, and purported religious practices of Native Americans and Native Australians, for New Age religions.

The New Age movement, which emerged in the 1980s, draws on and blends cultural elements from multiple traditions. It advocates change through individual personal transformation, rather than through political action. According to Lisa Aldred (2000), its adherents are mainly white, middle to upper middle class, middle aged, and college educated. Some New Agers construct their beliefs and practices mainly around Native American religion, following “plastic medicine men,” people who claim to have been taught by “authentic” medicine men.

Native American activists decry the appropriation and commercialization of their spiritual beliefs and rituals, as when “sweat lodge” ceremonies are held on cruise ships, with wine and cheese served. Native Americans complain that New Agers romanticize their rites and images, thus obscuring the continuing socioeconomic and political problems that Indians face. They see the appropriation of their ceremonies and traditions as theft. In defense, the New Agers cite the First Amendment right of religious freedom; they assert that spirituality cannot be owned. Indians counter with examples in which entrepreneurs have incorporated, copyrighted, and sought trademark protection for ceremonies, books, and themes based on Native American spirituality (illustrating intellectual property rights, or IPRs, as was discussed in Chapter 3).
Witchcraft has been around for generations, but it joins today in the mobilization and celebration of multiculturalism. At the Cathedral of the Pines, a New Hampshire religious park, people of all denominations were allowed to hold services. But witches (Wiccans) were initially excluded. The dispute was resolved through meetings with the Witches’ Anti-Discrimination Lobby (WADL), the Cathedral of the Pines, and the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights. Wiccans received access to the park equal with other religious groups. The park even offered a permanent site to be consecrated as a Wiccan sacred space (Ontario Consultants 1996).

New religious movements have varied origins. Some have been influenced by Christianity, others by Eastern (Asian) religions, still others by mysticism and spiritualism, especially in the so-called New Age religions. Religion also evolves in tandem with science and technology. For example, the Raelian movement, a religious group centered in Switzerland and Montreal, promotes cloning as a way of achieving eternal life. Raelians believe that extraterrestrials called Elohim artificially created all life on earth. The group has established a company called Valiant Venture Ltd., which offers infertile and homosexual couples the opportunity to have a child cloned from one of the spouses (Palmer 2001).

Scientology promotes the idea that humans need to think rationally and to control their disturbing emotions to achieve spiritual enlightenment and salvation. In
Scientology, spiritual entities called *thetans* are believed to occupy human bodies in successive lives. Although not part of the physical universe, the thetan has become entangled with it. In the process, it acquired a reactive mind, which responds emotionally to anything that recalls painful and traumatic experiences. Salvation is the process by which that reactive mind is reduced and finally eliminated, allowing the individual to live to his or her full potential. Scientology aims at enabling individuals to recall, confront, and overcome the effects of unhappy events of the past. The ultimate goal is for the thetan to exist outside the physical realm and so outside the body. This condition has analogies with the Christian conception of the saved soul (Hubbard 1997).

In the United States the official recognition of a religion entitles it to a modicum of respect and certain benefits, such as exemption from taxation on its income and property (as long as it does not engage in political activity). Not all would-be religions receive official recognition. For example, Scientology is recognized as a church in the United States but not in Germany. In 1997 U.S. government officials spoke out against Germany’s persecution of Scientologists as a form of human rights abuse. Germans protested vehemently, calling Scientology a dangerous nonreligious political movement, with between 30,000 and 70,000 German members.

Religious persecution is ages old. Communist governments have suppressed the practice and manifestations of many religions. In many nations, unofficial religions are marginalized and at least partially hidden. Often, intolerance is expressed in stated doubts about their “true” religious nature. One example is “Yoruba religion,” a term applied to perhaps 15 million adherents in Africa, as well as to millions of practitioners of syncretic or blended religions (with elements of Catholicism and spiritism) in the western hemisphere. Forms of Yoruba religion include santeria (in the Spanish Caribbean and the United States), candomblé (in Brazil), and vodoun (in the French Caribbean). Yoruba religion, with roots in precolonial nation-states of West Africa, has spread far beyond its religion of origin, as part of the African diaspora. It remains an influential, identifiable religion today, despite suppression, such as by Cuba’s Communist government. There are perhaps 3 million practitioners of santeria in Cuba, plus another 800,000 in the United States. At least 1 million Brazilians participate in candomblé, also known as macumba.

Voodoo (or “vodoun”) traces its origins to Yoruba, Dahomey, and Fon in Africa. Blended with Catholicism, it is practiced mainly in Haiti, Cuba, and Benin. Usually described as a syncretic (mixed) religion, vodoun has been called the Haitian form of santeria; others consider santeria the Spanish form of vodoun.

**Secular Religion**

It is possible for apparently secular settings, things, and events to acquire intense meaning, reminiscent of religious commitment, for individuals who have grown up in their presence. Some anthropologists see religious rituals as distinguished from other kinds of behavior by special emotions, nonutilitarian intentions, and supernatural entities. But others define ritual more broadly. Writing about football, Arens (1981) pointed
out that behavior simultaneously can have sacred and secular aspects. On one level, football is simply a sport; on another, it is a public ritual.

In the context of comparative religion, the idea that the secular can become sacred isn’t surprising. Long ago, the French sociologist/anthropologist Émile Durkheim (1912/2001) pointed out that almost everything, from the sublime to the ridiculous, has in some societies been treated as sacred. The distinction between sacred and profane doesn’t depend on the intrinsic qualities of the sacred symbol. In Australian totemic religion, for example, sacred beings include such humble creatures as ducks, frogs, rabbits, and grubs, whose inherent qualities could hardly have given rise to the religious sentiment they inspire.

Madagascar’s tomb-centered ceremonies are times when the living and the dead are joyously reunited, when people get drunk, gorge themselves, and have sexual license. Perhaps the gray, sober, ascetic, and moralistic aspects of many official religious events, in taking the fun out of religion, force us to find religion (i.e., truth, beauty, meaning, passionate involvement) in fun. Many Americans seek in such apparently secular contexts as rock concerts, movies, and sports what other people find in religious rites, beliefs, and ceremonies.

Identities and loyalties based on fandom, football, baseball, and soccer can be powerful indeed. Rock stars and bands can mobilize many. A World Series win led to celebrations across a “Red Sox Nation.” Italians and Brazilians are rarely if ever as nationally focused and emotionally unified as they are when their teams are competing in the World Cup. The collective effervescence that Durkheim found so characteristic of religion can equally well describe what Brazilians experience when their country wins a World Cup.

**Key Terms**

- antimodernism (102)
- communitas (93)
- fundamentalism (103)
- liminality (93)
- religion (90)
- rites of passage (92)
- rituals (92)
- world view (100)
“I HATE THIS PART OF FLYING!”

During a recent flight from Atlanta to Detroit, Kozaitis enjoyed a conversation with Tala, a Filipina chef. They discussed shared interests, including immigration trauma, transnational identities, and Tala’s recipe for dinuguan (pork blood stew)—“real Philippine food.” Tala was on her way “home” to attend her father’s funeral in Manila, but she had a stopover in Detroit. As the plane descended, she uttered, “I hate this part of flying! It’s always so frustrating and painful!”

Travel can be a nuisance for us all, what with flight delays, uncomfortable seats, inedible (if any) food, and unpleasant passengers who feel the need to share their opinions and fixations with others during the trip. However, for many Americans, getting through security or customs is a process that leaves them feeling humiliated, demoralized, or enraged. Who might these travelers be, and why would they be singled out by American airport guards for additional scrutiny?

Could a Filipina be a victim of “racial profiling”? I wondered. “Oh no, not me,” Tala said. “It’s my last name. I’m married to a Middle-Easterner. His name is Nabeel Said Hamed; he’s from Oman . . . speaks with a heavy accent.” She continued to explain that her husband is a computer scientist and a Berkeley graduate who travels all over the world for work. “He is anxious and angry every time he has to fly, which for him is a lot!”

For Middle-Eastern men and women, and Americans of Middle-Eastern descent, travel is often an ordeal. Many are regular victims of discrimination at airport security
checks. They may be removed from, or prevented from boarding, a flight when their zone is called. As Tala put it, “Middle-Easterners look suspicious to the guards. When they see the name, that does it. They’re searched in case they’re terrorists.”

Federal, state, and local governments instituted investigations by law enforcement officials to determine the perpetrators and causes of the 9/11 tragedy, and implemented strategies to prevent further acts of terrorism on “American soil.” Following the atrocities of 9/11, many Middle-Eastern and Muslim Americans became victims of hate crimes, discrimination, and policies that singled out members of these populations for racial profiling (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009).

Racial profiling refers to singling out and discriminating against individuals and groups suspected of violent behaviors because of their “race.” Passengers whom airport personnel judge to be Arab or Muslim are subjected to detailed questioning, more frequent body searches, and more thorough luggage inspections (Persico and Todd 2005). Such treatment may be intentional because of perpetrators’ perceived cultural stereotypes—for example, ‘Arabs are Muslims; therefore they are terrorists.’ Airport profiling also may be a response to a disproportionate number of coordinated suicide attacks by “Middle-Easterners,” including those of 9/11 by Al Qaeda upon the United States.

Among the victims of racial profiling are international students. The Institute of International Education noted that by 2004, colleges across the country had seen the highest decrease in enrollment by international students since 1971 (2007, p. 381).

After the atrocities of September 11, 2001, Middle-Eastern and Muslim Americans complained about policies that apparently singled out members of these and other minorities for special scrutiny, such as in this airport security check.
Regardless of phenotype, nationality, religion, or language, terrorism refers to violence against civilians by a small group of partisan ideologues (blind adherents to a political ideology). Members of various religions have planned and implemented acts of terrorism in the United States and elsewhere. Nevertheless, ignorance, prejudice, and stereotypes are expressed in racial profiling of travelers, a prevalent problem to which solutions are needed (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2003). Improved airport security might result from more precise (rather than merely stereotypical) targeting or better detection (Persico and Todd 2005).

Members of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), a “non-partisan and non-sectarian” organization, advocate for and protect the rights of Arabs. Founded by U.S. Senator James Abourezk in 1980, ADC celebrated its 30th anniversary in line with its mission: “The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a civil rights organization committed to defending the rights of people of Arab descent and promoting their rich cultural heritage” (www.adc.org).

ADC records incidents of discrimination against Arabs. It works with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to advocate for and protect the rights of Arabs. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) argue that such organizations mobilize to demonstrate their commitment to the United States by distancing themselves from terrorists while defending their rights as Americans who happened to be of Middle-Eastern descent (2009).

Security measures have tightened, but racial profiling of travelers continued after Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, an Al Qaeda–affiliated terrorist from Nigeria, attempted to ignite a bomb on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 headed to Detroit on Christmas Day, 2009. While racial profiling is illegal, Middle-Easterners and other racialized minorities in the United States, including African Americans and Latinos, continue to be targeted disproportionately, whether in airports, on the road, or even in their own homes, compared with people regarded as “white.”

The 2009 case of Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates epitomizes this social phenomenon. Gates, a middle-aged African-American scholar, was arrested at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by police who went to investigate a reported “break-in,” a neighbor’s interpretation of a black man unlocking the door to his own house. Racial profiling transcends education, class, and age, even in a multicultural society like ours. The American Civil Liberties Union is committed to its eradication:

The ACLU’s Campaign against Racial Profiling fights law enforcement and private security that target disproportionately people of color for investigation and enforcement. We represent individuals who have been victims of racial profiling by airlines, police, and government agencies. Our work also encompasses major initiatives in public education and advocacy, including the creating of essential resources, lobbying for the passage of data collection and anti-profiling legislation, and litigation of airline and highway profiling cases.

As we note throughout this book, representatives of marginalized groups take it upon themselves to increase the likelihood that Americans of all ancestral roots and cultural orientations are guaranteed their human rights to security, safety, and prosperity. Similarly, self-identified Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and leaders of
American South Asian communities demand better security measures and antidiscrimination policies to protect innocent passengers, including those associated with the Middle East.

Identity politics among nationals of Middle-Eastern countries, or descendants of Middle-Eastern ancestry, are rooted in interpersonal and institutional discrimination against them on the basis of physical appearance, ethnicity, religion, and language. As an affinity group, they seek to dispel myths of their biology, contradict misconceptions of their culture, and oppose stereotypes of their personhood.

**Race: A Discredited Concept in Biology**

Contemporary North America is strikingly rich in human biological diversity. The photos in this chapter and this book can illustrate just a fraction of the world’s biological variation. Additional illustration comes from your own experience. Look around you in your classroom or at the mall or multiplex. Inevitably you’ll see people whose ancestors lived in many lands. The first (Native) Americans had to cross a land bridge that once linked Siberia to North America. For later immigrants, perhaps including your own parents or grandparents, the voyage may have been across the sea, or overland from nations to the south. They came for many reasons; some came voluntarily, while others were brought here in chains. The scale of migration in today’s world is so vast that millions of people routinely cross national borders or live far from the homelands of their grandparents. Now meeting every day are diverse human beings whose biological features reflect adaptation to a wide range of environments other than the ones they now inhabit. Physical contrasts are evident to anyone. Anthropology’s job is to explain them.

Historically, scientists have approached the study of human biological diversity in two main ways: (1) racial classification (now largely abandoned) versus (2) the current explanatory approach, which focuses on understanding specific differences. First we’ll consider problems with racial classification (the attempt to assign humans to discrete categories [purportedly] based on common ancestry). Then we’ll offer some explanations for specific aspects of human biological diversity. Biological differences are real, important, and apparent to us all. Modern scientists find it most productive to seek explanations for this diversity, rather than trying to pigeonhole people into categories called races. Certainly, human groups do vary biologically, for example, in their genetic attributes. But often we observe gradual, rather than abrupt, shifts in gene frequencies between neighboring groups. Such gradual genetic shifts are called clines, and they are incompatible with discrete and separate races.

What is race anyway? In theory, a biological race would be a geographically isolated subdivision of a species. Such a subspecies would be capable of interbreeding with other subspecies of the same species, but it would not actually do so because of its geographic isolation. Some biologists also use “race” to refer to “breeds,” as of dogs or roses. Thus, a pit bull and a Chihuahua would be different races of dogs. Such domesticated “races” have been bred by humans for generations. Humanity (*Homo sapiens*)
lacks such races because human populations have not been isolated enough from one another to develop into such discrete groups. Nor have humans experienced controlled breeding like that which has created the various kinds of dogs and roses.

A race is supposed to reflect shared genetic material (inherited from a common ancestor), but early scholars instead used phenotypical traits (usually skin color) for racial classification. Phenotype refers to an organism’s evident traits, its “manifest biology”—anatomy and physiology. Humans display hundreds of evident (detectable) physical traits. They range from skin color, hair form, eye color, and facial features (which are visible) to blood groups, color blindness, and enzyme production (which become evident through testing).

Racial classifications based on phenotype raise the problem of deciding which trait(s) should be primary. Should races be defined by height, weight, body shape, facial features, teeth, skull form, or skin color? Like their fellow citizens, early European and American scientists gave priority to skin color. Many schoolbooks and encyclopedias still proclaim the existence of three great races: the white, the black, and the yellow. This overly simplistic classification was compatible with the political use of race during the colonial period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such a tripartite scheme kept white Europeans neatly separate from their African, Asian, and Native American subjects. Colonial empires began to break up, and scientists began to question established racial categories, after World War II.

**Races Are Not Biologically Distinct**

History and politics aside, one obvious problem with color-based racial labels is that the terms don’t accurately describe skin color. White people are more pink, beige, or tan than white. Black people are various shades of brown, and yellow people are tan or beige. But these terms have also been dignified by more scientific-sounding synonyms: Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid.

Another problem with the tripartite scheme is that many human populations don’t neatly fit into any one of the three “great races.” For example, where does one put the Polynesians? Polynesia is a triangle of South Pacific islands formed by Hawaii to the north, Easter Island to the east, and New Zealand to the southwest. Does the bronze skin color of Polynesians place them with the Caucasoids or the Mongoloids? Some scientists, recognizing this problem, enlarged the original tripartite scheme to include the Polynesian race. Native Americans present an additional problem. Are they red or yellow? Again, some scientists add a fifth race—the red, or Amerindian—to the major racial groups.

Many people in southern India have dark skins, but scientists have been reluctant to classify them with black Africans because of their Caucasoid facial features and hair form. Some, therefore, have created a separate race for these people. What about the Australian aborigines, hunters and gatherers native to the most isolated continent? By skin color, one might place some Native Australians in the same race as tropical Africans. However, similarities to Europeans in hair color (light or reddish) and facial features have led some scientists to classify them as Caucasoids. But there is no evidence that Australians are closer genetically or historically to either of these
groups than they are to Asians. Recognizing this problem, scientists often regard Native Australians as a separate race.

Finally, consider the San (“Bushmen”) of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. Scientists have perceived their skin color as varying from brown to yellow. Those who regard San skin as yellow have placed them in the same category as Asians. In theory, people of the same race share more recent common ancestry with each other than they do with any others; but there is no evidence for recent common ancestry between San and Asians. More reasonably, the San are classified as members of the Capoid (from the Cape of Good Hope) race, which is seen as being different from other groups inhabiting tropical Africa.

Similar problems arise when any single trait is used as a basis for racial classification. An attempt to use facial features, height, weight, or any other phenotypical trait is fraught with difficulties. For example, consider the Nilotes, natives of the upper Nile region of Uganda and Sudan. Nilotes tend to be tall and to have long, narrow noses. Certain Scandinavians are also tall, with similar noses. Given the distance between their homelands, to classify them as members of the same race makes little sense. There is no reason to assume that Nilotes and Scandinavians are more closely related to each other than either is to shorter (and nearer) populations with different kinds of noses.

Would it be better to base racial classifications on a combination of physical traits? This would avoid some of the problems mentioned above, but others would arise. First, skin color, stature, skull form, and facial features (nose form, eye shape, lip thickness) don’t go together as a unit. For example, people with dark skin may be tall or short and have hair ranging from straight to very curly. Dark-haired populations may have light or dark skin, along with various skull forms, facial features, and body sizes and shapes. The number of potential combinations is very large, and the amount that heredity (versus environment) contributes to such phenotypical traits is often unclear.

Genetic Markers Don’t Correlate with Phenotype

The analysis of human DNA indicates that fully 94 percent of human genetic variation occurs within so-called races. Considering conventional geographic “racial” groupings such as Africans, Asians, and Europeans, there is only about 6 percent variation in genes from one group to the other. In other words, there is much greater variation within each of the traditional “races” than between them. Humans are much more alike genetically than are the living apes. This suggests a recently shared common ancestor (perhaps as recent as 70,000 to 50,000 years) for all members of modern Homo sapiens. The fact that African populations are the most diverse genetically provides evidence that Africa was the site where the human diaspora originated.

Contemporary work in genomics has allowed scientists to construct regional and global phylogenetic trees based on shared genetic markers. Such trees are based on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) (sampling females) and the Y chromosome (sampling males). A haplogroup is a lineage or branch of such a genetic tree marked by one or more specific genetic mutations. For example, the global mtDNA tree includes
branches known as M and N (among others). The Y chromosome tree includes branches known as C and F (among others). Those four branches (either M or N for mtDNA and either C or F for the Y chromosome) are known to be associated with the spread of modern humans out of Africa between 70,000 and 50,000 B.P. Because Native Australians share those four branches, they are known to be part of that diaspora. The Americas were settled (from Asia) much later than Australia by multiple haplogroups, which probably arrived at different times and came by different routes. Although long-term genetic markers do exist, they don’t correlate neatly with phenotype. Phenotypical similarities and differences aren’t precisely or even necessarily correlated with genetic relationships. Because of changes in the environment that affect individuals during growth and development, the range of phenotypes characteristic of a population may change without any genetic change whatsoever. There are several examples. In the early 20th century, the anthropologist Franz Boas (1940/1966) described changes in skull form (e.g., toward rounder heads) among the children of Europeans who had migrated to North America. The reason for this was not a change in genes, for the European immigrants tended to marry among themselves. Also, some of their children had been born in Europe and merely raised in the United States. Something in the environment, probably in the diet, was producing this change. We know now that changes in average height and weight produced by dietary differences in a few generations are common and may have nothing to do with race or genetics.

**Explanatory Approaches to Human Biological Diversity**

Traditional racial classification assumed that biological characteristics were determined by heredity and were stable (immutable) over long periods of time. We now know that a biological similarity doesn’t necessarily indicate recent common ancestry. Dark skin color, for example, can be shared by tropical Africans and Native Australians for reasons other than common ancestry. It is not possible to define races biologically. Still, scientists have made much progress in explaining variation in human skin color, along with many other expressions of human biological diversity. We shift now from classification to explanation, in which natural selection plays a key role.

First recognized by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace, natural selection is the process by which the forms most fit to survive and reproduce in a given environment—such as the tropics—do so in greater numbers than others in the same population. Over the years, the less fit organisms die out and the favored types survive by producing more offspring. The role of natural selection in producing variation in skin color will illustrate the explanatory approach to human biological diversity. Comparable explanations have been provided for many other aspects of human biological variation, some of which are discussed in the next section.

More than survival of the fittest, natural selection is differential reproductive success. Natural selection is a natural process that leads to a result. Natural selection operates when there is competition for strategic resources (those necessary for life)
such as food and space between members of the population. There is also the matter of finding mates. You can win the competition for food and space but have no mate and thus have no impact on the future of the species. For natural selection to work on a particular population, there must be variety within that population, as there always is.

Explaining Skin Color
Skin color is a complex biological trait—influenced by several genes. Just how many genes is not known. Melanin, the primary determinant of human skin color, is a chemical substance manufactured in the epidermis, or outer skin layer. The melanin cells of darker-skinned people produce more and larger granules of melanin than do those of lighter-skinned people. By screening out ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, melanin offers protection against a variety of maladies, including sunburn and skin cancer.

Prior to the 16th century, most of the world’s very dark-skinned peoples lived in the tropics, a belt extending about 23 degrees north and south of the equator, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The association between dark skin color and a tropical habitat existed throughout the Old World, where humans and their ancestors have lived for millions of years. The darkest populations of Africa evolved not in shady equatorial forests but in sunny open grassland, or savanna, country.

Outside the tropics, skin color tends to be lighter. Moving north in Africa, for example, there is a gradual transition from dark brown to medium brown. Average skin color continues to lighten as one moves through the Middle East, into southern Europe, through central Europe, and to the north. South of the tropics skin color also is lighter. In the Americas, by contrast, tropical populations don’t have very dark skin. This is the case because the settlement of the New World by light-skinned Asian ancestors of Native Americans was relatively recent, probably dating back no more than 20,000 years.

How, aside from migrations, can we explain the geographic distribution of human skin color? Natural selection provides an answer. In the tropics, intense UV radiation poses a series of threats, including severe sunburn, that make light skin color an adaptive disadvantage (Table 7–1 summarizes those threats). By damaging sweat glands, sunburn reduces the body’s ability to perspire and thus to regulate its own temperature (thermoregulation). Sunburn also can increase susceptibility to disease. Melanin, nature’s own sunscreen, confers a selective advantage (i.e., a better chance to survive and reproduce) on darker-skinned people living in the tropics. (Today, light-skinned people manage to survive in the tropics by staying indoors and by using cultural products, such as umbrellas and lotions, to screen sunlight.) Yet another disadvantage of having light skin color in the tropics is that exposure to UV radiation can cause skin cancer (Blum 1961).

Years ago, W. F. Loomis (1967) focused on the role of UV radiation in stimulating the manufacture (synthesis) of vitamin D by the human body. The unclothed human body can produce its own vitamin D when exposed to sufficient sunlight. However, in a cloudy environment that also is so cold that people have to dress themselves
### Table 7-1

Advantages and Disadvantages (Depending on Environment) of Dark and Light Skin Color

Also shown are cultural alternatives that can make up for biological disadvantages and examples of natural selection (NS) operating today in relation to skin color.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultural Alternatives</th>
<th>NS in Action Today</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DARK SKIN COLOR</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Melanin is natural sunscreen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In tropics: screens out UV</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces susceptibility to folate destruction and thus to NTDs, including spina bifida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevents sunburn and thus enhances sweating and thermoregulation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces disease susceptibility</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces risk of skin cancer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>Outside tropics: Reduces UV absorption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increases susceptibility to rickets, osteoporosis</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foods, vitamin D supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Asians in northern UK Inuit with modern diets</td>
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</tbody>
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| **LIGHT SKIN COLOR** |                       |                    |
| Advantage           | No natural sunscreen |                    |
|                     | Outside tropics: admits UV |               |
|                     | Body manufactures vitamin D and thus prevents rickets and osteoporosis |             |
| Disadvantage        | Increases susceptibility to folate destruction and thus to NTDs, including spina bifida |         |
|                     | Impaired spermatogenesis |                   |
|                     | Increases susceptibility to sunburn and thus to impaired sweating and poor thermoregulation |         |
|                     | Increases disease susceptibility |              |
|                     | Increases susceptibility to skin cancer |           |
|                     | Folic acid/folate supplements |               |
|                     | Whites still have more NTDs |               |
|                     | Shelter, sunscreens, lotions, etc. |            |
much of the year (such as northern Europe, where very light skin color evolved),
clothing interferes with the body’s manufacture of vitamin D. The ensuing shortage
of vitamin D diminishes the absorption of calcium in the intestines. A nutritional dis-
ease known as rickets, which softens and deforms the bones, may develop. In women,
deformation of the pelvic bones from rickets can interfere with childbirth. In cold
northern areas, light skin color maximizes the absorption of UV radiation and the syn-
thesis of vitamin D by the few parts of the body that are exposed to direct sunlight.
There has been selection against dark skin color in northern areas because melanin
screens out UV radiation.

This natural selection continues today: East Asians who have migrated recently
from India and Pakistan to northern areas of the United Kingdom have a higher inci-
dence of rickets and osteoporosis (also related to vitamin D and calcium deficiency)
than the general British population. A related illustration involves Eskimos (Inuit) and
other indigenous inhabitants of northern Alaska and northern Canada. According to
Nina Jablonski (quoted in Iqbal 2002), “Looking at Alaska, one would think that the
native people should be pale as ghosts.” One reason they aren’t is that they haven’t
inhabited this region very long in terms of geological time. Even more important, their
traditional diet, which is rich in seafood, including fish oils, supplies sufficient vita-
min D so as to make a reduction in pigmentation unnecessary. However, and again
illustrating natural selection at work today, “when these people don’t eat their abo-
driginal diets of fish and marine mammals, they suffer tremendously high rates of vita-
min D–deficiency diseases such as rickets in children and osteoporosis in adults”
(Jablonski quoted in Iqbal 2002). Far from being immutable, skin color can become
an evolutionary liability very quickly.

According to Jablonski and George Chaplin (2000), another key factor explain-
ing the geographic distribution of skin color involves the effects of UV on folate, an
essential nutrient that the human body manufactures from folic acid. Folate is needed
for cell division and the production of new DNA. Pregnant women require large
amounts of folate to support rapid cell division in the embryo, and there is a direct
connection between folate and individual reproductive success. Folate deficiency
causes neural tube defects (NTDs) in human embryos. NTDs are marked by the
incomplete closure of the neural tube, so the spine and spinal cord fail to develop
completely. One NTD, anencephaly (with the brain an exposed mass), results in still-
birth or death soon after delivery. With spina bifida, another NTD, survival rates are
higher, but babies have severe disabilities, including paralysis. NTDs are the second-
most-common human birth defect after cardiac abnormalities. Today, women of repro-
ductive age are advised to take folate supplements to prevent serious birth defects
such as spina bifida.

Natural sunlight and UV radiation destroy folate in the human body. Because
melanin, as we have seen, protects against UV hazards, such as sunburn and its con-
sequences, dark skin coloration is adaptive in the tropics. Now we see that melanin
also is adaptive because it conserves folate in the human body and thus protects
against NTDs, which are much more common in light-skinned than in darker-skinned
populations (Jablonski and Chaplin 2000). Studies confirm that Africans and African
Americans have a low incidence of severe folate deficiency, even among individuals
with marginal nutritional status. Folate also plays a role in another process that is central to reproduction, spermatogenesis—the production of sperm. In mice and rats, folate deficiency can cause male sterility; it may well play a similar role in humans.

Today, of course, cultural alternatives to biological adaptation permit light-skinned people to survive in the tropics and darker-skinned people to live in the far north. People can clothe themselves and seek shelter from the sun; they can use artificial sunscreens if they lack the natural protection that melanin provides. Dark-skinned people living in the north can, indeed must, get vitamin D from their diet or take supplements. Today, pregnant women are routinely advised to take folic acid or folate supplements as a hedge against NTDs. Even so, light skin color still is correlated with a higher incidence of spina bifida.

Jablonski and Chaplin (2000) explain variation in human skin color as resulting from a balancing act between the evolutionary needs to (1) protect against all UV hazards (thus favoring dark skin in the tropics) and (2) have an adequate supply of vitamin D (thus favoring lighter skin outside the tropics). This discussion of skin color shows that common ancestry, the presumed basis of race, is not the only reason for biological similarities. Natural selection, still at work today, makes a major contribution to variations in human skin color, as well as to many other human biological differences and similarities.

**Lactose Intolerance**

Many biological traits that illustrate human adaptation, such as skin color, are not under simple genetic control. Genetic determination of such traits may be likely but unconfirmed, or several genes may interact to influence the trait in question. Sometimes there is a genetic component, but the trait also responds to stresses encountered during growth. We speak of *phenotypical adaptation* when adaptive changes occur during the individual’s lifetime. Phenotypical adaptation is made possible by biological plasticity—our ability to change in response to the environments we encounter as we grow.

For example, genes and phenotypical adaptation work together to produce a biochemical difference between human groups: the ability to digest large amounts of milk—an adaptive advantage when other foods are scarce and milk is available, as it is in dairying societies. All milk, whatever its source, contains a complex sugar called lactose. The digestion of milk depends on an enzyme called lactase, which works in the small intestine. Among all mammals except humans and some of their pets, lactase production ceases after weaning, so that these animals can no longer digest milk.

Lactase production and the ability to tolerate milk vary between populations. About 90 percent of northern Europeans and their descendants are lactose tolerant; they can digest several glasses of milk with no difficulty. Similarly, about 80 percent of two African populations, the Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi in East Africa and the Fulani of Nigeria in West Africa, produce lactase and digest milk easily. Both these groups are herders. However, such nonherders as the Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria, the Baganda in Uganda, the Japanese and other Asians, Eskimos, South American Indians, and many Israelis cannot digest lactose (Kretchmer 1972/1975).
However, the variable human ability to digest milk seems to be a difference of degree. Some populations can tolerate very little or no milk, but others are able to metabolize much greater quantities. Studies show that people who move from no-milk to low-milk diets to high-milk diets increase their lactose tolerance; this suggests some phenotypical adaptation. We can conclude that no simple genetic trait accounts for the ability to digest milk. Lactose tolerance appears to be one of many aspects of human biology governed both by genes and by phenotypical adaptation to environmental conditions.

The Case for Cultural versus Biological Determination of Physical Attractiveness and Sports Abilities

Culture is a key environmental force in determining how human bodies grow and develop. Cultural traditions promote certain activities and abilities, discourage others, and set standards of physical well-being and attractiveness. Physical activities, including sports, that are influenced by culture help build the body. North American girls...
are encouraged to pursue, and therefore do well in international competition involving, figure skating, gymnastics, track and field, swimming, diving, and many other sports. Brazilian girls, although excelling in the team sports of basketball and volleyball, haven’t fared nearly as well in individual sports as have their American and Canadian counterparts. Why are people encouraged to excel as athletes in some nations but not others? Why do people in some countries invest so much time and effort in competitive sports that their bodies change significantly as a result?

Cultural standards of attractiveness and propriety influence participation and achievement in sports. Americans run or swim not just to compete but to keep trim and fit. Brazil’s beauty standards accept more fat, especially in female buttocks and hips. Brazilian men have had some international success in swimming and running, but Brazil rarely sends female swimmers or runners to the Olympics. One reason Brazilian women avoid competitive swimming in particular may be that sport’s effects on the body. Years of swimming sculpt a distinctive physique: an enlarged upper torso, a massive neck, and powerful shoulders and back. Successful female swimmers tend to be big, strong, and bulky. The countries that produce them most consistently are the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, the Scandinavian nations, the Netherlands, and the former Soviet Union, where this body type isn’t as stigmatized as it is in Latin countries. Swimmers develop hard bodies, but Brazilian culture says that women should be soft, with big hips and buttocks, not big shoulders. Many young female swimmers in Brazil choose to abandon the sport rather than the “feminine” body ideal.

Culture, not race, also helps us understand many or most of the differences in the sports success of blacks and whites. Cultural factors help explain why blacks excel in certain sports and whites in others. In American public schools, parks, sandlots, and city playgrounds, African Americans have access to baseball diamonds, basketball courts, football fields, and tracks. However, because of restricted economic opportunities, many black families can’t afford to buy hockey gear or golf or ski equipment, take ski vacations, pay for tennis lessons, or belong to clubs with tennis courts, pools, or golf courses. In the United States mainly light-skinned suburban boys (and increasingly, girls) play soccer, the most popular sport in the world. In Brazil, however, soccer is the national pastime of all males—black and white, rich and poor. There is wide public access. Brazilians play soccer on the beach and in streets, squares, parks, and playgrounds. Many of Brazil’s best soccer players, including the world-famous Pelé, have dark skin. When blacks have opportunities to participate in soccer, tennis, golf, or any other sport, they are physically capable of doing as well as whites.

Why does contemporary North America have so many black football and basketball players and so few black swimmers and hockey players? The answer lies mainly in cultural factors, including variable access, social stratification, and aspirations fueled by media exposure. Many Brazilians practice soccer, hoping to play for money for a professional club. Similarly, American blacks are aware that certain sports have provided career opportunities for African Americans. They start developing skills in those sports in childhood. The better they do, the more likely they are to persist, and the pattern continues. Culture—specifically, differential access to sports resources—has more to do with sports success, and the body types that go along with it, than race does.
The Case for Cultural versus Biological Determination of Intelligence

We have seen that, as scientists have shifted from racial classification to the explanation of human biological diversity, race is no longer considered a valid biological concept. Race has meaning only in social, cultural, and political terms. Over the centuries groups with power have used racial ideology to justify, explain, and preserve their privileged social positions. Dominant groups have declared minorities to be innately, that is, biologically, inferior. Racial ideas have been used to suggest that social inferiority and presumed shortcomings (in intelligence, ability, character, or attractiveness) are immutable and passed across the generations. This ideology defends stratification as inevitable, enduring, and natural—based in biology rather than society. Thus, the Nazis argued for the superiority of the Aryan race, and European colonialists asserted the existence of a “white man’s burden.” South Africa institutionalized apartheid. Again and again, to justify exploitation of minorities and native peoples, those in control have proclaimed the innate inferiority of the oppressed. In the United States the supposed superiority of whites was once standard segregationist doctrine. Belief in the biologically based inferiority of Native Americans has been an argument for their slaughter, confinement, and neglect.

However, anthropologists know that most of the behavioral variation among human groups rests on culture rather than biology. The cultural similarities revealed through thousands of ethnographic studies leave no doubt that capacities for cultural evolution are equivalent in all human populations. There is also excellent evidence that within any stratified (class-based) society, differences in performance between economic, social, and ethnic groups reflect their different experiences and opportunities. (Stratified societies are those with marked differences in wealth, prestige, and power between social classes.)

Occasionally, doctrines of innate superiority are even set forth by scientists, who, after all, tend to come from the favored stratum of society. One of the best-known examples is Jensenism, named for the educational psychologist Arthur Jensen (Jensen 1969; Herrnstein 1971), its leading proponent. Jensenism is a highly questionable interpretation of the observation that African Americans, on average, perform less well on intelligence tests than Euro-Americans and Asian Americans do. Jensenism asserts that blacks are incapable of performing as well as whites do. Writing with Charles Murray, Richard Herrnstein makes a similar argument in the 1994 book The Bell Curve, to which the following critique also applies (see also Jacoby and Glauberman 1995).

Environmental explanations for test scores are much more convincing than are the genetic arguments of Jensen, Herrnstein, and Murray. An environmental explanation does not deny that some people may be smarter than others. In any society, for many reasons, genetic and environmental, the talents of individuals vary. An environmental explanation does deny, however, that these differences can be generalized to whole populations. But even when talking about individual intelligence, we have to decide which of several abilities is an accurate measure of intelligence.
Psychologists have devised various kinds of tests to measure intelligence, but there are problems with all of them. Early intelligence tests required skill in manipulating words. Such tests do not accurately measure learning ability for several reasons. For example, individuals who have learned two languages as children (bilinguals) don’t do as well, on average, on verbal intelligence tests as do those who have learned a single language. It would be absurd to suppose that children who master two languages have inferior intelligence. The explanation seems to be that because bilinguals have vocabularies, concepts, and verbal skills in both languages, their ability to manipulate either one suffers a bit. This would seem to be offset by the advantage of being fluent in two languages.

Tests reflect the experience of the people who devise them: educated people in Europe and North America. It isn’t surprising that middle- and upper-class children do best, because they are more likely to share the test makers’ educational background, knowledge, and standards. Numerous studies have shown that performance on Scholastic Achievement Tests (SATs) can be improved by coaching and preparation. Parents who can afford hundreds of dollars for an SAT preparation course or thousands of dollars for an elite private school enhance their kids’ chances of getting high scores. Standardized college entrance exams are similar to IQ tests in that they have claimed to measure intellectual aptitude. They may do this, but they also measure type and quality of high school education, linguistic and cultural background, and parental wealth. No test is free of class, ethnic, and cultural biases.

Tests can measure only phenotypical intelligence, the product of a particular learning history, rather than genetically determined learning potential. IQ tests use middle-class experience as a standard for determining what should be known at a given chronological age. Furthermore, tests are usually administered by middle-class white people who give instructions in a dialect or language that may not be totally familiar to the child being tested. Test performance improves when the cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds of takers and examiners are similar (Watson 1972).

Cultural biases in testing affect performance by people in different societies and by different groups within the same society, such as Native Americans in the United States. Many Native Americans have grown up on reservations or under conditions of urban or rural poverty. They have suffered social, economic, political, and cultural discrimination. In one study, Native Americans scored the lowest (a mean of 81, compared with a standard of 100) of any minority group in the United States (Klineberg 1951). But when the environment during growth and development includes opportunities similar to those available to middle-class Americans, test performance tends to equalize. Consider the Osage Indians, on whose reservation oil was discovered. Profiting from oil sales, the Osage did not experience the stresses of poverty. They developed a good school system, and their average IQ was 104. Here the relationship between test performance and environment is particularly clear. The Osage did not settle on the reservation because they knew oil was there. There is no reason to believe these people were innately more intelligent than were Indians on different reservations. They were just luckier, and afterward they benefited from their good fortune.

Similar links between social, economic, and educational environment and test performance show up in comparisons of American blacks and whites. At the beginning
of World War I, intelligence tests were given to approximately one million American army recruits. Blacks from some northern states had higher average scores than did whites from some southern states. At that time northern blacks got a better public education than many southern whites did, so their superior performance wasn’t surprising. That southern whites did better, on average, than southern blacks also was expectable, given the unequal school systems then open to whites and blacks in the South.

Racists tried to dismiss the environmental explanation for the superior performance of northern blacks compared with southerners by suggesting selective migration, that smarter blacks had moved north. However, it was possible to test this hypothesis, which turned out to be false. If smarter blacks had moved north, their superior intelligence should have been evident in their school records while they were still living in the South. It was not. Furthermore, studies in New York, Washington, and Philadelphia showed that as length of residence in those cities increased, test scores also rose.

Studies of identical twins raised apart also illustrate the impact of environment on identical heredity. In a study of 19 pairs of twins, IQ scores varied directly with years in school. The average difference in IQ was only 1.5 points for the 8 twin pairs with the same amount of schooling. It was 10 points for the 11 pairs with an average of 5 years’ difference. One subject, with 14 years more education than his twin, scored 24 points higher (Bronfenbrenner 1975).

These and similar studies provide overwhelming evidence that test performance measures background and education rather than genetically determined intelligence. For centuries Europeans and their descendants have extended their political and economic control over much of the world. They colonized and occupied environments that they reached in their ships and conquered with their weapons. Most people in the most powerful contemporary nations—located in North America, Europe, and Asia—have light skin color. Some people in these currently powerful countries may incorrectly assert and believe that their position rests on innate biological superiority.

We are living in and interpreting the world at a particular time. In the past there were far different associations between centers of power and human physical characteristics. When Europeans were barbarians, advanced civilizations thrived in the Middle East. When Europe was in the Dark Ages, there were civilizations in West Africa, on the East African coast, in Mexico, and in Asia. Before the Industrial Revolution, the ancestors of many white Europeans and North Americans were living more like precolonial Africans than like current members of the American middle class. There is every reason to doubt that preindustrial Europeans would excel on current IQ tests.

Testing and Affirmative Action

We are individuals, but we also belong to groups with whose other members we share backgrounds, behavior patterns, values, interests, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses, which influence our likelihood of success in particular domains. One such domain is higher education, in which affirmative-action policies have been used to increase the proportion of minorities in the student body. Today, however, colleges and universities with affirmative-action goals face increased legal and political challenges.
In 1997, the Center for Individual Rights in Washington, DC, sued the University of Michigan on behalf of white students claiming that efforts to increase campus diversity by admitting black and Hispanic students with lower test scores and grades violated the Constitution. This suit followed a similar one against the University of Texas and a referendum in California (Proposition 209) that ended racial preferences in admissions. California and Texas are now forbidden to use race in university admissions.

It is claimed that affirmative-action policies lead universities to use different, and lower, standards for minorities. The standards mentioned in the legal challenges are national test scores (whose limitations have been discussed above) and grade point averages. The average test scores of black and Latino/a students are below those of whites. This phenomenon cuts across all income groups.

Educators face a quandary: How can fairness and equal opportunity be combined with maintenance of student bodies that reflect national diversity? How, fairly and legally, can diversity and multiculturalism be mainstreamed in the college setting? It is feared that primary use of scores, rather than more qualitative criteria, will result in virtual racial segregation. Furthermore, there is reason to question whether SAT scores and their professional-school equivalents are the best predictors of academic and career success. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education reported that in 1951, Martin Luther King, Jr., took the Graduate Record Exam for admission to a doctoral program at Boston University. His verbal aptitude score was below average. Yet King is now viewed as a verbal hero, one of the greatest orators in American history (Bronner 1997).

In the previous section we saw that test performance varies with environmental conditions and opportunities. It also varies over time. Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis compared IQ test scores of blacks and whites in their last year of high school and again at the end of college. Blacks improved their scores more than four times as much as whites did (Bronner 1997). The college experience itself may explain the faster rate of increase in average test scores by blacks.

Claude Steele of Stanford University suggests that blacks and women absorb negative self-images from the environment, driving down their scores on standardized tests (Bronner 1997). Steele (1997) found that when blacks taking a test were told that such tests showed no distinction in white–black scores, they did as well as the white test takers. But when they were told nothing or had to check off their race on a form before starting, their scores were lower. The findings for women were similar.

On June 23, 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race can be used in university admission decisions. But the Court also placed limits on the extent to which race can give an advantage to minority students. The Court ruled on two separate but parallel cases, both involving the University of Michigan. The justices voted 5–4 to uphold the university law school’s affirmative-action policy. But in a 6–3 vote, the Court ruled against the undergraduate admissions policy, which awarded 20 extra points for being black, Hispanic, or Native American.

In the 2003 Supreme Court decision, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor stated that affirmative action is still needed in America, but commented, “We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today.” In the undergraduate case, the Court ruled that the points
system violated equal protection provisions of the Constitution, because the use of race was not “narrowly tailored” to achieve the university’s diversity goals.

Debates regarding affirmative action continue. Some affirmation-action programs now give priority to students in poverty, not just to students of African-American, Hispanic, and Native American origin (Marciniak 2001). One solution would be to end the use of standard tests for college admissions. Almost 300 American colleges, including Bates College in Maine, no longer require test scores from their applicants (Bronner 1997). Bates College’s internal data show that those who did not submit their scores but were admitted got 160 points less than those who did submit their scores. Yet the two groups showed no difference in grades or graduation rates (Bronner 1997). The lower scorers included not only minority students but also whites from working-class backgrounds, students who grew up speaking another language at home, more women than men, and musicians and athletes. Bates’s no-test policy had helped double its minority representation (Bronner 1997).

### Key Terms

- haplogroup (113)
- melanin (115)
- natural selection (114)
- phenotype (112)
- Polynesia (112)
- racial classification (111)
- rickets (117)
- tropics (115)
CHAPTER 8

RACE: ITS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

REFLECTIONS: “I AM THE ORIGINAL SEOUL BROTHER!”

❖ Race and Racism
❖ Race, Ethnicity, and Culture
❖ The Cultural Construction of Race

Race in the Census
Not Us: Race in Japan
Phenotype and Fluidity: Race in Brazil

Hypodescent: Race in the United States

“I AM THE ORIGINAL SEOUL BROTHER!”

Joseph Simplicio (2001) describes a classroom lesson he did with prekindergarten children who were interested in skin color. He used M&M candies to show that things can look different on the outside but be the same on the inside. Young children start noticing skin color differences as early as age three or four. Years after their graduation, Simplicio’s high school students have returned to tell him they still remember that particular lesson, which he believes helps kids develop tolerance and an understanding of diversity.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.” The proverb warns against determining the value of something simply by the way it looks. Why haven’t we learned to apply this principle to our interactions with human beings? To what extent would ethnic conflict and racial violence diminish if we more consistently sought knowledge of humanity beyond appearance? What might our world look like without the imprints of slavery, colonialism, and the Holocaust?

Freudian theory suggests that within the first few minutes of having met someone, we know how we feel about that person. We determine almost instantaneously our course of action toward the new acquaintance. Stories about love at first sight are all too familiar. So are experiences of spontaneous, on-sight rejection, avoidance, and dismissal, be we the senders or recipients of such interpersonal responses. We look with our eyes, but see with our hearts, our instincts, and our history. We like, and protect, that which is familiar and comforting, and, especially, that which resonates with our sense of reality, righteousness, and survival. Intergroup relations, including race-based ones, mirror interpersonal strategies that work for self-preservation.
For a moment, assume the task of drawing a mental picture of the person who claims to be “the original Seoul brother.” What associations come to mind? What does the person look like? Imagine his body type, his facial features, and other physical attributes, such as his skin pigmentation and the texture of his hair. Consider his intellectual, emotional, and social attributes. How much education does he have? What language or languages does he speak? Is he employed, religious, wealthy or gregarious? How does he dress? How does he spend his leisure time? How do you feel about him?

Now try to interpret his self-definition. What possible stories, experiences, and meanings does his statement reveal? What might be original about him? How does his reference to Seoul, and the obvious pun, inform your interpretation? What meanings do you infer from his use of the term brother? Are there others just like him? Try to classify these people. What criteria of membership did you select? How much value does this group merit?

Finally, listen carefully to his claim “I am the original Seoul brother!” What sentiments do you hear in his voice, that is, his representation or definition of himself? Do these vary from the sentiments that you generated about him? If so, how? If there are differences between his and your depiction, how do you account for them? If you find it challenging to complete this exercise with a single person as your focus, imagine the effort that a thorough understanding of a group or a population requires. Failure to achieve an accurate account and appreciation of a race-based group of people results in racism (beliefs about categorical superiority and inferiority of socially defined groups assumed to share biological characteristics). Organized efforts by contemporary groups de-emphasize a racial definition by redefining themselves by ethnic or cultural criteria. Thus the Reverend Jesse Jackson’s proclamation to rename black Americans as African Americans has resulted in both a more positive self-image and more political credibility for this group.

The subject of our story defines himself as a “war baby.” He was born in Seoul, South Korea, the “proud son” of a Korean mother and an African-American father. “Everyone sees me as black. But I’m more than that; my nature is mixed, and my culture is rich.” By emphasizing his ethnic heritage, this man asserts a different-but-equal status. He resists the stigma that often accompanies a biologically based identity. In addition, he is adamant about his cosmopolitan orientation. He has lived in the United States since he was six years old. He claims American citizenship and nationality. He has traveled in India and plans to move to Brazil. His self-representation communicates pride and assurance with respect to his ancestry as a Korean, by his reference to Seoul, and his kinship to and affinity for African Americans, by his reference to brother. The structure of his performance when he speaks of himself—that is, his body language, voice modulation, speech pattern, gestures, and facial expression—tells of a man much more complex than his appearance, colored by phenotype and a janitor’s uniform, attest.

As part of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and later events, political activists and antiracist artists and intellectuals of various ethnic backgrounds united in efforts to combat racism and institutional discrimination. To do so, they accepted the argument that human beings are racially distinct, even though it was this idea
that had fueled racism and racial consciousness in the first place. To remedy historical inequities involving people of color, these well-meaning reformers accepted racial categorization as valid. They assumed that the best way to achieve equity was through race-based initiatives, such as affirmative action. This strategy proved useful in increasing access to resources and privileges by people of color.

However, this approach accentuates race-based differentiation and stratification. It makes race a primary criterion for the allocation and distribution of goods, services, and value. In this case, judging the book by its cover is justified by those who believe that privilege has always been linked chiefly to appearance (i.e., race) rather than substance (i.e., culture). Some argue that historically the people who have dominated economically, politically, and socially have done so because they are white, a race of another color. However, this perspective is misinformed and misguided. The fact that privilege and power have been the properties of whites and continue to be to a significant degree is incidental. The proximity that historically a European minority had to technological development and environmental exploitation is the primary determinant of the wealth, power, and prestige that whites are associated with. All Europeans are not privileged and powerful, any more than are all white people in North America. European peasants and poor whites in the United States and Canada are socioculturally differentiated and subordinated much like other racially defined minorities. Their access to privilege and power is limited and controlled. Whiteness may be considered generally an asset, but it does not equal inherent economic, political, or social superiority.

Socioeconomic divisions are enforced by elites of many colors who control economic, political, and cultural power. One of the consequences of externally structured segmentation and stratification is the construction of internal solidarity, loyalties, and habits by individuals. Such cohesion serves to distinguish and protect one group of people from another. From its inception as a classification, race has served as a basis for separating peoples, for protecting some and exploiting others. The Nazi party used race and racism to justify the extermination of millions of Jews and Gypsies in its intent to enforce German nationalism. Afrocentrists rely on race and racialcentrism to mobilize, organize, and unite the “black Atlantic,” encompassing descendants of the slavery-driven African diaspora.

Race is still perceived as either a stigma or a marker of superiority. Racial distinctions perpetuate inequalities and reinforce misconceptions about the nature and culture of social groups. However, mainstream Americans are beginning to understand today, as Brazilians have always known, that race is no longer as simple as black and white. Reminders come from such public figures as Halle Berry, Paula Abdul, Tiger Woods, and President Barack Obama; members of such advocacy groups as the Multiracial Americans of Southern California, Interracial/Intercultural Pride, and its offspring, Generation Pride (a group of teenagers of interracial background in the San Francisco Bay Area); and the debate over adding a multiracial category to the U.S. Census forms. Contrary to the assertion “What you see is what you get!” and more consistent with the stance of our Seoul brother, what we get from the varied individuals and groups that make up our society is much more than what we view. Culture, regardless of its racial cover, must be read critically and conscientiously, like any book, if it is to be understood and before it can be judged, let alone recommended.
This chapter and the last one examine race as a discredited biological term and as a cultural construct. Detailed discussion of examples from different cultures show that race, like ethnicity in general, is a matter of cultural categories and organization, rather than biological reality. That is, ethnic groups, including races, derive from contrasts perceived and perpetuated in particular societies, rather than from scientific classifications based on common genes.

Members of a group may consider themselves or be defined by others as different and special because of their language, religion, geography, history, ancestry, or physical traits. When an ethnic group is assumed to have a biological basis (shared blood or genetic material), it is called a race.

More than 50 years ago, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict realized that “in World history, those who have helped to build the same culture are not necessarily of one race, and those of the same race have not all participated in one culture. In scientific language, culture is not a function of race” (Benedict 1940, Chapter 2). Despite ample evidence backing her statement, faulty associations between heredity and society continue to distort the status of certain groups. To what extent has the construct race been used to rank human beings and to discriminate against them? How does race serve as a basis for group inclusion, identity, and solidarity?

Our tendency to classify and to stratify people by their appearance continues today despite decades of scientific evidence contradicting natural and absolute divisions of humanity. Abolition and the Civil Rights movement failed to end racial consciousness. We still hear discussions of the needs of the black race and accusations against the white race. The ranking of human groups based on assumed shared biological traits has been prominent in international and interpersonal relations for centuries. Unequal access to strategic resources, such as employment and education, disproportionately affects peoples of color.

Moral worth also has been unequally allocated. So strong is the perceived link between economic or political status and virtue that we tend to evaluate people by category rather than by their personal qualities. Attention to race often outweighs consideration of individual moral worth. Parents may warn their children against “mixing blood” by interracial marriage. Offspring of mixed unions may struggle to determine, and to assert, a satisfactory racial identity.

Racism rests on the notion that some groups are inherently inferior to others, and therefore should be dominated by other, presumably inherently superior, groups. In the United States, until the 1960s, domination of blacks was institutionalized and backed by the government. African Americans were denied civil rights and full participation in national economic, political, and social life. Racism continues. Remarks such as “Mexicans in California are like the blacks in the South” and acts such as locking the car doors when a Hispanic-looking youth approaches exemplify the tendency of whites to equate nonwhiteness with inferiority or danger.

However, practices that promote social inequality coexist with acts, policies, and programs designed to combat racism. Belief in biopsychological equality of human groups informs the work of antiracists, who reject ideas and practices based on
presumed innate superiority and inferiority of groups. Antiracist strategies include refusal to behave according to one’s prescribed racial category and participation in activities to combat racism.

Legislation has played a vital role in increasing social equality. Federal action against racism includes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which fought segregation in public facilities and employment; the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Affirmative action refers to a set of policies designed to increase the participation of African Americans and other minorities in settings and positions traditionally dominated by privileged whites. These policies, whose legal status is currently in question, require institutions and employers to admit and hire members of historically underrepresented groups.

The Civil Rights movement in general, and the black movement in particular, fostered a reevaluation of race as a concept and category. This process has accelerated with the Afrocentric orientation of many African Americans and the native movements of other minorities. Race and culture have been reclaimed, redefined, and reinterpreted by minority leaders and their followers. In this new ownership, the classification denotes strength, not weakness; privilege, not victimization; and freedom rather than confinement. Trying to correct past injustices, leaders declared race the basis of their unity, identity, and power. They used race as a basis for explaining discrimination and mobilizing self-reflection and solidarity. The collective voice of these cultural architects of color proclaimed, “It’s about race, everybody!”

Ideas and practices that promote inequality among races reflect cultural bias, not science or justice. Racial stratification and racism have economic and political determinants. In opposition, the mobilizing agents of racial and ethnic identity groups devise strategies to enhance opportunities, awareness, pride, and quality of life for their members. Such movements have helped reduce disparities, but they have not ended hierarchy. Contemporary examples of members of subordinate groups who participate in dominant social spheres—for example, the African-American engineer, the Native American journalist, or the Latino/a senator or governor do not negate the fact of culture-based but biology-justified group subordination.

Barbara Trepagnier (2001) sets forth the idea of silent racism. Some “well-meaning white people . . . do not commit overtly racist acts or make intentionally racist statements, and they are concerned about racism,” yet they still may play a role in constructing racist acts (Trepagnier 2001, p. 142). Rather than the binary categories of “racist” and “nonracist,” there is a continuum of racial awareness, and people are racist to various degrees. Trepagnier assembled focus groups of white women who had identified themselves as concerned about racism. She discovered two forms of silent racism in her study: feelings of superiority by members of the dominant group (whites) and stereotypical images of others, reflecting their belief in inherent racial differences.

Optimal understanding of any construct requires critical analysis of its origins as well as its nature. Has humanity been racially ordered since antiquity? What circumstances generated racism? How are races and racism conceived in different cultures? Do humans possess a racist gene? If so, should we assume that efforts to abolish racism are futile?

Many Americans assume that racism has always existed and that it is intrinsic to humanity. Frank Snowden, Jr., dispels this myth in his analysis of intergroup rela-
tions in the ancient world (1970, 1983, 1992, 1995). He relies on classical studies and ancient art to show that Europeans and Africans coexisted in the ancient world and that social relations and business transactions occurred free of discrimination based on skin color or other physical features.

According to Snowden, the ancient Greeks and Romans accepted the physical and cultural diversity in their midst. For example, they used the term *Ethiopian* for the dark-skinned peoples who lived south of Egypt. Portrayals of African blacks by Greeks and Romans spanned a range of physical types and a gradation of skin color. Degree of coloration (e.g., blackest, less sunburned, mildly dark) and contrasts by physical features (e.g., thick lips, tightly curled hair) denote recognition of a range of human diversity. Ancient art and literature also acknowledged variety in customs and social practices, for instance, facial scarification. The Greeks and Romans ascribed variations in physical characteristics and cultural markers partly to environmental influences and partly to intermarriage between members of different groups (Snowden 1995).

### Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

It is not possible to define races biologically. Only cultural constructions of race are possible, even though the average citizen conceptualizes race in biological terms. The belief that races exist and are important is much more common among the public than it is among scientists. Most Americans, for example, believe that their population includes biologically based races to which various labels have been applied. These Hispanic can be of any race. “Hispanic” and “Latino” are labels that crosscut racial contrasts such as that between black and white. Phenotypical diversity even marks families, such as the one shown celebrating here.
labels include white, black, yellow, red, Caucasoid, Negroid, Mongoloid, Amerindian, Euro-American, African American, Asian American, and Native American.

We hear the words *ethnicity* and *race* frequently, but North American culture doesn’t draw a very clear line between them. As an illustration, consider two articles in the *New York Times* of May 29, 1992. One, discussing the changing ethnic composition of the United States, stated (correctly) that Hispanics “can be of any race” (Barringer 1992, p. A12). In other words, Hispanic is an ethnic category that crosses racial contrasts such as that between black and white. The other article reported that during the Los Angeles riots of spring 1992, “hundreds of Hispanic residents were interrogated about their immigration status on the basis of their race alone [emphasis added]” (Mydans 1992a). Use of race here seems inappropriate, because Hispanic is usually perceived as referring to a linguistically based (Spanish-speaking) ethnic group rather than a biologically based race. Since these Los Angeles residents were being interrogated because they were Hispanic, the article was actually reporting on ethnic, not racial, discrimination. However, given the lack of a precise distinction between race and ethnicity, it is probably better to use the term ethnic group instead of race to describe any such social group, for example, African Americans, Asian Americans, Irish Americans, Anglo Americans, or Hispanics.

**The Cultural Construction of Race**

Races are ethnic groups assumed by members of a particular culture to have a biological basis, but actually race is culturally constructed. The races we hear about every day are cultural, or social, rather than biological categories. Many Americans mistakenly assume that whites and blacks, for example, are biologically distinct and that these terms stand for discrete races; but these labels, like racial terms used in other societies, really designate culturally perceived rather than biologically based groups.

**Hypodescent: Race in the United States**

How is race culturally constructed in the United States? In American culture, one acquires his or her racial identity at birth, as an ascribed status, but race isn’t based on biology or on simple ancestry. Take the case of the child of a racially mixed marriage involving one black and one white parent. We know that 50 percent of the child’s genes come from one parent and 50 percent from the other. Still, American culture overlooks heredity and classifies this child as black. This rule is arbitrary. From genotype (genetic composition), it would be just as logical to classify the child as white.

American rules for assigning racial status can be even more arbitrary. In some states, anyone known to have any black ancestor, no matter how remote, is classified as a member of the black race. This is a rule of descent (it assigns social identity on the basis of ancestry), but of a sort that is rare outside the contemporary United States. It is called hypodescent (Harris and Kottak 1963) (*hypo* means “lower”) because it automatically places the children of a union or mating between members of different groups in the minority group. Hypodescent helps divide American society into groups that have been unequal in their access to wealth, power, and prestige. So strong is the
rule of hypodescent, that even President Barack Obama, the son of a white mother (who raised him) and an African father, and therefore clearly biracial, chose to self-identify as black in filling out his 2010 census form.

Millions of Americans have faced discrimination because one or more of their ancestors happened to belong to a minority group. We saw in Chapter 5 that governments sometimes manipulate ethnicity and encourage ethnic divisions for political and economic ends. The following case from Louisiana is an excellent illustration of the arbitrariness of the hypodescent rule and of the role that governments (federal or state) play in legalizing, inventing, or eradicating race and ethnicity (B. Williams 1989). Susie Guillory Phipps, a light-skinned woman with Caucasian features and straight black hair, discovered as an adult that she was black. When Phipps obtained a copy of her birth certificate, she found her race listed as colored. Since she had been “brought up white and married white twice,” Phipps challenged a 1970 Louisiana law declaring anyone with at least one-thirty-second “Negro blood” to be legally black. Although the state’s lawyer admitted that Phipps “looks like a white person,” the state of Louisiana insisted that her racial classification was proper (Yetman 1991, pp. 3–4).

Cases like Phipps’s are rare, because racial and ethnic identities usually are ascribed at birth and usually don’t change. The rule of hypodescent affects blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and Hispanics differently. It’s easier to negotiate Indian or Hispanic identity than black identity. The ascription rule isn’t as definite, and the assumption of a biological basis isn’t as strong.

To be considered Native American, one ancestor out of eight (great-grandparents) or four (grandparents) may suffice. This depends on whether the assignment is by federal or state law or by an Indian tribal council. The child of a Hispanic may (or may not, depending on context) claim Hispanic identity. Many Americans with an Indian or a Latino/a grandparent consider themselves white and lay no claim to minority group status.

Something like hypodescent even works with the classification of sexual orientation in the United States. Bisexuals are lumped with gays and lesbians rather than with heterosexuals. These statuses (sexual orientations) are often viewed as ascribed (no choice) rather than achieved (ambivalent or changing sexual preference possible).

**Race in the Census**

The U.S. Census Bureau has gathered data by race since 1790. Initially this was done because the Constitution specified that a slave counted as three-fifths of a white person, and because Indians were not taxed. The racial categories included in the 1990 census were “White,” “Black or Negro,” “Indian (American),” “ Eskimo,” “Aleut or Pacific Islander,” and “Other.” A separate question was asked about Spanish-Hispanic heritage. Check out Figure 8–1, a reproduction of the questionnaire on racial categories in the 2010 census.

Attempts by social scientists and interested citizens to add a “multiracial” census category have been opposed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Council of La Raza (a Hispanic advocacy group). Racial classification is a political issue (Goldberg 2002) involving access to
resources, including jobs, voting districts, and federal funding of programs aimed at minorities. The hypodescent rule results in all the population growth being attributed to the minority category. Minorities fear their political clout will decline if their numbers go down.

But things are changing. Choice of “some other race” in the U.S. Census tripled between 1980 (6.8 million) and 2010 (over 19 million)—suggesting imprecision in and dissatisfaction with the existing categories. In the 2000 census, 2.4 percent of Americans, or 6.8 million people, chose a first-ever option of identifying themselves as belonging to more than one race. These figures rose to 2.9 percent (9 million Americans) in the 2010 census. The number of interracial marriages and children is increasing, with implications for the traditional system of American racial classification. “Interracial,” “biracial,” or “multiracial” children who grow up with both parents undoubtedly identify with particular qualities of either parent. To have so important an identity as race dictated by the arbitrary rule of hypodescent is troubling for many of them. It may be especially discordant when racial identity doesn’t parallel gender identity, for instance, a boy with a white father and a black mother, or a girl with a white mother and a black father.
How does the Canadian census compare with the American census in its treatment of race? Rather than race, the Canadian census asks about “visible minorities.” That country’s Employment Equity Act defines such groups as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples [aka First Nations in Canada, Native Americans in the United States], who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada 2006). Table 8–1 shows that “South Asian” and “Chinese” are Canada’s largest visible minorities. Note that Canada’s total visible minority population of 16.2 percent in 2006 (up from 11.2 percent in 1996) contrasts with a figure of about 25 percent for the United States in the 2000 census and over 34 percent in 2008 (see Figure 5–2 on p. 76). In particular, Canada’s black population of 2.5 percent contrasts with the American figure of 12.8 percent (2008) for African Americans, while Canada’s Asian population is significantly higher than the U.S. figure of 4.4 percent (2008) on a percentage basis. Only a tiny fraction of the Canadian population (0.4 percent) claimed multiple visible minority affiliation, compared with 2.9 percent claiming “more than one race” in the United States in the 2010 census.

Canada’s visible minority population has been increasing steadily. In 1981, 1.1 million visible minorities accounted for 4.7 percent of the total population, versus 16.2 percent today. Visible minorities are growing much faster than is Canada’s total population. Between 2001 and 2006, the total population increased 5 percent,
while visible minorities rose 27 percent. If recent immigration trends continue, by 2016, visible minorities will account for 20 percent of the Canadian population.

**Table 8–1**

Visible Minority Population of Canada, 2006 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minority Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>1,262,865</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,216,515</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>783,795</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>410,695</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab/West Asian</td>
<td>374,835</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>304,245</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>239,935</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>141,890</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>83,300</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other visible minority</td>
<td>116,895</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple visible minority</td>
<td>133,120</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total visible minority population</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,068,090</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


American culture ignores considerable diversity in biology, language, and geographic origin as it socially constructs race in the United States. North Americans also overlook diversity by seeing Japan as a nation that is homogeneous in race, ethnicity, language, and culture—an image the Japanese themselves cultivate. Thus in 1986 Prime Minister Nakasone created an international furor by contrasting his country’s supposed homogeneity (responsible, he suggested, for Japan’s success at that time in international business) with the ethnically mixed United States.

Japan is hardly the uniform entity Nakasone described. Scholars estimate that 10 percent of Japan’s national population are minorities of various sorts. These include aboriginal Ainu, annexed Okinawans, outcast *burakumin*, children of mixed marriages, and immigrant nationalities, especially Koreans, who number more than 700,000 (De Vos, Wetherall, and Stearman 1983; Lie 2001).

To describe racial attitudes in Japan, Jennifer Robertson (1992) uses Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (1990) term “intrinsic racism”—the belief that a (perceived) racial difference is a sufficient reason to value one person less than another. In Japan the valued group is majority (“pure”) Japanese, who are believed to share “the same blood.” Thus, the caption to a printed photo of a Japanese-American model reads: “She was born in Japan but raised in Hawaii. Her nationality is American but no foreign blood flows in her veins” (Robertson 1992, p. 5). Something like hypodescent
also operates in Japan, but less precisely than in the United States, where mixed offspring automatically become members of the minority group. The children of mixed marriages between majority Japanese and others (including Euro-Americans) may not get the same “racial” label as their minority parent, but they are still stigmatized for their non-Japanese ancestry (De Vos and Wagatsuma 1966).

How is race culturally constructed in Japan? The (majority) Japanese define themselves by opposition to others, whether minority groups in their own nation or outsiders—anyone who is “not us.” The “not us” should stay that way; assimilation generally is discouraged. Cultural mechanisms, especially residential segregation and taboos on “interracial” marriage, work to keep minorities “in their place.”

In its construction of race, Japanese culture regards certain ethnic groups as having a biological basis, when there is no evidence that they do. The best example is the burakumin, a stigmatized group of at least 4 million outcasts, sometimes compared to India’s untouchables. The burakumin are physically and genetically indistinguishable from other Japanese. Many of them “pass” as (and marry) majority Japanese, but a deceptive marriage can end in divorce if burakumin identity is discovered (Aoki and Dardess, 1981).

Burakumin are perceived as standing apart from majority Japanese. Through ancestry, descent (and thus, it is assumed, “blood,” or genetics) burakumin are “not us.” Majority Japanese try to keep their lineage pure by discouraging mixing. The burakumin are residentially segregated in neighborhoods (rural or urban) called buraku, from which the racial label is derived. Compared with majority Japanese, the burakumin are less likely to attend high school and college. When burakumin attend the same schools as majority Japanese, they face discrimination. Majority children and teachers may refuse to eat with them because burakumin are considered unclean.

In applying for university admission or a job and in dealing with the government, Japanese must list their address, which becomes part of a household or family registry. This list makes residence in a buraku, and likely burakumin social status, evident. Schools and companies use this information to discriminate. (The best way to pass is to move so often that the buraku address eventually disappears from the registry.) Majority Japanese also limit “race” mixture by hiring marriage mediators to check out the family histories of prospective spouses. They are especially careful to check for burakumin ancestry (De Vos et al. 1983).

The origin of the burakumin lies in a historical tiered system of stratification (from the Tokugawa period—1603–1868). The top four ranked categories were warrior-administrators (samurai), farmers, artisans, and merchants. The ancestors of the burakumin were below this hierarchy, an outcast group who did unclean jobs such as animal slaughter and disposal of the dead. Burakumin still do similar jobs, including work with leather and other animal products. The burakumin are more likely than majority Japanese to do manual labor (including farm work) and to belong to the national lower class. Burakumin and other Japanese minorities are also more likely to have careers in crime, prostitution, entertainment, and sports (De Vos et al. 1983).

Like blacks in the United States, the burakumin are stratified, or class-stratified. Because certain jobs are reserved for the burakumin, people who are successful in those occupations (e.g., shoe factory owners) can be wealthy. Burakumin also have
found jobs as government bureaucrats. Financially successful burakumin can temporarily escape their stigmatized status by travel, including foreign travel.

Discrimination against the burakumin is strikingly like the discrimination that blacks have experienced in the United States. The burakumin often live in villages and neighborhoods with poor housing and sanitation. They have limited access to education, jobs, amenities, and health facilities. In response to burakumin political mobilization, Japan has dismantled the legal structure of discrimination against burakumin and has worked to improve conditions in the buraku. (The website http://blhrri.org/index_e.htm is sponsored by the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute and includes the most recent information about the burakumin liberation movement.) Still Japan has yet to institute American-style affirmative-action programs for education and jobs. Discrimination against nonmajority Japanese is still the rule in companies. Some employers say that hiring burakumin would give their company an unclean image and thus create a disadvantage in competing with other businesses (De Vos et al. 1983).

Phenotype and Fluidity: Race in Brazil

There are more flexible, less exclusionary ways of constructing social race than those used in the United States and Japan. Along with the rest of Latin America, Brazil has less exclusionary categories, which permit individuals to change their racial classification. Brazil shares a history of slavery with the United States, but it lacks the hypodescent rule. Nor does Brazil have racial aversion of the sort found in Japan.
Brazilians use many more racial labels—over 500 were once reported (Harris 1970)—than Americans or Japanese do. In northeastern Brazil, Kottak found 40 different racial terms in use in Arembepe, a village of only 750 people (Kottak 2006). Through their traditional classification system Brazilians recognize and attempt to describe the physical variation that exists in their population. The system used in the

These photos, taken in Brazil by Conrad Kottak in 2003 and 2004, give just a glimpse of the spectrum of phenotypical diversity encountered among contemporary Brazilians.
United States, by recognizing only three or four races, blinds Americans to an equivalent range of evident physical contrasts. The system Brazilians use to construct social race has other special features. In the United States one’s race is an ascribed status; it is assigned automatically by hypodescent and usually doesn’t change. In Brazil racial identity is more flexible, more of an achieved status.

Brazilian racial classification pays attention to phenotype. Scientists distinguish between genotype, or hereditary makeup, and phenotype—expressed physical characteristics. Genotype is what you are genetically; phenotype is what you appear as. Identical twins and clones have the same genotype, but their phenotypes vary if they have been raised in different environments. Phenotype describes an organism’s evident traits, its “manifest biology”—physiology and anatomy, including skin color, hair form, facial features, and eye color. A Brazilian’s phenotype and racial label may change because of environmental factors, such as the tanning rays of the sun or the effects of humidity on the hair.

A Brazilian can change his or her “race” (e.g., from “Indian” to “mixed”) by changing his or her manner of dress, language, location (e.g., rural to urban), and even attitude (e.g., by adopting urban behavior). Two racial/ethnic labels used in Brazil are indio (Indian) and caboclo (someone who “looks Indian” but wears modern clothing and participates in Brazilian culture, rather than living in an Indian community). Similar shifts in racial/ethnic classification occur in other parts of Latin America, for example, Guatemala. The perception of biological race is influenced not just by the physical phenotype but by how one dresses and behaves.

Furthermore, racial differences in Brazil may be so insignificant in structuring community life that people may forget the terms they have applied to others. Sometimes they even forget the ones they’ve used for themselves. In Arembepe, Kottak made it a habit to ask the same person on different days to tell him the races of others in the village (and his own). In the United States he is always “white” or “Euro-American,” but in Arembepe he got lots of terms besides branco (“white”). He could be claro (“light”), louro (“blond”), sarará (“light-skinned redhead”), mulato claro (“light mulatto”), or mulato (“mulatto”). The racial term used to describe Kottak or anyone else varied from person to person, week to week, even day to day. Kottak’s best informant, a man with very dark skin color, changed the term he used for himself all the time—from escuro (“dark”) to preto (“black”) to moreno escuro (“dark brunet”).

The American and Japanese racial systems are creations of particular cultures, rather than scientific—or even accurate—descriptions of human biological differences. Brazilian racial classification also is a cultural construction, but Brazilians have developed a way of describing human biological diversity that is more detailed, fluid, and flexible than the systems used in most cultures. Brazil lacks Japan’s racial aversion, and it also lacks a rule of descent like that which ascribes racial status in the United States (Degler 1970; Harris 1964).

For centuries the United States and Brazil have had mixed populations, with ancestors from Native America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Although races have mixed in both countries, Brazilian and American cultures have constructed the results differently. The historical reasons for this contrast lie mainly in the different characteristics of the settlers of the two countries. The mainly English early settlers of the
United States came as women, men, and families, but Brazil’s Portuguese colonizers were mainly men—merchants and adventurers. Many of these Portuguese men married Native American women and recognized their racially mixed children as their heirs. Like their North American counterparts, Brazilian plantation owners had sexual relations with their slaves. But the Brazilian landlords more often freed the children that resulted—for demographic and economic reasons. (Sometimes these were their only children.) Freed offspring of master and slave became plantation overseers and foremen and filled many intermediate positions in the emerging Brazilian economy. They were not classed with the slaves but were allowed to join a new intermediate category. No hypodescent rule developed in Brazil to ensure that whites and blacks remained separate (see Degler 1970; Harris 1964).

In today’s world system, Brazil’s system of racial classification is changing in the context of international identity politics and rights movements. Just as more and more Brazilians claim indigenous (Indian) identities, an increasing number now assert their blackness and self-conscious membership in the African diaspora. Particularly in such northeastern Brazilian states as Bahia, where African demographic and cultural influence is strong, public universities have instituted affirmative-action programs aimed at indigenous peoples and especially at blacks. Racial identities firm up in the context of international (e.g., pan-African and pan-Indian) mobilization and access to strategic resources based on race.

**Key Terms**

Afrocentric (130)                descent (132)
antiracists (129)                hypodescent (132)
CHAPTER 9

GENDER

REFLECTIONS: WHO'S THE BRIDE AND WHO'S THE GROOM NOW?

❖ Sex and Gender
❖ Recurrent Gender Patterns
❖ Gender Roles and Gender Stratification
  Reduced Gender Stratification—Patrilineal, Patrilocal Societies
  Matriarchy
  Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrifocal Societies
❖ Gender in Industrial Societies
  The Feminization of Poverty
  Work and Happiness
❖ Beyond Male and Female

WHO'S THE BRIDE AND WHO'S THE GROOM NOW?

An unanticipated reversal of gender roles and activities between Fred and Tonyo, two recently married gay men, stirs in them conflicting emotions of anger, relief, pride, guilt, and hope. Fred is a 52-year-old descendant of peasant, Greek immigrants turned factory workers in Detroit. He graduated from a top public university with a degree in business administration. His intellect, ambition, and creativity gained him rapid financial independence, prestige, and membership in the cultural elite of New York City. Four years ago the downsizing of his company left him unemployed, disconnected professionally, and marginalized socially. A corresponding change in his gender role from breadwinner to a kept man added to his loss of key identities.

At 46 years of age, Tonyo is financially secure, cultivated, and domestically gifted. Graduate of a prestigious private university, his elegant lifestyle defies his humble beginnings as the son of poor Cuban immigrants and a migrant to Manhattan from the “Jersey working class.” A series of recent promotions catapulted Tonyo from buyer to the vice-presidency of a leading retail company, a promotion with a significant increase in income, power, and prestige. His domestic gender role shifted from supplemental income earner and consummate homemaker, to breadwinner and more dominant public figure.

As the stay-at-home partner Fred now saw himself as the noikokira (Greek for woman, wife, homemaker), responsible for managing and maintaining the household. Tonyo suddenly became the afediko (Greek for master, boss, breadwinner, man), a role that in our society requires success in making money, supporting the family, and...
building influential social connections. The men admit that their recent marriage, following 18 years of a domestic partnership, calls for a “greater commitment to one another” and reinforces the reversal in roles to sustain the “family.” As Fred clarified sarcastically, “Before he was the niﬁ [Greek for bride/daughter-in-law] to the Tsarousis clan; now he’s the gambro” [Greek for groom/son-in-law]. “Who’s the bride and who’s the groom now?” teases Tonyo. How might these men understand and reconcile their new gender roles?

Gender refers to the behaviors and meanings that societies assign to males and females, based on perceived distinctions linked to sex or anatomy. However, we know that gender also is shaped by historical, environmental, economic, political, and cultural forces.

We learn from infancy how to behave based on interactions with family members and the material and symbolic rewards that we receive for acting like “a good little girl” or “a big, strong boy.” Children usually adapt by internalizing and manifesting a binary sex and gender identity: They see males as masculine/manly and females as feminine/womanly. Family, peers, school, religion, and the media reinforce this division of the sexes by stereotyping male and female roles, activities, and rewards.

What about children who “feel different” or “act strange” and who as young as four years of age display behaviors and sensibilities that contradict heteronormative roles of sex and gender? What becomes of human beings who defy or transcend sex-based “manly” or “womanly” roles and activities, or those who claim to be “postgender”? How do we make sense of “masculine women” and “feminine men” in our midst?

We live in a world in which economic and social survival depends not so much on biological sex as on education, skills, political connections, and creativity. Our economy requires flexibility in gender roles, and our society accommodates varied and alternating expressions of sex and gender. Economic shifts have produced flexible and unpredictable gender roles—at times liberating, often burdensome, but frequently necessary.

Today, notions of masculinity/manliness and femininity/womanliness are more fluid than ever. The stay-at-home dad may be in the minority of neighborhood dads, but he isn’t an “outcast.” The mom who travels across continents for a living may be unconventional, perhaps ridden with guilt for prioritizing her work ambitions over child care; and yet, we may admire her, or justify her choice given the vulnerability most women face today when reliance on a husband for economic security is a high-risk investment.

Anthropology teaches us that folk classifications of what constitutes masculine/manly or feminine/womanly behavior contradict great variance in gender potentialities. Biological sex and gender identity are not inherently linked or absolutely binary. Fred’s and Tonyo’s predicament is neither unique nor a symptom of their sexual orientation as gay men. Gender is a malleable human attribute that transcends sex and sexuality. Gender expresses human potentials that economic reality, societal necessity, and individual choice enact again and again. As our society becomes less sexist and more humane, men and women will pursue activities that support a way of life that is conducive to personal and political realities.
Because anthropologists study biology, society, and culture, they are in a unique position to comment on nature (biological predispositions) and nurture (environment) as determinants of human behavior. Human attitudes, values, and behavior are limited not only by our genetic predispositions—which often are difficult to identify—but also by our experiences during enculturation. Our attributes as adults are determined both by our genes and by our environment during growth and development.

Questions about nature and nurture emerge in the discussion of human sex-gender roles and sexuality. Men and women differ genetically. Women have two X chromosomes, and men have an X and a Y. The father determines a baby’s sex because only he has the Y chromosome to transmit. The mother always provides an X chromosome.

The chromosomal difference is expressed in hormonal and physiological contrasts. Humans are sexually dimorphic, more so than some primates, such as gibbons (small tree-living Asiatic apes), and less so than others, such as gorillas and orangutans. Sexual dimorphism refers to differences in male and female biology besides the contrasts in breasts and genitals. Women and men differ not just in primary (genitalia and reproductive organs) and secondary (breasts, voice, hair distribution) sexual characteristics but in average weight, height, strength, and longevity. Women tend to live longer than men and have excellent endurance capabilities. In a given population, men tend to be taller and to weigh more than women do. Of course, there is a considerable overlap between the sexes in terms of height, weight, and physical strength, and there has been a pronounced reduction in sexual dimorphism during human biological evolution.

Anthropologists have documented substantial variability in the roles of men, women, and children in different cultures. Increasingly in the United States, women do “men’s work,” and vice versa. Can you think of any job that is restricted to one gender?
Just how far, however, do such genetically and physiologically determined differences go? What effects do they have on the way men and women act and are treated in different societies? Anthropologists have discovered both similarities and differences in the roles of men and women in different cultures. The predominant anthropological position on sex-gender roles and biology may be stated as follows:

The biological nature of men and women [should be seen] not as a narrow enclosure limiting the human organism, but rather as a broad base upon which a variety of structures can be built. (Friedl 1975, p. 6)

Although in most societies men tend to be somewhat more aggressive than women are, many of the behavioral and attitudinal differences between the sexes emerge from culture rather than biology. Sex differences are biological, but gender encompasses all the traits that a culture assigns to and inculcates in males and females. “Gender,” in other words, refers to the cultural construction of male and female characteristics (Rosaldo 1980b).

Given the “rich and various constructions of gender” within the realm of cultural diversity, Susan Bourque and Kay Warren (1987) note that the same images of masculinity and femininity do not always apply. Anthropologists have gathered systematic ethnographic data about similarities and differences involving gender in many cultural settings (Bonvillain 2007; Brettell and Sargent 2009; Gilmore 2001; Mascia-Lees and Black 2000; Nanda 2000; Ward and Edelstein 2009). Before we examine the cross-cultural data, some definitions are in order.

Gender roles are the tasks and activities a culture assigns to the sexes. Related to gender roles are gender stereotypes, which are oversimplified but strongly held ideas about the characteristics of males and females. Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards (socially valued resources, power, prestige, human rights, and personal freedom) between men and women, reflecting their different positions in a social hierarchy.

In stateless societies, gender stratification often is more obvious in regard to prestige than it is in regard to wealth. In her study of the Ilongots of northern Luzon in the Philippines, Michelle Rosaldo (1980a) described gender differences related to the positive cultural value placed on adventure, travel, and knowledge of the external world. More often than women, Ilongot men, as headhunters, visited distant places. They acquired knowledge of the outside world, amassed experiences there, and returned to express their knowledge, adventures, and feelings in public oratory. They received acclaim as a result. Ilongot women had inferior prestige because they lacked external experiences on which to base knowledge and dramatic expression. On the basis of Rosaldo’s study and findings in other stateless societies, Ong (1989) argues that we must distinguish between prestige systems and actual power in a given society. High male prestige may not entail economic or political power held by men over their families.

Recurrent Gender Patterns

You probably had chores when you were growing up. Was there any gender bias in what you were asked to do compared with your brother or sister? If you were raised by two parents, did any tension arise over your parental division of labor? Based on
cross-cultural data from societies worldwide, Table 9–1 lists activities that are generally male, generally female, or swing (either male or female). Before you look at that table, see if you can assign the following to one gender or the other (M or F): hunting large animals ( ), gathering wild-vegetable foods ( ), tending crops ( ), fishing ( ), cooking ( ), fetching water ( ), making baskets ( ), making drinks ( ). Now consult Table 9–1 and see how you did. Reflect on your results. Is what’s true cross-culturally still true of the division of labor by gender in today’s world, including the United States.

Even if we still think in terms of “men’s work” and “women’s work,” ideas about gender are changing along with the employment patterns of men and women. But old beliefs, cultural expectations and challenges, and gender stereotypes linger. As of this writing, only 17 out of 100 United States senators are women. Only four women have ever served on the United States Supreme Court. Women, in general, remain less powerful than men. The lingering American expectation that proper female behavior should be polite, restrained, or meek poses a challenge for women, because American culture also values decisiveness and “standing up for your beliefs.” When American men and women display certain behavior—speaking up for their ideas, for example—they are judged differently. A man’s assertive behavior may be admired and rewarded, but a woman’s similar behavior may be labeled “aggressive”—or worse.

Both men and women are constrained by their cultural training, stereotypes, and expectations. For example, American culture stigmatizes male crying. It’s okay for little boys to cry, but becoming a man discourages this natural expression of joy and sadness. American men are trained as well to make decisions and stick to them. In our stereotypes, changing one’s mind is more associated with women than men and may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Politicians routinely criticize their opponents for being indecisive, for waffling or “flip-flopping” on issues. What a strange idea—that

| TABLE 9–1 |

| Generalities in the Division of Labor by Gender, Based on Data from 185 Societies |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Male Activities</th>
<th>Generally Female Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunting large aquatic mammals</td>
<td>Gathering fuel (e.g., firewood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelting ores</td>
<td>Making drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalworking</td>
<td>Gathering wild vegetal foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumbering</td>
<td>Dairy production (e.g., churning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting large land animals</td>
<td>Spinning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working wood</td>
<td>Doing laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting fowl</td>
<td>Fetching water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making musical instruments</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapping</td>
<td>Preparing vegetal food (e.g., processing cereal grains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building boats</td>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working stone</td>
<td>Setting bones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 9–1 (Continued)

Generalities in the Division of Labor by Gender, Based on Data from 185 Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Activities (contd.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butchering(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting wild honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearing land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending large herd animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing the soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making nets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making rope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swing (Male or Female) Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing skins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering small land animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making leather products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making baskets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying burdens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making mats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for small animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving meat and fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loom weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering small aquatic animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing manufacture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making pottery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)All the activities above “butchering” are almost always done by men; those from “butchering” through “making rope” usually are done by men.


people shouldn’t change their positions if they’ve discovered there’s a better way. Males, females, and humanity may be equally victimized by aspects of cultural training.

Data relevant to the cross-cultural study of gender can be drawn from the domains of economics, politics, domestic activity, kinship, and marriage. Table 9–1 shows cross-cultural data from 185 randomly selected societies on the division of labor by gender.
Remembering the discussion in Chapter 2 of universals, generalities, and particularities, the findings in Table 9–1 about the division of labor by gender illustrate generalities rather than universals. That is, among the societies known to ethnography, there is a very strong tendency for men to build boats, but there are exceptions. One was the Hidatsa, a Native American group in which the women made the boats used to cross the Missouri River. (Traditionally, the Hidatsa were village farmers and bison hunters on the North American Plains; they now live in North Dakota.) Another exception: Pawnee women worked wood; this is the only Native American group that assigned this activity to women. (The Pawnee, also traditionally Plains farmers and bison hunters, originally lived in what is now central Nebraska and central Kansas; they now live on a reservation in north-central Oklahoma.) Among the Mbuti “pygmies” of Africa’s Ituri forest, women hunt by catching small, slow animals using their hands or a net (Murdock and Provost 1973).

Exceptions to cross-cultural generalizations may involve societies or individuals. That is, a society like the Hidatsa can contradict the cross-cultural generalization that men build boats by assigning that task to women. Or, in a society where the cultural expectation is that only men build boats, a particular woman or women can contradict that expectation by doing the male activity. Table 9–1 shows that in a sample of 185 societies, certain activities (“swing activities”) are assigned to either or both men and women. Among the most important of such activities are planting, tending, and harvesting crops. Some societies customarily assign more farming chores to women, whereas others call on men to be the main farm laborers. Among the tasks almost always assigned to men (Table 9–1), some (e.g., hunting large animals on land and at sea) seem clearly related to the greater average size and strength of males. Others, such as working wood and making musical instruments, seem more culturally arbitrary. And women, of course, are not exempt from arduous and time-consuming physical labor, such as gathering firewood and fetching water. In Arembepe, Bahia, Brazil, women routinely transported water in 5-gallon tins, balanced on their heads, from wells and lagoons located at long distances from their homes.

Notice in Table 9–1 that there’s no mention of trade and market activity, in which either or both men and women are active. Table 9–1 would appear to be somewhat androcentric (male-focused) in detailing more tasks for men than for women. More than men, women do child care, but the study on which Table 9–1 is based (Murdock and Provost 1973) does not break down domestic activities to the same extent that it details extradomestic activities.

Think about how female domestic activities could have been specified in greater detail in Table 9–1. The original coding of the data probably illustrates a male bias in that extradomestic activities received much more prominence than domestic activities did. For example, is collecting wild honey (listed in Table 9–1) more necessary and/or time-consuming than cleaning a baby’s bottom (absent from Table 9–1)? Think about Table 9–1 in terms of today’s home and job roles and with respect to the activities done by contemporary women and men. Men still do most of the hunting; either gender can collect the honey from a supermarket, even as most baby bottom wiping continues to be in female hands.
Both women and men have to fit their activities into 24-hour days. Based on cross-cultural data, Table 9–2 shows that the time and effort spent in subsistence activities by men and women tend to be about equal. If anything, men do slightly less subsistence work than women do. But in domestic activities and child care, female labor clearly predominates, as we see in Tables 9–3 and 9–4. Table 9–3 shows that in about half the societies studied, men did virtually no domestic work. Even in societies where men did some domestic chores, the bulk of such work was done by women. Adding
together their subsistence activities and their domestic work, women tend to work more hours than men do. Has this changed in the contemporary world?

What about child care? Women tend to be the main caregivers in most societies, but men also play a role. Again there are exceptions, both within and between societies. Table 9–4 uses cross-cultural data to answer the question “Who—men or women—has final authority over the care, handling, and discipline of children younger than four years?” Although women have primary authority over infants in two-thirds of the societies, there are still societies (18 percent of the total) in which men have the major say. In the United States and Canada today, some men are primary child caregivers despite the cultural fact that the female role in child care remains more prominent in both countries. Given the critical role of breast-feeding in ensuring infant survival, it makes sense, for infants especially, for the mother to be the primary caregiver.

There are differences in male and female reproductive strategies. Women give birth, breast-feed, and assume primary responsibility for infant care. Women ensure that their progeny will survive by establishing a close bond with each baby. It’s also advantageous for a woman to have a reliable mate to assist in the child-rearing process. Women can have only so many babies during the course of their reproductive years, which begin after menarche (the advent of first menstruation) and end with menopause (cessation of menstruation). Men, in contrast, have a longer reproductive period, which can last into the elder years. If they choose to do so, men can enhance their reproductive success by impregnating several women over a longer time period. Although men do not always have multiple mates, they do have a greater tendency to do so than women do (see Tables 9–5, 9–6, and 9–7). Among the societies known to ethnography, polygyny (marriage of one man to multiple women) is much more common than polyandry (marriage of one woman to multiple men) is (see Table 9–5).

Men mate, within and outside marriage, more than women do. Table 9–6 shows cross-cultural data on premarital sex, and Table 9–7 summarizes the data on extramarital sex. In both cases men are less restricted than women are, although the restrictions are equal in about half the societies studied. Double standards that restrict women more than men illustrate gender stratification, which we examine now more systematically.

### Table 9–5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the Society Allow Multiple Spouses?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only for males</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For both, but more commonly for males</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For neither</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For both, but more commonly for females</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentage of 92 randomly selected societies.*

*Source: “Does the Society Allow Multiple Spouses?” from “Cross-Cultural Codes Dealing with the Relative Status of Women” by M. F. Whyte, ETHNOLOGY, 17(2): 211–239. Reprinted by permission of Ethnology, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.*

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**Chapter 9  Gender**
Several studies have shown that economic roles affect gender stratification. In one cross-cultural study, Sanday (1974) found that gender stratification decreased when men and women made roughly equal contributions to subsistence. She found that gender stratification was greatest when the women contributed either much more or much less than the men did.

In foraging societies, gender stratification was most marked when men contributed much more to the diet than women did. This was true among the Inuit and other northern hunters and fishers. Among tropical and semitropical foragers, by contrast, gathering usually supplies more food than hunting and fishing do. Gathering is generally women’s work. Men usually hunt and fish, but women also do some fishing and may hunt small animals. When gathering is prominent, gender status tends to be more equal than it is when hunting and fishing are the main subsistence activities.

Gender status also is more equal when the domestic and public spheres aren’t sharply separated. (Domestic means within or pertaining to the home.) Strong differentiation between the home and the outside world is called the domestic–public dichotomy or the private–public contrast. The outside world can include politics, trade, warfare, or work. Often when domestic and public spheres are clearly separated, public activities have greater prestige than domestic ones do. This can promote gender stratification, because men are more likely to be active in the public domain than...
women are. Cross-culturally, women’s activities tend to be closer to home than men’s are. Thus, another reason hunter-gatherers have less gender stratification than food producers do is that the domestic–public dichotomy is less developed among foragers.

We’ve seen that certain gender roles are more sex-linked than others. Men are the usual hunters and warriors. Given such tools and weapons as spears, knives, and bows, men make better hunters and fighters because they are bigger and stronger on average than are women in the same population (Divale and Harris 1976). The male hunter-fighter role also reflects a tendency toward greater male mobility.

Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrilineal, Matrilocal Societies

Cross-cultural variation in gender status is also related to rules of descent and post-marital residence (Friedl 1975; Martin and Voorhies 1975). With matrilineal descent and matrilocality (residence after marriage with the wife’s relatives, so that children grow up in their mother’s village), female status tends to be high (see Blackwood 2000). Matriliney and matrilocality disperse related males, rather than consolidating them. By contrast, patriliney and patrilocality (residence after marriage with the husband’s kin) keep male relatives together. Matrilineal-matrilocal systems tend to occur in societies where population pressure on strategic resources is minimal and warfare is infrequent.

Women tend to have high status in matrilineal, matrilocal societies for several reasons. Descent-group membership, succession to political positions, allocation of land, and overall social identity all come through female links. In Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia (Peletz 1988), matriliney gave women sole inheritance of ancestral rice fields. Matrilocality created solidarity clusters of female kin. Women had considerable influence beyond the household. In such matrilineal contexts, women are the basis of the entire social structure. Although public authority may be (or may appear to be) assigned to the men, much of the power and decision making may actually belong to the senior women.

Matriarchy

Cross-culturally, anthropologists have described tremendous variation in the roles of men and women, and the power differentials between them. If a patriarchy is a political system ruled by men, what would a matriarchy be? Would a matriarchy be a political system ruled by women, or a political system in which women play a much more prominent role than men do in social and political organization? Anthropologist Peggy Sanday (2002) has concluded that matriarchies exist, but not as mirror images of patriarchies. The superior power that men typically have in a patriarchy isn’t matched by women’s equally disproportionate power in a matriarchy. Many societies, including the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, whom Sanday has studied for decades, lack the substantial power differentials that typify patriarchal systems. Minangkabau women play a central role in social, economic, and ceremonial life and as key symbols. The primacy of matriliney and matriarchy is evident at the village level, as well as regionally, where seniority of matrilineal descent serves as a way to rank villages.

The four million Minangkabau constitute one of Indonesia’s largest ethnic groups. Located in the highlands of West Sumatra, their culture is based on the coexistence
of matrilineal custom and a nature-based philosophy called adat, complemented by Islam, a more recent (16th-century) arrival. The Minangkabau view men and women as cooperative partners for the common good rather than competitors ruled by self-interest. People gain prestige when they promote social harmony rather than vie for power.

Sanday considers the Minangkabau a matriarchy because women are the center, origin, and foundation of the social order. Senior women are associated with the central pillar of the traditional house, the oldest one in the village. The oldest village in a cluster is called the “mother village.” In ceremonies, women are addressed by the term used for their mythical Queen Mother. Women control land inheritance, and couples reside matrilocally. In the wedding ceremony, the wife collects her husband from his household and, with her female kin, escorts him to hers. If there is a divorce, the husband simply takes his things and leaves. Yet despite the special position of women, the Minangkabau matriarchy is not the equivalent of female rule, given the Minangkabau belief that all decision making should be by consensus.

Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrifocal Societies

Nancy Tanner (1974) also found that the combination of male travel and a prominent female economic role reduced gender stratification and promoted high female status. She based this finding on a survey of the matrifocal (mother-centered, often with no resident husband-father) organization of certain societies in Indonesia, West Africa, and the Caribbean. Matrifocal societies are not necessarily matrilineal. A few are even patrilineal.

For example, Tanner (1974) found matrifocality among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, who are patrilineal, patrilocal, and polygynous (men have multiple wives). Each wife had her own house, where she lived with her children. Women planted crops next to their houses and traded surpluses. Women’s associations ran the local markets, while men did the long-distance trading.

In a case study of the Igbo, Ifi Amadiume (1987) noted that either sex could fill male gender roles. Before Christian influence, successful Igbo women used wealth to take titles and acquire wives. Wives freed husbands (male and female) from domestic work and helped them accumulate wealth. Female husbands were not considered masculine but preserved their femininity. Igbo women asserted themselves in women’s groups, including those of lineage daughters, lineage wives, and a communitywide women’s council led by titled women. The high status and influence of Igbo women rested on the separation of males from local subsistence and on a marketing system that encouraged women to leave home and gain prominence in distribution and—through these accomplishments—in politics.

Increased Gender Stratification—Patrilineal-Patrilocal Societies

The Igbo are unusual among patrilineal-patrilocal societies, many of which have marked gender stratification. Martin and Voorhies (1975) link the decline of matriliny and the spread of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex (consisting of patrilineality, patrilocality, warfare, and male supremacy) to pressure on resources. Faced with
scarce resources, patrilineal-patrilocal cultivators, such as the Yanomami of Brazil and Venezuela, often wage warfare against other villages. This favors patrilocality and patriline, customs that keep related men together in the same village, where they make strong allies in battle. Such societies tend to have a sharp domestic–public dichotomy, and men tend to dominate the prestige hierarchy. Men may use their public roles in warfare and trade and their greater prestige to symbolize and reinforce the devaluation or oppression of women.

The patrilineal-patrilocal complex characterizes many societies in highland Papua New Guinea. Women work hard growing and processing subsistence crops, raising and tending pigs (the main domesticated animal and a favorite food), and doing domestic cooking, but they are isolated from the public domain, which men control. Men grow and distribute prestige crops, prepare food for feasts, and arrange marriages. The men even get to trade the pigs and control their use in ritual.

In densely populated areas of the Papua New Guinea highlands, male–female avoidance is associated with strong pressure on resources (Lindenbaum 1972). Men fear all female contacts, including sex. They think that sexual contact with women will weaken them. Indeed, men see everything female as dangerous and polluting. They segregate themselves in men’s houses and hide their precious ritual objects from women. They delay marriage, and some never marry.

By contrast, the sparsely populated areas of Papua New Guinea, such as recently settled areas, lack taboos on male–female contacts. The image of woman as polluter fades, heterosexual intercourse is valued, men and women live together, and reproductive rates are high.

**Patriarchy and Violence**

**Patriarchy** describes a political system ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights. Barbara Miller (1997), in a study of systematic neglect of females, describes women in rural northern India as “the endangered sex.” Societies that feature a full-fledged patrilineal-patrilocal complex, replete with warfare and intervillage raiding, also typify patriarchy. Patriarchy extends from tribal societies such as the Yanomami to state societies such as India and Pakistan.

Although more prevalent in certain social settings than in others, family violence and domestic abuse of women are worldwide problems. Domestic violence certainly occurs in neolocal–nuclear family settings, such as Canada and the United States. Cities, with their impersonality and isolation from extended kin networks, are breeding grounds for domestic violence.

We’ve seen that gender stratification is typically reduced in societies in which women have prominent roles in the economy and social life. When a woman lives in her own village, she has kin nearby to look after and protect her interests. Even in patrilocal polygynous settings, women often count on the support of their co-wives and sons in disputes with potentially abusive husbands. Such settings, which tend to provide a safe haven for women, are retracting rather than expanding in today’s world, however. Isolated families and patrilineal social forms have spread at the expense of
matrilineality. Many nations have declared polygyny illegal. More and more women, and men, find themselves cut off from extended kin and families of orientation.

With the spread of the women’s rights movement and the human rights movement, attention to domestic violence and abuse of women has increased. Laws have been passed, and mediating institutions established. Brazil’s female-run police stations for battered women provide an example, as do shelters for victims of domestic abuse in the United States and Canada. But patriarchal institutions do persist in what should be a more enlightened world.

**Gender in Industrial Societies**

The domestic–public dichotomy also has affected gender stratification in industrial societies, including the United States and Canada. However, gender roles have been changing rapidly in North America. The “traditional” idea that “a woman’s place is in the home” developed among middle- and upper-class Americans as industrialism spread after 1900. Earlier, pioneer women in the Midwest and West had been recognized as fully productive workers in farming and home industry. Under industrialism, attitudes about gendered work came to vary with class and region. In early industrial Europe, men, women, and children had flocked to factories as wage laborers. Enslaved Americans of both sexes had done grueling work in cotton fields. After abolition, southern African-American women continued working as field hands and domestics. Poor white women labored in the South’s early cotton mills. In the 1890s, more than one million American women held menial, repetitive, and unskilled factory positions (Martin and Voorhies 1975; Margolis 1984, 2000). Poor, immigrant, and African-American women continued to work throughout the 20th century.

After 1900, European immigration produced a male labor force willing to work for wages lower than those of American-born men. Immigrant men accepted lower-paying factory jobs that previously had gone to women. With a growing male labor force, the notion that women were biologically unfit for factory work began to gain ground (Martin and Voorhies 1975).

Maxine Margolis (1984, 2000) has shown how gendered work, attitudes, and beliefs have varied in response to American economic needs. For example, wartime shortages of men have promoted the idea that work outside the home is women’s patriotic duty. During the world wars, the idea that women were unfit for hard physical labor faded. As well, inflation and the culture of consumption also have spurred female employment. When prices and/or demand rises, multiple paychecks help maintain family living standards.

The steady increase in female paid employment since World War II also reflects the baby boom and industrial expansion. American culture traditionally has defined clerical work, teaching, and nursing as female occupations. With rapid population growth and business expansion after World War II, the demand for women to fill such jobs grew steadily. Employers also found that they could increase their profits by paying women lower wages than they would have to pay returning male war veterans.

Margolis (1984, 2000) contends that changes in the economy led to changes in attitudes toward and about women. Economic changes paved the way for the
contemporary women’s movement, which also was spurred by the publication of Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and the founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966. The movement in turn promoted expanded work opportunities for women, including the goal of equal pay for equal work. Between 1970 and 2008, the female percentage of the American workforce rose from 38 to 46 percent. In other words, almost half of all Americans who work outside the home are women. Over 71 million women now have paid jobs, compared with 82 million men. Women now fill more than half (57 percent) of all professional jobs (*Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2010, Tables 584, 603). And it’s not mainly single women working, as once was the case. Table 9–8 presents figures on the ever-increasing cash employment of American wives and mothers.

Note in Table 9–8 that the cash employment of American married men has been falling while that of American married women has been rising. There has been a dramatic change in behavior and attitudes since 1960, when 89 percent of all married men worked, compared with just 32 percent of married women. The comparable figures in 2007 were 77 percent and 62 percent. To see how gender roles of men and women have changed, compare your grandparents and your parents. Chances are you have a working mother, but your grandmother was more likely a stay-at-home mom. Your grandfather is more likely than your father to have worked in manufacturing and to have belonged to a union. Your father is more likely than your grandfather to have shared child care and domestic responsibilities. Age at marriage has been delayed for both men and women. College educations and professional degrees have increased. What other changes do you associate with the increase in female employment outside the home?

Table 9–9 details employment in the United States in 2007 by gender, income, and job type for year-round full-time workers. Overall, the ratio of female to male income rose from 68 percent in 1989 to 78 percent in 2007.

**Table 9–8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of All Married Women, Husband Present with Children under 6</th>
<th>Percentage of All Married Women&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Percentage of All Married Men&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Husband present.  
<sup>b</sup>Wife present.

*Sources: Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2010, Tables 583, 586.
During the world wars, the notion that women were biologically unfit for hard physical labor faded. World War II’s Rosie the Riveter—a strong, competent woman dressed in overalls and a bandanna—was introduced as a symbol of patriotic womanhood. Is there a comparable poster woman today? What does her image say about modern gender roles?

**TABLE 9–9**

Earnings in the United States by Gender and Job Type for Year-Round Full-Time Workers, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BY JOB TYPE</th>
<th>Median Annual Salary</th>
<th>Ratio of Earnings Female/Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Earnings</td>
<td>$35,102</td>
<td>$45,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/business/financial</td>
<td>$50,303</td>
<td>$70,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>45,842</td>
<td>62,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and office</td>
<td>30,950</td>
<td>42,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>22,023</td>
<td>29,657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: By occupation of longest job held.

Source: Based on data in *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2010, Table 634.
Today’s jobs aren’t especially demanding in terms of physical labor. With machines to do the heavy work, the smaller average body size and lesser average strength of women are no longer impediments to blue-collar employment. The main reason we don’t see more modern-day Rosies working alongside male riveters is that the U.S. workforce itself is abandoning heavy-goods manufacture. In the 1950s, two-thirds of American jobs were blue collar, compared with less than 15 percent today. The location of those jobs has shifted within the world capitalist economy. Third World countries with cheaper labor produce steel, automobiles, and other heavy goods less expensively than the United States can. The United States, however, excels at services, which no one doubts women can do as well as men. The American mass education system has many inadequacies, but it does train millions of people for service- and information-oriented jobs, from sales clerks to computer operators.

The Feminization of Poverty

Alongside the economic gains of many American women stands an opposite extreme: the feminization of poverty. This refers to the increasing representation of women (and their children) among America’s poorest people. Women head over half of U.S. households with incomes below the poverty line. Feminine poverty has been a trend in the United States since World War II, but it has accelerated recently. In 1959, female-headed households accounted for just one-fourth of the American poor. Since then, that figure has more than doubled. About half the female poor are “in transition.” These are women who are confronting a temporary economic crisis caused by the departure, disability, or death of a husband. The other half are more permanently dependent on the welfare system or on friends or relatives who live nearby. The feminization of poverty and its consequences in regard to living standards and health are widespread even among wage earners. Many American women continue to work part-time for low wages and meager benefits.

Married couples are much more secure economically than single mothers are. The data in Table 9–10 demonstrate that the average income for married-couple families is more than twice that of families maintained by a woman. The average one-earner family maintained by a woman had an annual income of $33,370 in 2007. This was less than one-half the mean income ($72,785) of a married-couple household.

The feminization of poverty isn’t just a North American trend. The percentage of single-parent (usually female-headed) households has been increasing worldwide. The figure ranges from about 10 percent in Japan, to below 20 percent in certain South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, to almost 50 percent in certain African countries and the Caribbean (Buvinic 1995, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 1301). The percentage of single-parent households rose in every nation listed in Table 9–11 between 1980–81 and 2008. The United States maintains the largest percentage of single-parent households (28.8 percent in 2008), followed by the United Kingdom (25 percent), Canada (24.6 percent), Ireland (22.6 percent), and Denmark (21.3 percent). The rate of increase in single-parent households over the past 30 years has been highest in Ireland, where it tripled, from 7.2 to 22.6 percent.
Globally, households headed by women tend to be poorer than are those headed by men. In one study, the percentage of single-parent families considered poor was 18 percent in Britain, 20 percent in Italy, 25 percent in Switzerland, 40 percent in Ireland, 52 percent in Canada, and 63 percent in the United States. Poverty, of course, has health consequences. Studies in Brazil, Zambia, and the Philippines show the survival rates of children from female-headed households to be inferior to those of other children (Buvinic 1995).

In the United States, the feminization of poverty is a concern of NOW. The organization still exists, alongside many newer women’s organizations. The women’s movement has become international in scope and membership. And its priorities have

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 9–10</th>
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<tr>
<td>Median Annual Income of U.S. Households, by Household Type, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households (1,000s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married-couple households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male earner, no wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female earner, no husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NONFAMILY HOUSEHOLDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 682, 676.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 9–11</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of Single-Parent Households, Selected Countries, 1980–81 and 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
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Globally, households headed by women tend to be poorer than are those headed by men. In one study, the percentage of single-parent families considered poor was 18 percent in Britain, 20 percent in Italy, 25 percent in Switzerland, 40 percent in Ireland, 52 percent in Canada, and 63 percent in the United States. Poverty, of course, has health consequences. Studies in Brazil, Zambia, and the Philippines show the survival rates of children from female-headed households to be inferior to those of other children (Buvinic 1995).

In the United States, the feminization of poverty is a concern of NOW. The organization still exists, alongside many newer women’s organizations. The women’s movement has become international in scope and membership. And its priorities have
shifted from mainly job-oriented to more broadly social issues. These include poverty, homelessness, women’s health care, day care, domestic violence, sexual assault, and reproductive rights (Calhoun, Light, and Keller 1997). These issues and others that particularly affect women in the developing countries were addressed at the United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing. In attendance were women’s groups from all over the world. Many of these were national and international NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), which work with women at the local level to augment productivity and improve access to credit.

It is widely believed that one way to improve the situation of poor women is to encourage them to organize. New women’s groups can in some cases revive or replace traditional forms of social organization that have been disrupted. Membership in a group can help women to mobilize resources, to rationalize production, and to reduce the risks and costs associated with credit. Organization also allows women to develop self-confidence and to decrease dependence on others. Through such organization, poor women throughout the world are working to determine their own needs and priorities, and to change things to improve their social and economic situation (Buvinic 1995).

Work and Happiness
Table 9–12 shows female labor force participation in various countries—condensed from 30 countries for which data were available—in 2008. The United States, with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of Women in Labor Force</th>
<th>Rank among World’s 15 “Happiest Countries”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey (lowest in table)</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69.3 percent of its women employed, ranked thirteenth, while Canada (74.4 percent) ranked sixth. Iceland topped the list, with 82.5 percent of its women in the workforce. Turkey was lowest; only 26.7 percent of its women were employed.

In 2010 Gallup conducted a survey of the world’s 132 happiest countries, based on various measures, including the percentage of people in that country who were thriving—and suffering. Respondents also were asked to rate their own lives on a scale from zero (worst possible) to 10 (best possible). Denmark was the world’s happiest nation; Canada came in sixth; and the United States, twelfth.

Interestingly, we can detect a correlation between the two rankings—of happiness and of women’s work outside the home. We see in Table 9–12 that of the 13 countries with greatest female labor force participation, 10 ranked among the world’s happiest (See Levy 2010). What factors might explain this correlation? Why, as more women work outside the home, might a country’s population achieve a greater sense of well-being? More money? More taxes? More social services? More personal freedom? We report; you decide!

**Beyond Male and Female**

Genders other than male and female may be socially recognized. Our multicultural society includes individuals who self-identify as “transgender,” “intersex,” “third gender,” “intermediate,” “postgender,” or “transsexual.” For such individuals, gender identity is complex, arguably self-determined, and subject to discrimination. Such persons contradict dominant male/female gender distinctions by being both or part male and female, or neither male nor female. Because people who self-identify as “transgender” are increasingly visible, we must be careful about seeing “masculine” and “feminine” as absolute and binary categories of roles, activities, and identities.

The classification “transgender” has multiple meanings, biomedical definitions, and political implications. Transgender isn’t a homogeneous category, even if the medical industry frequently pathologizes gender outside the male-female divide, referring to transgender as “gender identity disorder.” In fact, the variety of individual experiences, identities, and behaviors among those who ascribe to the label “transgender” defies categorization.

Sex, we have seen, is biological, while gender is socially constructed. Transgender is a social category that includes individuals who may or may not contrast biologically with ordinary males and females. Within the transgender category, intersex people (see below) usually contrast biologically with ordinary males and females, but transgender also includes people whose gender identity has no apparent biological roots.

The term intersex encompasses a group of conditions involving a discrepancy between the external genitals (penis, vagina, etc.) and the internal genitals (testes, ovaries, etc.). The older term for this condition, hermaphroditism, combined the names of a Greek god and goddess. Hermes was a god of male sexuality (among other things) and Aphrodite a goddess of female sexuality, love, and beauty.

The causes of intersex are varied and complex (Kaneshiro 2009): (1) An XX Intersex person has the chromosomes of a woman (XX) and normal ovaries, uterus,
and Fallopian tubes, but the external genitals appear male. Usually this results from a female fetus having been exposed to an excess of male hormones before birth. (2) An XY Intersex person has the chromosomes of a man (XY), but the external genitals are incompletely formed, ambiguous, or female. The testes may be normal, malformed, or absent. (3) A True Gonadal Intersex person has both ovarian and testicular tissue. The external genitals may be ambiguous or may appear to be female or male. (4) Intersex also can result from an unusual chromosome combination, such as X0 (only one X chromosome), XXY, XYY, and XXX. In the last three cases there is an extra sex chromosome, either an X or a Y. These chromosomal combinations don’t typically produce a discrepancy between internal and external genitalia, but there may be problems with sex hormone levels and overall sexual development.

The XXY configuration, known as Klinefelter’s syndrome, is the most common unusual sex chromosome combination and the second most common condition (after Down syndrome) caused by the presence of extra chromosomes. Effects of Klinefelter’s occur in about 1 out of every 1,000 males. One in every 500 males has an extra X chromosome but lacks the main symptoms—small testicles and reduced fertility. With XXX, aka triple X syndrome, there is an extra X chromosome in each cell of a human female. Triple X occurs in about 1 out of every 1,000 female births. There usually is no physically distinguishable difference between triple X women and other women. The same is true of XYY compared with other males.

Turner syndrome encompasses several conditions, of which 0X (absence of one sex chromosome) is most common. In this case, all or part of one of the sex chromosomes is absent. Typical females have two X chromosomes, but in Turner syndrome, one of those chromosomes is missing or abnormal. Girls with Turner syndrome typically are sterile because of nonworking ovaries and amenorrhea (absence of menstrual cycle).

Biology isn’t destiny; people construct their identities in society. Many individuals affected by one of the biological conditions just described see themselves simply as male or female, rather than transgender. Self-identified transgender people tend to be individuals whose gender identity contradicts their biological sex at birth and the gender identity that society assigned to them in infancy. The transgender category comprises a highly diverse affinity group, including people with varied interests, goals, and hierarchies. Consistent with the purpose of this book, our interest in self-identified transgender individuals has to do with illuminating the nature and culture of gender-based affinity groups, examining gender identity as a feature of multicultural societies, and explaining identity politics among sex/gender minorities as a contemporary movement for human rights.

As with other marginalized and unfamiliar groups, fear and ignorance related to diversity in gender fuels discrimination, principally because outsiders perceive transgender as a homogeneous category or, as one corporate lawyer put it, “a new and deviant variety of sex perverts.” In fact, there is nothing new or abnormal about diverse gender roles and identities, as comparative mythology attests. Gender variance is a human phenomenon that has taken many forms across societies and cultures.

The historical and ethnographic records reveal the malleability of gender categories and roles (Herdt 1994). Consider, for example, the *eunuch* or “perfect servant”
On Harvey Milk day, May 22, 2010, activists rally in Boston for transgender rights. This would have been the 80th birthday of the gay rights activist and first openly gay man elected to California public office.

(a castrated man who served as a safe attendant to harems in Byzantium [Tougher 2003]). Acknowledgement and accommodation of hijras as a third sex/gender in Indian society indicates that certain societal requirements necessitated the castration of some men who then filled special social roles (Nanda 1998). Roscoe writes of the “Zuni man-woman” or berdache in the 19th century. A berdache is a male who adopts social roles traditionally assigned to women and, through performance of a third gender, contributes to the social and spiritual well-being of the community as a whole (1992, 2000). Effeminate men formed a third gender in 19th-century London; their actions opposed traditional sex-based roles and heterosexist behaviors (Trumbach 1993). Some Balkan societies included “sworn virgins,” born females who assumed male gender roles and activities to meet societal needs when there was a shortage of men (Gremaux 1993). Among the Gheg tribes of northern Albania, “virginal transvestites” were biologically female, but locals considered them “honorary men” (Shryock 1988). Albanian adolescent girls have chosen to become men, remain celibate, and live among men, with the support of their families and villagers (Young 2000). And consider Polynesia. In Tonga the term fakaleitis describes males who behave like women, thereby contrasting with mainstream Tongan men who display masculine characteristics. Similar to the fakaleitis of Tonga, Samoan fa’afafine and Hawaiian mahu refer to men who adopt feminine attributes, behaviors, and visual markers.

In the contemporary West, the umbrella category transgender encompasses a similar variety of persons whose gender performance and identity contradict or defy a binary gender structure. Acknowledgement of a third gender, even among those who
self-identify as such, assumes the existence of a clear-cut first gender and second gender. The umbrella category transgender, which encompasses multiple variations of gender performance, includes varied individuals who are productive and contributing members of society, at least in those sectors to which they have access and relative protection to live as who they are.

In the United States we find that because current economic and social roles are accessible to most men and women, gender-flexing, gender-bending behaviors by individuals may be acceptable. However, more threatening to dominant and normative culture is the existence of “transgender” as a political category. This is especially true when members of this group claim a collective proclivity, preference, and right to live openly and freely as different.

Unification of personally and culturally diverse individuals is a deliberate and effective political strategy for mobilizing a movement for human rights. For example, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community (LGBT), fully aware of both the diversity of interests and the stratification of individuals within its permeable boundaries, fights for collective human rights by inclusion of variant genders and sexualities to increase the likelihood that government policies and social practices will protect their needs and interests as humans and as Americans.

The political organization of gender-variant persons into a collective translates into an independent identity movement for human rights. While gender in all its variants is a human universal, transgenderism—mobilization by transgender persons to secure their safety, security, and integrity—is a contemporary phenomenon, and another feature of multicultural societies.

**Key Terms**

- domestic (151)
- domestic–public dichotomy (151)
- gender roles (145)
- gender stereotypes (145)
- gender stratification (145)
- intersex (161)
- matriarchy (152)

- matrifocal (153)
- matrilocality (152)
- patriarchy (154)
- patrilineal-patrilocal complex (153)
- patrilocality (152)
- sexual dimorphism (144)
CHAPTER 10

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

REFLECTIONS: COMING OUT

❖ The Nature and Culture of Sexual Orientation
❖ Changing Patterns and Views of Sexual Orientation
❖ Varieties of Human Sexuality
❖ The Social Construction of Sexual Orientation

Cross-Cultural Variation
Bisexuality
❖ The Political Organization of Sexual Orientation
Legal Protection of LGBT
Gay Culture

COMING OUT

"Of all my kids, you are the most thoughtful, kind, talented, and polite one! Why do you have to be a homosexual?" Such was the response of an immigrant Pakistani father to his 23-year-old son, Aamir, who until this event lived with his parents in St. Louis. Unable to contain a “painful anger” at his son’s revelation, Aamir’s father walked out of the house. His mother cried silently, wondering if her son’s condition was a punishment from God. Was there anything she could have done, or still might do, to repair it? Aamir’s coming out left his parents feeling shame and grief. Their reaction left Aamir “heartbroken, cold, and alone.”

Coming out as gay or lesbian to one’s parents is painful for most young men and women, without the additional angst that accompanies such conversations when the news contradicts fundamental national mores that immigrant parents hold dear. Asian-American immigrants who settle in close-knit enclaves and observe family-centered rules, ancestral religious practices, and other Asian cultural norms are especially vulnerable to familial discord when their children’s sexual behavior and beliefs deviate from the norm (Leong 1996).

For Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Koreans in American, coming out is a family reorientation, not just an individual’s personal path (Hom 2006). For example, Korean-American families who ascribe to Confucian values, including respect for elders, heteronormativity, and procreative sexuality, face inordinate emotional distress when they must confront their children’s homosexuality. (Heteronormativity refers to the belief that males and females have essential qualities and natural social roles, that heterosexual pair-bonding is natural, and that the only normal marriages are between men and women.)
When the daughter of Korean immigrants came out as a lesbian, her father lost his title as an “elder” of their church, where her mother could no longer play the piano and her younger brother was ejected from the praise band. Even family members and friends withdrew their support. Concerned about their parents’ “face and name,” social status and reputation, and mental health, immigrant women often lead “double lives.” Those who immigrated in their youth with their parents, the “1.5 generation,” struggle with self-expression and holding on to their beloved communities, while “Americanized daughters” are more inclined to assert their individuality and live with the consequences of that decision (Chung, Oswald, and Wiley 2006).

Coming out as gay or lesbian is a rite of passage—a process through which humans experience change from one social status to another. Such transitions by groups of people typically are marked by ceremonies and rituals. However, when transformation is a personal choice, as coming out typically is, an individual may experience grief for the loss of a former identity and anxiety linked to unpredictable future consequences. Thousands of young people who decide to announce their “true self” face painful emotions that, unless family and friends are there to embrace them, may lead to tragedy.

A string of suicides by self-identified gay college men at the time of this writing may be indicative of the rejection and violence, often in the form of bullying, that young people experience when they express their homosexual orientation. On September 29, 2010, Tyler Clementi of Rutgers University took his own life by jumping off the George Washington Bridge when he realized that his peers had violated and ridiculed his sexual expression even in the privacy of his own dorm room. Raymond Chase, a gay student of culinary arts at Johnson & Wales University, hanged himself on October 1, 2010. Nineteen days later, Corey Jackson of Oakland University also killed himself. After coming out to his friends, Corey reported that “people are treating me different, I don’t know what to do.” How has a multicultural society failed these young men?

Violence against young people who claim a gay or lesbian identity is on the rise even as our society’s norms and practices of love, sex, and mating are increasingly varied, fluid, and unpredictable. In a 2009 speech to the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights organization President Barack Obama told his listeners:

Tonight, somewhere in America, a young person, let’s say a young man, will struggle to fall to sleep, wrestling alone with a secret he’s held as long as he can remember. Soon, perhaps, he will decide it’s time to let that secret out. What happens next depends on him, his family, as well as his friends and his teachers and his community. But it also depends on us—on the kind of society we engender, the kind of future we build. I believe the future is bright for that young person. (Obama 2009)

Children and adolescents who become victims of hate crimes because of their sexual or gender dispositions are especially dependent on supportive parents, siblings, and other relatives, who are often unavailable or unwilling to care. Teachers and other school personnel, along with leaders and members of religious congregations, also are responsible for the well-being of youths who are struggling with multiple layers of
“Who or what I am,” including their sexuality. When a young person dares to open his or her heart with “I have something to tell you,” adults must listen before they speak. However, even the most enlightened and accepting of us must practice restraint in naming a minor’s experience and thoughts of sexual variance.

Scholars, politicians, parents, and advocates of sexual diversity often are too quick to speak of and for “gay and lesbian children” or “LGBT children” (Herdt and Koff 1999). Many gay men and lesbians reach middle age before they become, that is self-identify or come out as, “gay” or “lesbian.” It is preposterous to impose on children and adolescents such sociopolitical labels, when they are just learning the joys and fears of desire, be it hetero-, homo-, or multierotic. Labeling or forcing children to self-identify as gay or lesbian is unethical and would be an overzealous multiculturalism.

In campuses across the country, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students have organized as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Student Alliance (LGBSA), through which they forge the communal identity “Queer.” Gay students have expropriated and redefined a disparaging popular vernacular label, which they use as a personal identifier. They construct a social space within which they assert new and meaningful leadership roles and cultural activities (Rhoads 1994). As they complete their rite of passage, they, as our president, put it, continue to live the story of America, of ordinary citizens organizing, agitating, and advocating for change. Of hope stronger than hate, of love more powerful than any insult or injury. Of Americans fighting to build for themselves and their families a nation in which no one is a second-class citizen, in which no one is denied their basic rights, in which all of us are free to live and love as we see fit (Obama 2009).

The Nature and Culture of Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a human attribute. It is natural, biologically programmed, and cultural, linked to rules and habits. Enculturation regulates and directs the libido (sexual energy) toward varied expressions. Sexual desire is inborn, a human universal. However, patterns of flirting, courting, dating, loving, and lovemaking vary across time and space. Premarital sex may have outraged your grandparents, as arranged marriages, common in India, may offend some of you today. The sex drive is to erotic orientations and sexual practices as hunger is to nutritional standards and eating habits.

To some extent at least, all human activities and preferences, including erotic expression, are learned and malleable. Sexual orientation is the patterned way in which a person views and expresses the sexual component of his or her personality; it refers to a person’s habitual sexual attraction to and activities with persons of the opposite sex, heterosexuality; the same sex, homosexuality; or both sexes, bisexuality. Asexuality, indifference toward or lack of attraction to either sex, is also a sexual orientation. All four of these forms are found in contemporary North America and throughout the world. But each type of desire and experience holds different meanings for individuals and groups. For example, an asexual disposition may be acceptable in
some places but may be perceived as a character flaw in others. Bisexuality may be a private orientation in Mexico, rather than socially sanctioned and encouraged as among the Sambia of Papua New Guinea.

Most people ascribe to and conform to one of these labels, albeit not always self-consciously. Most heterosexuals are oblivious to the cultural construction of the sex drive. They consider the sexual dimension of their lives natural and normal. People assume, and most hope, that they will bear and rear heterosexual children. Imagine a son “coming out” to his dad by saying “I like girls.”

The most critical gauge of sexual orientation is one’s experiences in eros (sexual love), what in psychoanalysis is known as the life instinct. This is an impulse, a spontaneous inclination or incitement, to become intimate with a person or type of person. Sexual love gratifies a basic human need. It preserves physical and mental health, provided it is socially sanctioned. Eros is distinguished from philia (friendship), the most enduring form of love, born out of higher faculties, and agape (humanitarianism), or love for humanity. Erotic love may inspire creativity, productivity, and psychological fulfillment, even when morality and law forbid the physical expression of erotic longings. Desire, combined with genuine, psychic attachment between two individuals, results in what Socrates called “divine madness.” Do you remember the last time you fell in love? How did you feel? That state of being hints at your sexual orientation.

Erotic fantasies and autoerotic practices also reveal aspects of one’s sexual orientation. Habits of masturbation reveal one’s sexual impulses and tendencies. Indicators of sexual proclivity may include possession and use of erotic paraphernalia, for example, books, videos, and sex toys. People often associate sexual orientation with essential being, or a true inner self. One’s fantasy life may be homoerotic or heteroerotic, may include orgies or threesomes, may involve pain, or may consistently feature a best friend’s wife. Law, morality, guilt, habit, and fear channel psychosexual potential into sociosexual behavior.

Included in the sexual component of personality is one’s tendency to be monogamous (the practice of having only one sexual partner at a time), to have multiple partners simultaneously, to “cruise on the side” (pursue anonymous sexual contacts in public places, such as parks, bathrooms, and rest stops), to practice adultery, or to be celibate. In the North American mainstream, monogamy is a cultural ideal; but among middle-class urban Greeks, adultery is reportedly institutionalized. A favorite sound bite in conversations among Greeks is that “between 2:00 and 5:00 P.M. (the normal rest period of a workday), half of Athens is sleeping with the other half.” The capacity and expression of one’s sexual desires reflect enculturation and vary contextually over time, in degree and intensity.

It’s common to hear people discuss their sexual preferences in terms of temperament, height, hair and skin color, age, and body weight. However, one’s sexual fit combines physical traits with psychosocial sensibilities. This fit, that is, a particular set of characteristics that activates one’s libido, reappears in different potential partners during one’s life span. When a man rejects sexual advances by a woman, he may say, “She’s not my type.” Moreover, the partner of choice at different periods in life typically matches one’s own psychosocial and intellectual stage of development. Thus a man may divorce his wife because “we’ve grown apart and have little in common.”
We also project the sexual component of our personality by our *gender identity* (gender-based ideas and activities to which an individual ascribes and by which he or she is defined socially). Most people align a private sexual disposition (e.g., heterosexual male) with the socially appropriate public persona (married man, or husband). Others maintain what by societal standards are incompatible markers of identity, such as private homosexual inclinations with a public heterosexual relationship. Still others choose different identities and statuses situationally and contextually.

Sexual life has both private and public manifestations. In the United States 60 years ago premarital sex was kept secret, and interracial dating was discouraged or prohibited. (Within some communities in North America these activities are still taboo.) In North America adultery is usually private behavior. Kissing and flirting are public and socially acceptable. Among the poor in some societies, depending on the economic needs of the household, some women, and men, alternate between being faithful spouses and obligatory prostitutes. They serve as sexual partners for material rewards, including food, clothes, and school supplies. Like much social behavior, sexual conduct isn’t simply a matter of personal choice. Whom we love, how much, and in what way have to do both with individual wishes and discretion and with social sanctions and survival.

Sexual activity or fantasy does not necessarily correspond with sexual orientation. For example, homosexual experiences during specific periods in the life cycle...
(e.g., adolescence) or time spent in gender-segregated institutions, or as a recreational outlet, do not necessarily convert the heterosexual. Likewise, a homosexual orientation doesn’t necessarily prohibit one from participating in heterosexual relationships, claiming a straight identity, or marrying heterosexually. Consider the college junior who, during her third year abroad in Italy, had sex regularly with a local woman. The student described the experience as “an act of intimacy; I don’t ever have to sleep with another woman again. I know I’m heterosexual.” Even a dominant sexual orientation does not define one in absolute terms.

One’s sexual identity is a primary indicator of status, but it is not necessarily accurate. Participation in homosexual encounters, which many self-identified heterosexuals may perceive as “experimentation” or “a phase,” may in fact reflect a homosexual orientation and, eventually, result in a gay identity. A person who declares a bisexual identity may be denying or hiding a predominant orientation, typically homosexuality. Another simply may be expressing sexual attraction to, or actual experiences with, both sexes. Consider the young man who spent his entire college career trying to convince himself and everyone around him that “we’re all bi.” Several heterosexual and homosexual affairs later, the same man sought “to marry a man.” “There is, however,” he said, “one woman that I would marry, but she’s taken.” Today he is “married” to a man, “the love of my life,” as he described his partner.

Sexual orientation is neither pure nor absolute. Sexuality is learned, flexible, and situational. Variability in sexual need, capacity, and expression prevails across individuals and groups. An individual may feel and display varied erotic impulses throughout the life cycle. A man dates several women as a single person but remains faithful to his wife once married. A straight-identified lesbian marries a man and raises children with him. A male homosexual sex worker “retires” to marry a woman. A married-with-children gay man and lesbian pursue homosexual liaisons. A bisexual man spends six months a year with his wife in one country and the other six months with his male lover in another. These examples, all drawn from the real world, illustrate that sexual orientation is a highly complex, multifaceted, and individual matter.

Our society recognizes four main types of sexual orientation: heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. However, variation in sentiment and activity within each category probably is greater than that between these labels. What we do with our body and psyche, how frequently, under what circumstances, and with whom is more complicated than simply the anatomy of our partners. Sexual sensibilities and acts exist along a continuum. A more accurate and responsible way to discuss variety in sexual orientation is to speak about homo-, hetero-, or bisexual acts, and not homosexuals, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. People practice such acts, or combinations of such acts, at different times, to varying degrees, and under particular conditions.

Social categories, including those associated with sexual minorities, are terms of convenience. They also serve as markers of distinction and identity. Classifications help us to make sense of human variety and to manage social relations in a rapidly changing, complex world. Social labels are also useful to individuals because they provide actual or perceived psychosocial connections, legal and often economic protection, and political or civic validation. It is important to distinguish between
self-constructed labels and those that others impose on groups. For example, members of the gay community often use the label “breeders” to describe heterosexuals. Equally offensive may be the label “homosexuals,” which nongays use to reduce gays to merely sexual creatures. In this book we conform to the use of classifications only as a communication device and not as proclamations of absolute essential or social statuses.

CHANGING PATTERNS AND VIEWS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Because most people practice heterosexuality, they assume it to be “just human nature.” Any other type of eroticism is, therefore, a puzzle. People are less likely to wonder, “What causes sexual orientation?” than they are to ask, “Where does homosexuality come from?” Generations of westerners, steeped in the Judeo-Christian heritage, distinguish between moral and legal heterosexual behavior, and all other “deviant” or, at best, alternative forms of sexuality (Foucault 1978).

In the Middle Ages sexuality was evaluated as behavior, what people did. Deviation from publicly approved procreative sex between a married couple was viewed as perverted. In many Western societies, homosexuality was punished severely, sometimes by death. Puritan values equated sexual pleasure with sin, a sentiment that still holds true in some parts of the United States. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, all forms of nonreproductive sex were considered deviant and morally offensive. Homosexual acts in particular, judged to be nothing more than sex for pleasure, were interpreted as a “condition” with which certain types of persons were afflicted.

Greater public attention to human sexuality led to its interpretation as an innate state of being. Persons who pursued heterosexual lifestyles were considered proper. Those who were known to practice homosexuality were identified and classified as homosexuals. In many societies, sexual categorization led to a distinction between the stigmatized “monsters” and the citizens. The perceived defects of the former category, which included homosexuals, were presumed to be psychological and inherent to an individual, as were the characteristics of heterosexuals, the socially protected category. During the 19th century, sexuality was polarized as male–female and homosexual–heterosexual. This interpretation emphasized a congenital basis for sexuality. The prevalent belief was that sexual attraction was inborn and permanent.

The rise of scientific medicine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries promoted a view of human sexuality as a matter of health, physical and mental. Clinical and popular impressions of sexual orientation emphasized a polarity between right and wrong, good and bad, and healthy and unhealthy sexuality. Heterosexuality was deemed healthy; and homosexuality was considered an illness, a condition that could be cured. Health professionals and the populace wondered about the biological and mental nature of homosexuality as a pathology. Clinicians classified persons who practiced homosexuality as abnormal and debated the etiology (cause) of this illness. Treatment strategies for “patients” included commitment to an institution, analysis, castration, and sterilization. Same-sex practices came to be known as closet homosexuality, meaning secrecy and maintenance of a double life.
Sigmund Freud contributed to the medicalization of sexuality. However, he stressed the plasticity (capable of being molded) of sexual orientation. He proposed that all humans are innately capable of bisexuality, but that normal libidinal development results in heterosexuality. Freud’s perspective on sex emphasized that humans are social creatures. Biopsychological instincts are shaped and directed by a cultural milieu to accommodate societal regulations and to conform to social norms. Freud was situated in the social and cultural context of early-20th-century Vienna. Heterosexuality was in fact the normative pattern of psychosocial development and interpersonal relations in his time and place.

Heterosexuality in general, and reproductive sex in particular, remained the dominant cultural code of human sexuality throughout the Western world well after World War II. The starkest demonstration of heterosexism in recent history is the extermination by the Nazis of thousands of persons suspected of being homosexual. Fascists threw perceived homosexuals into prison cells and concentration camps, along with millions of Jews and thousands of Gypsies. It would be another generation before westerners, and North Americans in particular, would learn that same-sex relations were more common and more complex than both the psychosocial model and the biomedical model had proposed.

Understanding of the social construction of sexual orientation heightened with the publication of Alfred Kinsey’s studies in the mid-20th century (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey et al. 1953). Kinsey and his colleagues documented self-reported sex practices in the United States. The researchers concluded that sexual orientation exists in gradations and not in a dichotomy of polar heterosexuality and homosexuality. Kinsey proposed a 7-point rating scale in which 0 signified exclusive heterosexuality and 6 signified exclusive homosexuality. His data showed that about 4 percent of males and 2 percent of females had an exclusively same-sex orientation. This research also suggested that people don’t fit neatly into discrete categories of sexual behavior and fixed orientations. Most people are capable of responding, and many do respond, psychosexually to members of both sexes. Sexual feelings and psychic responses may change over the life span of a person.

Variability in sexual practices and meanings among Americans was confirmed by a national comprehensive survey conducted by Michael et al. (1994). These researchers verified that the majority of the U.S. population practices heterosexuality. Nine percent of men and 4 percent of women reported some homosexual activity during their life span. A slightly smaller percentage (7 percent of men and almost 4 percent of women) reported same-sex experiences during childhood or early adolescence. Most striking about this study is its attention to sexual orientation as an identity, not just a fantasy, proclivity, or practice. Out of 3,432 respondents, ranging in age from 18 to 59, 2.8 percent of men and 1.4 percent of women reported a partial or total homosexual identity. This number is small compared to that of persons claiming a heterosexual identity. Nonetheless, the existence of even a small percentage of sexually identified persons is important. Understanding the nature, culture, and variety of human sexuality within North American society and in the world is likely to lead to greater integration and protection of people who for centuries have been misunderstood and, therefore, misjudged and punished.
Attitudes about sex in other cultures differ strikingly, as Kottak has found in contrasting the cultures he knows best—the United States, urban and rural Brazil, and Madagascar. During his first stay in Arembepe, Brazil, when he was 19 years old and unmarried, young men told him details of their experience with prostitutes in the city. Arembepe’s women also were more open about their sex lives than North American women were at that time.

Arembepeiros talked about sex so willingly that Kottak wasn’t prepared for the silence and avoidance of sexual subjects he encountered in Madagascar. He did discover from city folk that, as in many non-Western societies, traditional ceremonies were times of ritual license, when normal taboos lapsed and men and women engaged in what Christian missionaries described as “wanton” sexuality. Only during his last week in Madagascar did a young man in the Betsileo village of Ivato, where Kottak had spent a year, take him aside and offer to write down the words for genitals and sexual intercourse. The young man could not say these tabooed words, but he wanted Kottak to know them so that his knowledge of Betsileo culture would be as complete as possible.

In any society, individuals will differ in the nature, range, and intensity of their sexual interests and urges. No one knows for sure why such individual sexual differences exist. Part of the answer may be biological, reflecting genes or hormones. Another part may have to do with experiences during growth and development. But whatever the reasons for individual variation, culture always plays a role in molding individual sexual urges toward a collective norm. And such sexual norms vary from culture to culture.

What do we know about variation in sexual norms from society to society, and over time? A classic cross-cultural study (Ford and Beach 1951) found wide variation in attitudes about masturbation, bestiality (sex with animals), and homosexuality. Even in a single society, such as the United States, attitudes about sex differ over time and with socioeconomic status, region, and rural versus urban residence. However, even in the 1950s, prior to the “age of sexual permissiveness” (the pre-HIV period from the mid-1960s through the 1970s), research showed that almost all American men (92 percent) and more than half of American women (54 percent) admitted to masturbation. In the famous Kinsey report (Kinsey et al. 1948), 37 percent of the men surveyed admitted having had at least one sexual experience leading to orgasm with another male. In a later study of 1,200 unmarried women, 26 percent reported same-sex sexual activities. (Because Kinsey’s research relied on nonrandom samples, it should be considered merely illustrative, rather than a statistically accurate representation, of sexual behavior at the time.)

Sex acts involving people of the same sex were absent, rare, or secret in only 37 percent of 76 societies for which data were available in the Ford and Beach study (1951). In the others, various forms of same-sex sexual activity were considered normal and acceptable. Sometimes sexual relations between people of the same sex involved transvestism on the part of one of the partners.

Transvestism did not characterize male–male sex among the Sudanese Azande, who valued the warrior role (Evans-Pritchard 1970). Prospective warriors—young
men aged 12 to 20—left their families and shared quarters with adult fighting men, who paid bridewealth for, and had sex with, them. During this apprenticeship, the young men did the domestic duties of women. Upon reaching warrior status, these young men took their own younger male brides. Later, retiring from the warrior role, Azande men married women. Flexible in their sexual expression, Azande males had no difficulty shifting from sex with older men (as male brides), to sex with younger men (as warriors), to sex with women (as husbands) (see Murray and Roscoe 1998).

An extreme example of tension involving male–female sexual relations in Papua New Guinea is provided by the Etoro (Kelly 1976), a group of 400 people who subsist by hunting and horticulture in the Trans-Fly region. The Etoro illustrate the power of culture in molding human sexuality. The following account, based on ethnographic fieldwork by Raymond C. Kelly in the late 1960s, applies only to Etoro males and their beliefs. Etoro cultural norms prevented the male anthropologist who studied them from gathering comparable information about female attitudes. Note, also, that the activities described have been discouraged by missionaries. Since there has been no restudy of the Etoro specifically focusing on these activities, the extent to which these practices continue today is unknown. For this reason, we’ll use the past tense in describing them.

Etoro opinions about sexuality were linked to their beliefs about the cycle of birth, physical growth, maturity, old age, and death. Etoro men believed that semen was necessary to give life force to a fetus, which was, they believed, implanted in a woman by an ancestral spirit. Sexual intercourse during pregnancy nourished the growing fetus. The Etoro believed that men had a limited lifetime supply of semen. Any sex act leading to ejaculation was seen as draining that supply, and as sapping a man’s virility and vitality. The birth of children, nurtured by semen, symbolized a necessary sacrifice that would lead to the husband’s eventual death. Heterosexual intercourse, required only for reproduction, was discouraged. Women who wanted too much sex were viewed as witches, hazardous to their husbands’ health. Etoro culture allowed heterosexual intercourse only about 100 days a year. The rest of the time it was tabooed. Seasonal birth clustering shows the taboo was respected.

So objectionable was male–female sex that it was removed from community life. It could occur neither in sleeping quarters nor in the fields. Coitus could happen only in the woods, where it was risky because poisonous snakes, the Etoro claimed, were attracted by the sounds and smells of male–female sex.

Although coitus was discouraged, sex acts between men were viewed as essential. Etoro believed that boys could not produce semen on their own. To grow into men and eventually give life force to their children, boys had to acquire semen orally from older men. From the age of 10 until adulthood, boys were inseminated by older men. No taboos were attached to this. Such oral insemination could proceed in the sleeping area or garden. Every three years, a group of boys around the age of 20 was formally initiated into manhood. They went to a secluded mountain lodge, where they were visited and inseminated by several older men.

Male–male sex among the Etoro was governed by a code of propriety. Although sexual relations between older and younger males were considered culturally essential, those between boys of the same age were discouraged. A boy who took semen
from other youths was believed to be sapping their life force and stunting their growth. A boy’s rapid physical development might suggest that he was getting semen from other boys. Like a sex-hungry wife, he might be shunned as a witch.

Do the taboos that have surrounded homosexuality in our own society remind you of Etoro taboos? Homosexual activity has been stigmatized in Western industrial societies. Indeed, sodomy laws continue to make it illegal in many U.S. states. Among the Etoro, male–female sex is banned from the social center and moved to the fringes or margins of society (the woods, filled with dangerous snakes). In our own society, homosexual activity traditionally has been hidden, furtive, and secretive—also moved to the margins of society rather than its valued center. Imagine what our own sex lives would be like if we had been raised with Etoro beliefs and taboos.

The Etoro’s sexual practices rested not on hormones or genes but on cultural beliefs and traditions. The Etoro were an extreme example of a male–female avoidance pattern that has been widespread in Papua New Guinea and in patrilineal-patrilocal societies. The Etoro shared a cultural pattern, which Gilbert Herdt (1984) calls “ritualized homosexuality,” with some 50 other tribes in Papua New Guinea, especially in that country’s Trans-Fly region. These societies illustrate one extreme of a male–female avoidance pattern that is widespread in Papua New Guinea and indeed in many patrilineal-patrilocal societies.

Flexibility in sexual expression seems to be an aspect of our primate heritage. Both masturbation and same-sex sexual activity exist among chimpanzees and other primates. Male bonobos (pygmy chimps) regularly engage in a form of mutual masturbation known as “penis fencing.” Females get sexual pleasure from rubbing their genitals against those of other females (de Waal 1997). Our primate sexual potential is molded by culture, the environment, and reproductive necessity. Heterosexual coitus is practiced in all human societies—which, after all, must reproduce themselves—but alternatives are also widespread (Rathus, Nevid, and Fichner-Rathus 2005). Like gender roles and attitudes more generally, the sexual component of human personality and identity—just how we express our “natural” sexual urges—is a matter that culture and environment direct and limit.

**The Social Construction of Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is more than a biological craving or character trait. It is also a social phenomenon. Each society maintains particular, and prevalent, views about what sexuality is and ought to be. We acquire our sense of sexual status and identity through membership in a social group. Our sense of “Who am I?” and “Who am I, really?” comes from our lived experiences and interaction with other human beings within and outside our own group. The difference between being labeled mentally ill, a mother’s worst nightmare, a dyke, a lesbian, or a human being depends a great deal on one’s social relationships. A woman who grew up in a small town thinking she was “weird” describes her “coming out” process and subsequent integration into the lesbian community as her having been “reborn; I could be myself!”
Cross-Cultural Variation

Historically and cross-culturally the sex drive and sexual behavior among humans reflect particular sociopolitical conditions as much as biopsychological cravings. For example, classical Athens was divided into two parts. One was a political and social elite composed exclusively of men, who were citizens. The subordinate category included all others—women, slaves, foreigners (barbarians), and children, all of whom were denied civil rights to varied degrees. Sexual morality and behavior mirrored this hierarchy. Free men, always the dominant, insertive “penetrators,” had sexual relations with social inferiors, the “penetrated” partners, regardless of gender. Homosexual unions between elite men, including teachers and students, were viewed as acceptable behavior, indeed the highest form of intimacy.

All societies require heterosexuality for reproduction. Social groups want to reproduce themselves biologically and culturally. However, as we have seen, many societies tolerate homosexual activities, and some endorse them. We saw that Azande (southern Sudan) warriors “married” young men to satisfy their sexual needs until they were socially ready to marry a woman and have children. Homosexual acts are part of initiation rites among the Etoro and the Sambia of Papua New Guinea. Dahomey girls of West Africa prepared for marriage by having homosexual relations with older women. Among the Ju’hoansi of the Kalahari, young girls are sexually active with each other before they have heterosexual relations. These societies recognize heterosexual or homosexual acts, not persons, and certainly not groups.

Enculturation also directs social and sexual relations between boys and girls. The Lepcha of Sikkim in northern India consider sexuality proper behavior, comparable to eating or drinking. Sexual freedom is normative, and girls become sexually active before puberty. In contrast, some Middle Eastern societies (e.g., Saudi Arabia) enforce segregation between men and women and prohibit sexual and social relations between boys and girls. Heterosexual relations among the young, particularly adolescents, are shunned in some rural areas of Mediterranean Europe. In Greek villages, where chastity and virginity are considered a strong component of a young woman’s dowry, girls are taught to avoid public contact with boys and men. A young girl may be spanked or beaten by her father or brother if she is caught with a young man. In contrast, Kozaitis (1993) observed that among the Roma (Gypsies) of Athens, Greece, adults encourage romantic relations between prepubescent boys and girls to ensure endogamy (marriage between members of the same social group) and, thus, cultural reproduction.

Cultural codes of sexual expression dictate whether an act is legal, normal, deviant, or pathological. Actual yet abnormal sexual conduct in our society includes necrophilia (an erotic attraction to or fascination with corpses), pedophilia (sexual desire by adults for children), pederasty (sodomy between an adult male and a boy), sadomasochism (sexual pleasure from inflicting or receiving physical and psychological pain), and bestiality (sexual contact between a person and an animal).

In the United States both sibling incest and parent–child incest are illegal. North Americans also hold fairly strict standards of what constitutes rape and sexual abuse and harassment compared with other Western societies. We learn that “No means no!”
An American man may hesitate to compliment a woman on her new hairstyle because he fears offending or insulting her. In Greece, young women learn to expect, and manage, sexual attention, but American girls may be taught to discourage it by deemphasizing their femininity and sexuality.

Societies attribute different meaning to sexual activities. As in the case of the Etoro of New Guinea, the local belief system holds that masculinity is achieved through sexual contact with men, but social adulthood ultimately involves heterosexual marriage and procreative sex. In our own society, a man who admits to his fiancé or friends that he had homosexual experiences during childhood or adolescence is likely to find that they will raise questions about his masculinity. This perspective contrasts with those of contemporary Greece and Brazil, where homosexual activity, particularly by dominant (penetrating) partners, or “tops,” does not threaten their perceived masculinity.

Compare the situation in those cultures with the perception and treatment of bisexuality in the United States and Great Britain, where bisexuals often are criticized and marginalized by both heterosexuals and homosexuals for being different. Bisexuals suffer alienation from heterosexuals, who may view them as likely carriers of HIV; from gay men, who accuse them of selfishness, confusion, cowardice, and fraud—for hiding their essential homosexuality; and from lesbians, who may reject bisexuality among women on feminist grounds, as a betrayal of “the cause.” Such suspicion of bisexuality demonstrates lack of awareness not only of the range of human sexuality but also of its relationship to the cultural context in which it is expressed. But things are changing.

**Bisexuality**

The gay movement has sought to affirm homosexuality as a natural and healthy component of human personality and to mobilize a political community. An unintended result of the movement has been to reinforce a binary sexual divide between homosexuality and heterosexuality. What about bisexuals? Do they constitute an affinity group? What desires and lifestyle choices do they have? Do they have a collective, public, political identity?

Increase in media and academic accounts of bisexuality reflects our society’s growing accommodation of nonmonogamist, biopsychosocial expression among men and women beyond the reproductive imperative (Barker and Langdridge 2010; Angelides 2001). Individually, people experience bisexuality differently. It may be “just a phase” of their sexual development, a situational event, a secret regular practice, or a distinct orientation (Lichtenstein 2000).

One form of bisexuality among males is called being “on the down-low” or “DL.” This label refers to men who have sex with men secretly, but who maintain a public heterosexual identity and lifestyle. DL is similar to being “in the closet”—when homosexual single or married men and women pretend to be heterosexual or conceal their sexual identity altogether. Like most closeted homosexuals, men on the DL may maintain a heterosexual relationship with a wife or girlfriend. They excuse their sex with men as a personal “biological need” or “natural impulse.” As one DL man
remarked, “That’s my unique preference, and it has no place in my life with my wife, my children, my family, or the world.” African-American DL men may reject a public, gay identity, which they associate with femininity or with white men who self-identify as gay or queer. Consistent with mainstream African-American culture, these men seek to preserve a type of manliness that appeals to heterosexual women and that is culturally compatible with heterosexual mating and pair-bonding. Men on the DL, like closeted homosexuals in general, enjoy the same social rewards as straight men (e.g., privileged access to certain professions, housing, and community resources to which openly gay men may not have access).

What bisexuals may consider a personal choice, the growing bisexual movement has turned into a social and political practice. The sexual liberation of the 1970s advocated for all types of recreational sex, including bisexual expression. A public consciousness of bisexuality emerged, and with it collective efforts to assert, protect, and valorize bisexuality as a biopsychological human attribute and as a cultural identity. Bisexuals created social organizations for support, including the National Bisexual Liberation Group, founded in New York, and the San Francisco Bisexual Center. Women in Boston and Seattle created a Bisexual Women’s Network. By 1987 the North American Bisexual Network (NABN) had been launched. The bisexual movement is now a global phenomenon, as indicated by the International Conference on Bisexuality that brings together scholars and activists who consolidate efforts to construct a place for bisexuals to express their collective interests and culture.

The collective articulation and public divulgence of bisexual acts led to the First Annual Celebrate Bisexuality Day on September 23, 1999. At that year’s world conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, leaders of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) raised the official Bisexual Flag, distinguished by pink, blue, and lavender colors. ILGA issued this proclamation: “On International Celebrate Bisexuality Day, ILGA calls on people, researchers, organizations, services and governments to apply the same respect, recognition and rights to bisexual peoples as they do to any other group of people in society” (Ochs and Rowley 2009; Fox 2004). A multicultural society accommodates yet another movement, by bisexual activists who seek social protection and cultural validation on behalf of a highly ambiguous and diversified sexual minority.

**The Political Organization of Sexual Orientation**

Historically and cross-culturally, sexual behavior and ideology reveal economic and political conditions. What is considered normal, proper, deviant, or alternative differs from one society to another. In the United States we find variation in sexual beliefs and practices within and across segments of the population. Our market-oriented society nurtures individualism, supports personal choice, poses obstacles to marriage and procreative sex, and fosters gender symmetry. Indirectly, it encourages recreational sex, a menu of sexual pleasures that includes premarital and extramarital sex, bisexuality, homosexuality, and serial monogamy. Increased female participation in the
labor force launched a social movement in the 1960s that fueled a sex-gender revolution. Puritanism may still exist as a cultural ideal, but our society contains an unprecedented diversity in sexual sentiment, belief, and experience. In earlier chapters we saw that the black movement introduced race as an organizing principle. Later the feminist movement established gender as a constitutive basis for social organization. Now we turn to the gay movement and see how desire may form a basis for culture.

Sexual diversity is not only a demographic fact, it is also a political reality. The shift from an industrial to a services-and-information economy has altered our perceptions of sex, sexuality, and sex-gender roles. North American households have become more diverse (see Chapter 16). Dual-career couples and two-income families have become common models of mainstream American life. Broken families, blended families, and single-parent households are increasingly common.

Along with these changes came new cultural values, illustrated by terms like career woman, independent woman, working mother, singlehood, sexual freedom, and gender equality. A sexual revolution born out of economic and political changes challenged the basis of our social order. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a disease. Choice in sexual expression became more accessible and popular among mainstream, particularly educated, North Americans, including persons with same-sex desires. More open diversity in sexual interests, beliefs, and actions challenged our society’s standard of the traditional family.

The feminist movement played an important role in changing ideas and behavior about human sexuality. Being female became the basis upon which (mainly middle-class and upper-income white) women organized socially and politically to promote gender equality. Women became a category that required political attention. The public interest in sex-gender roles expanded to include sex. Women sought freedom, signified by choice in all aspects of life, including sexual partners, premarital sex, extramarital sex, and same-sex relationships.

The liberation of men in general, and homosexual men in particular, followed the women’s liberation movement. Gay men and lesbians fought, as individuals, as two separate constituencies, and as a unified body, for public acknowledgment of their oppression and for their freedom. Consistent with the national climate of sexual liberation in the 1970s, sexual fulfillment and self-actualization became key goals of the gay and lesbian movement. More important, individual activists fought to change mass opinion and public policy. Men and women who for centuries had been outlaws and marginals, and had been accused of living in sin demanded to be recognized and treated like citizens.

The distinction between the terms homosexual and gay or lesbian is perhaps the most important one to appreciate. As we saw earlier, homosexual is a term used to describe sexual desire and activity between persons of the same sex. Gay and lesbian stand for a way of life by persons who desire, and have sex with, persons of the same sex. The classification “gays and lesbians” refers to a community of experience that homosexual-identified individuals share and construct in an ongoing fashion.

Political mobilization among gay men and lesbians seeks citizenship rights and privileges: the right to a safe, healthy, and gratifying life within the structure and norms of gay culture, as this is constructed in various Western societies. The gay
movement assumes (1) that sexual desire forms the basis for building a community, and (2) that individuals, through collective action, can alter society by expressing a particular configuration of needs, feelings, and experiences. Gays and lesbians seek the freedom to pursue and design a way of life that offers self-fulfillment, security, and legitimacy.

Gay and lesbian activists emphasize that sexual orientation is a human attribute. Like race and gender, it should be understood as an aspect of human nature and validated as a social practice. The contemporary gay and lesbian movement has several goals. The primary ones include protection from discrimination related to housing, employment, health, health insurance, domestic partnerships (legalization of same-sex marriages), parenting, and kinship (Weston 1991; Melymuka 2001).

**Legal Protection of LGBT**

Visibility and integration of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community within the North American mainstream is increasing. In the 2008 General Social Survey (GSS), 9 percent of adults identified as homosexual or bisexual. While only about 25 percent reveal their sexual orientation to their employers, 90 percent of self-identified homosexuals are “out,” that is, they claim a social identity and a public presence. The 2009 American Community Survey reveals that the estimated number of same-sex couples who identified themselves as either spouses or unmarried domestic partners increased at three times the rate of population growth from 2008 to 2009. As the visibility of LGBT has increased in the last three decades, so has public support for their rights.

A majority of Americans now believe that gays and lesbians deserve equal access to employment, that domestic partnerships should be legal, and that homosexuality is socially acceptable. There are more and more heterosexual Americans among the estimated 200,000 Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), a national nonprofit organization with more than 500 affiliates and 13 regional chapters in the United States. Each year Gay Pride parades become forums for non-LGBT citizens to march in support of their loved ones.

In 2010, LGBT families were included in the White House Easter Egg Roll, an annual tradition that dates to 1878. By this gesture, the Obama administration attempted to signify its acceptance of LGBT families as an equal variant of the American kinship system. Interested high school juniors and seniors now have access to the Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students, a list of universities that faculty and students describe as “gay friendly campuses.”

Sexual orientation in the 21st century emerges more as a public cultural variant than as a private preference for sexual gratification. Social integration of gays and lesbians has increased across the social institutions of our society, including the economy, government, education, religion, and kinship. Acceptance, even advocacy, for the rights of homosexuals is also evident at the level of interpersonal relations. However, barriers to full citizenship, many institutionalized in our legal system, persist. Gay and lesbian couples can marry in only a handful of states and receive no federal benefits when they do. They and their families are denied such legal protections or rights as
adoption, child custody, guardianship, Social Security, inheritance, and income tax benefits comparable to those of opposite-sex married couples. The effort to lift the military’s ban on admittedly gay and lesbian service members had a major setback when the U.S. Senate could not muster the 60 votes necessary to advance a defense bill that included conditional repeal of the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell law, which even members of the military now think should be repealed.

The LGBT movement has brought the majority of Americans a long way from the erroneous and ironic view of homosexuality as “a crime against nature.” Yet the “legalization of homosexuality” lags by comparison with its public expression and social acceptance. This denial of full legal rights is especially curious when the number of Americans who stand to benefit from its privileges is relatively small compared with the millions who have access to them because they are heterosexuals.

Gay Culture
Organized efforts for civil rights by gay and lesbian activists have helped establish a gay culture (Herdt 1992). This way of life is distinguished by standards, norms, values, and symbols that its members invent, practice, and reproduce. The gay community is an aggregate of human beings, not just individuals defined by sexual practices.

The contemporary gay and lesbian movement has several goals. The primary ones include protection from discrimination related to housing, employment, health, health insurance, domestic partnerships (legalization of same-sex marriages), parenting, and kinship. Shown here, a gay family, with couple, son, uncle, and aunt, participate in a Gay Heritage Parade in New York City in 1998. The kinship term on one T-shirt is obscured. What do you imagine it says?
The onset of AIDS shifted attention to humanistic and political support within the gay community and by society at large. Gay-born social institutions include ceremonies and "rituals of deliverance," such as "commitment ceremonies" and the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Day Parade.

As many gay men and lesbians report, gay culture provides a home for persons who may be rejected, marginalized, and punished by other citizens, including employers, colleagues, and, most important, members of their own families. In cities such as San Francisco, New York, Toronto, and Atlanta, sexual minorities occupy a physical space that constitutes home and community.

"Queer Nation" encompasses all gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" assert Queer Nationals. In their effort to dispute and diminish discrimination by outsiders, gay and lesbian activists claim the right to represent the needs of "our own kind." Demonstrations and rallies by Queers in public settings, such as shopping malls and parks, express anger associated with oppression. Unification of persons with same-sex desires and partnerships, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or age, strengthens the movement and symbolizes internal power and determination to "be who we are!" Today, despite resistance, gay men and lesbians, as individuals and as a collective, have greater access to political and economic power than at any time in the history of North America.

The term queer may be derogatory when used by heterosexuals, or "straights." But today it has become a label that gays and lesbians claim to refer to same-sex relations and to a range of desires, identities, and behaviors. Most important, this category rejects all others that either are imposed by outsiders on the gay community or express conventional, heterosexist practices and morality. Queer Nation stands for, cultivates, and promotes a particular culture. It emphasizes the principle that gays and lesbians are human first. As a social category, Queers challenge conventional models and morality related to sexual pair-bonding, courting patterns, love, romance, and reproduction. Perceptions of sex and gender as fixed categories break down as blending, flexing, and bending gender orientations become more common.

Our society, and the kind of work and family roles it requires, encourages gender flexibility on all fronts. Accordingly, mainstream norms and ideas about sex and gender are changing—particularly among young people—to embrace diversity in psychosocial profiles among most Americans. Human diversity is intrinsic to every social group. The gay and lesbian community is not an exception. As the numbers grow, so does intracommunity variation in class, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual tastes and styles, and other personality and social traits. Diversity, and even stratification, within the gay community is more prevalent than it is between gays and straights.

Homoerotic feelings and homosexual tendencies probably exist in all human societies. But a gay culture is a characteristic of few, including northwestern Europe, Canada, and the United States. Cross-cultural studies show that non-Western societies may recognize same-sex activities as integral and necessary to the overall social structure (Herdt 1997). People may practice same-sex activities that are ritualized and culturally sanctioned; they reinforce rather than threaten the social order. In contrast, westerners in general and North Americans in particular have tended to disapprove of
same-sex desire and relationships. Our market society may discourage homosexual behaviors, even as it generates a gay community or culture.

This chapter has focused on another component of human diversity and multiculturalism. Sexual orientation, a biocultural universal, always is embedded within the social organization and structure of particular human societies. Contemporary multicultural societies increasingly accept and integrate varied *lifestyles* and *orientations*. Sexual gratification never has dictated cultural identity or social status. Heterosexuals do not pursue romantic relationships, marriages, and social connections to satisfy sexual fantasies and needs, any more than do homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender persons, or any other kind of sexually identified individuals. A sexual culture, like all cultures, is less about sex, and more about affinity.

**Key Terms**

- agape (168)
- asexuality (167)
- bisexuality (167)
- eros (168)
- Etoro (174)
- gay (179)
- heterosexuality (167)
- homosexual (179)
- homosexuality (167)
- lesbian (179)
- libido (167)
- monogamous (168)
- philia (168)
- sexual fit (168)
- sexual orientation (167)
CHAPTER 11

AGE AND COHORT

REFLECTIONS: TO AGE IS HUMAN; TO AGE UNGRACEFULLY, AMERICAN

❖ Ages and Cohorts
❖ The Generation Gap
❖ An Aging Population
❖ The Aging Process
❖ Intergenerational Conflict
❖ The Gray and the Brown
❖ The Tea Party Movement
❖ The Social Construction of Childhood
❖ The Politics of Age and Aging

TO AGE IS HUMAN; TO AGE UNGRACEFULLY, AMERICAN

Knowing and reporting age is one of the first developmental tasks of childhood, second only perhaps to saying one’s name. Adults typically ask children, “How old are you?” The brief dialogue usually ends with the adult rewarding the child with compliments such as “You’re a good girl!” or “You’re a big boy!” We learn very early that chronological age (number of years since birth) ought to correspond to maturity (capacity and performance of socially desirable thoughts and actions).

Attention to age denotes social expectations and cultural values by which individuals are judged. We expect the four-year-old to know her ABCs, the nine-year-old to bathe and dress himself, the adolescent to drive responsibly, and the adult to support herself financially. Social convention dictates when a youth is invited to sit at “the adults’ table,” the timing for “leaving home,” and the age at which perfectly healthy adults must retire from the labor force. Table 11–1 shows milestones in the transition to adulthood.

In North America aging biologically and socially is celebrated during childhood and adolescence. Children can’t wait to become grown-ups. Little girls imitate women by playing dress-up. Little boys pretend to shave. Children are eager to earn money by accepting responsibility for chores. Adolescents look forward to expressing their sexual freedom, having a car, and being on their own. Growing up is desirable, but growing old is not.

In our society the enthusiasm for aging diminishes as people reach adulthood. To ask a woman her age still is considered taboo. The midlife crisis is a familiar rite of passage for many Americans. By the time men, and increasingly women, reach middle adulthood (the 40s and 50s), they measure the value of their life by occupationally linked accomplishments, for example, position, status, and annual income. Anxieties about aging escalate as adults become “the elderly.”
All living organisms age biologically. Participation in a life course, maturation, physiological capacity relative to biological age, and age-related risks of mortality constitute a universal, genetically programmed process. However, as a sociocultural process, aging varies in structure, content, and meaning. For example, Greek-American elderly in Chicago report that the crowning glory of one’s life is a good family. Implicit in this core value (if not always a fact) is that having a good family during one’s yerondamata (old age) guarantees social security for elderly who are not integrated in the dominant senior culture of our society (Kozaitis 1987).

Age is a key dimension of one’s cultural identity and social status. In many non-industrial societies, people continue to work until they become frail, injured, or ill. In societies in which the elderly control land, property, technology, and knowledge, they also have authority and power, and they are repositories of tradition and wisdom. Seniors hold positions of prestige and leadership and contribute to the security and prosperity of family and community. This is particularly true of small-scale, slowly changing, nonliterate societies that rely on the old for economic security, social guidance, political protection, and cultural integrity.

By contrast, today’s industrial societies rely on up-to-date, state-of-the-art skills and information. A market economy that depends on new and rapidly changing technology and knowledge favors younger workers and forces many elders into early retirement. Compared with agrarian societies, today’s older generation may be less directly involved in its adult children’s private lives, including decisions about lifestyle, courtship, marriage, and child rearing. However, among the poor, the wealthy, and some ethnic groups in industrial nations, the elderly do maintain a strong position within families by offering persistent financial and psychological support to their children and grandchildren. Kozaitis (1993) found that the Roma of Athens, Greece, insisted that “our children’s children are twice our children.” These Gypsies

---

**Table 11–1**

**Milestones in the Transition to Adulthood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Age</th>
<th>Life Event</th>
<th>Percentage who view event as extremely/quite important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>Financial independence from parents/guardians</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>Separate residence from parents</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>Full-time employment</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>Completion of formal schooling</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>Capability of supporting family</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>Parenthood</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Based on the 2002 General Social Survey of 1398 people.*

*Source: T. Smith 2003.*
invest vigorously in securing land, property in the form of gold, and desirable marriage alliances for their children and grandchildren.

In contemporary North America old age is defined chiefly in terms of years, labor participation, accumulation of wealth, and eligibility for federal entitlements. Many Americans retire from the labor force around age 65. The rest of their life they are supported by investments, retirement funds, and government programs. Middle-class retirees often live long distances from their children and withdraw from family decision making. Many elderly people move to retirement communities, frequently in warm regions of the country. The quality of these vary; some resemble apartment buildings that accommodate “the young old” who are capable of independent living. More frail elderly move into complexes that specialize in assisted living. Many people spend their last years of life in convalescent homes where they receive round-the-clock care.

Gerontological research shows that aging does not result in loss of intelligence, change in personality, or altered political orientation. Why then are older people often seen as a social burden? Social scientists have treated the elderly as a contemporary social problem, to be investigated and understood. Research foci include ageism (prejudice and discrimination against the elderly), physical decline, social isolation, depression, poverty, and abuse from family members. Geriatrics has become a recognized specialty in medicine, and gerontology has gained legitimacy among the professions, both as a field of study and as practice. Students who want to work with old people pursue a degree or certificate that qualifies them to serve the elderly in some professional capacity. Today, “elder care” is more than a logo; it is a viable economic niche in a market that thrives on services and information.

Is the graying of America actually a social problem? Consider the number of retirement communities that require designers, architects, builders, and managers to construct and maintain them. Travel, a major pursuit of persons in their golden years, helps support airline agents, tour guides, hotel clerks, and cruise line personnel. Many retailers, journalists, psychiatrists, accountants, and fitness experts earn their living by meeting elder-specific needs. Hundreds of nurses, physicians, social workers, janitors, cooks, and administrators depend on nursing homes to supply them with salaries and benefits. Is it any wonder that our society, despite its apparent contempt for aging, invests in prolonging life biomedically?

In today’s North America, both children and the elderly tend to be excluded from contributing directly to the formal economy as producers. Segregation into care facilities for kids and old people, by those who can afford the services, relieves the “sandwich generation” of many child and elder care responsibilities that might otherwise devolve on adult children. Actually, the perception that our growing elder population has become “the young man’s burden” is erroneous. Think of all the younger people that the elderly support to take care of them and meet their special needs. Even if many seniors are not contributing resources to their biological kin, they are certainly a key economic resource for many American families.

For their part, the elderly are actively constructing a culture of their own. Their number alone justifies their collective status and identity. About 12 percent of Americans are over 65 years of age. By the mid-21st century this segment will comprise
about 20 percent of the U.S. population. Cultural differences and similarities characterize seniors within and across socioeconomic class, ethnicity, age, and gender. However, age-based cultural construction is evident in the number of senior citizen organizations, agencies, and centers designed to meet the social and recreational needs of older adults, provide living quarters, and offer specialized services and benefits. Most seniors pursue new, or previously neglected, interests and engage in activities that reinforce new psychological ties and social membership. These include volunteer work, continuing education, travel, hobbies and activities such as golf and tennis, and part-time work. Elders are gradually, but not always consciously, participating in a culture of their own.

In our rapidly changing Information Age, the technical skills of older people may become obsolete, their pace may be slow, and their strength limited. What the elderly do have is experience in many of life’s main concerns, such as citizenship, friendship, family planning, child rearing, career development, peace of mind, marital harmony, and human development. Such insight is a resource that elders can provide and that younger generations can use. We live in a period of human history in which most of us are overinformed and underenlightened. Resigned to a peer culture that a market society supports and reinforces, we are denied understanding of aging and the human life course that is gained best from intergenerational relationships. Consistent and meaningful exchange across generations and the understanding of humanity that it yields would, at the very least, urge us to celebrate birthdays without complaints, and at most, lead us to grow old gracefully and meaningfully.

Ages and Cohorts

Age is like many of the other social principles we have examined so far. Age unites and divides us, and it can be a basis for ranking. But age is unlike our other ascribed statuses—ethnicity, race, or gender, for example—in that we can expect to experience more than one, in fact several, age-based statuses during our lives. Most North Americans can join Sir Paul McCartney in wondering, “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m 64?” (although most 64-year-olds, indeed most 84-year-olds, are perfectly capable of feeding themselves).

The social significance of age differences is demonstrated by our many terms designating age categories and attributes. Babies, infants, toddlers, children, kids, juveniles, preteens, adolescents, teens, youths, yuppies, adults, middle-aged, midlife crisis, maturity, old, seniors, elderly—many of the most common labels we use for our fellow citizens are based on age. Some of the categories have adjectives attached, suggesting stereotypes associated with that age category, for example, terrible twos. Some labels incorporate multiple social contrasts—yuppies are young urban professionals. The term yuppy blends age with residence (city) and occupation (professional), with a hint of class (upscale). Retiree, based on former work status, also implies a certain age range.

Two kinds of age-based statuses—age and generation, or cohort—are roughly comparable to what anthropologists call age grades and age sets. Thus, we can expect
to go through certain age phases, categories, or grades, like infancy, childhood, adolescence, the college years, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. But also, by virtue of when we were born and what we experienced during our formative years, many of us belong to a culturally named generation cohort, or age set. Thus, as baby boomers or Generation Xers, we share or have shared certain enculturative influences, experiences, recollections, preferences, and behavior. Members of a generation, cohort, or age set share common memories. For example, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a defining event for boomers, as the stock market crash of October 1929, followed by the Great Depression, was for their parents. For what generation was September 11, 2001, a defining event? If we live to be 100 years old, we’ll pass through the same age grades as everyone else, but we’ll always belong to our own age set, cohort, or generation.

Generations are distinguished by patterns of collective identity, behavior, beliefs, and values. Generation X includes some 17 million Americans born between 1961 and 1975. Market researchers associate this generation with self-indulgence, a sense of entitlement, materialism, prolonged adolescence, disregard for authority, and high distress levels, but also with commitment to a balanced way of life. For example, Generation X women seek a lifestyle that may be less profitable financially, but more fulfilling psychologically (Gutner 2002).

Generation Y includes Americans born between 1976 and 1994 (or 1999, according to some definitions). Also known as the “millennium generation” or “echo
boomers,” Generation Y numbers about 60 million people, compared to 72 million baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). Generation Y consists mainly of the sons and daughters of baby boomers. While they rival their parents’ generation in size, members of the echo boom are much more racially diverse: One in three is not Caucasian. One in four lives in a single-parent household. Three in four have working mothers. Their core values are said to include self-expression, self-fulfillment, creativity, frugality, and public service (Ebenkamp and Barry 2001). Familiar with computers since childhood, members of Generation Y habitually use the Internet to explore sensitive issues they may want to conceal from their parents or friends (Lau 2002).

Market researchers believe that members of Generation Y, growing up in a media-saturated, brand-conscious world, respond to ads differently from their elders. They prefer to encounter ads in different places, such as on the Internet and cable TV. Raised in dual-income and single-parent families, these echo boomers are accustomed to financial responsibility. One in nine high school students has a credit card cosigned by a parent. Most expect to have careers. They even are planning home ownership, according to a 1998 survey of first-year college students. “This is a very pragmatic group. At 18 years old, they have five-year plans. They are already looking at how they will be balancing their work/family commitments,” said Deanna Tillisch, who directed the survey (quoted in Neuborne and Kerwin 1999).

In North America today, perhaps because of the value our culture bestows on youth, our age statuses are rough, informal, and blurred. The names of our generations tend to be terms that others employ to categorize us rather than labels we use for ourselves. Few people introduce themselves by saying, “Hi, I’m an echo boomer, and I’ll be your server tonight.” In other societies, however, age and generation can be used more formally as principles of social organization—ways of organizing people, giving them a collective consciousness and group identity—for example, among an age set or grade of male warriors in East Africa.

Contemporary North Americans pass through roughly the same age grades as our parents passed and as our children will pass. But there have been shifts in the meaning of these grades and in the cultural expectations associated with them. For example, people in their 50s felt and acted older a generation ago than they do today. Now actresses in their 50s, who would have been “over the hill” in the 1950s, can advertise gym equipment and cosmetics and still be Hollywood sex symbols. Many of Hollywood’s leading action heroes are boomers or older (e.g., Harrison Ford).

Our current age, work, and family situations influence the ways in which we view other age groups. Kottak, who began teaching college at age 25, realized he was aging or getting older when his introductory students started looking like his children. His perception of his own aging strengthened when parents of current students started visiting his class to proclaim themselves his former students. As in the situational negotiation of ethnic identity discussed in Chapter 5, most people probably don’t recognize aging by looking in the mirror; they do so situationally and by comparison, gradually perceiving themselves in relation to others who are younger or older.
During the 1960s the renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead helped publicize the notion of a generation gap. This was the idea that a cultural chasm had opened between American youths and their parents and grandparents. The impetus was the social context surrounding the unpopular Vietnam War, which draft-prone young Americans resisted, as most of their parents and grandparents had not resisted previous wars, such as the Korean War or the two world wars. In the Vietnam era, young Americans (especially draft-eligible young men) perceived that their lives were being manipulated and endangered by older people (especially older men) for goals that were not their own and that were not even just. In protesting the war and other social ills, youths used potent symbols, such as flag burning, drug consumption, sexual promiscuity, vulgarity, and public confrontation to express resentment toward elders. Steeped in the Civil Rights movement and exposed to mass media as no previous generation had been, young Americans questioned and resisted traditional notions of order, propriety, and obedience. The media, in turn, played a powerful role in spreading images and fueling awareness of protests, opposition, and resistance. The generation gap opened alongside a class chasm, in that less-financially privileged and less-educated Americans were more likely to support the Vietnam War, and to be sent into it, than were their wealthier compatriots. Social polarization became the order of the day.

Mead’s generational chasm was evident mainly in the United States, with echoes in Canada and western Europe. Today’s generation gap is worldwide, as trends evident in the United States in the 1960s have achieved global significance. Among the most important is the information and image revolution—the spread of education and the influence of the mass media, particularly television and the Internet. Nowadays in most parts of the world, members of the current younger generation, like Americans who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, are better educated, more media exposed, and more world savvy than their elders. Even for people in very remote areas, the world is radically different from what it was 30 years ago. Third World villagers have never been truly isolated, and most were affected to some degree by colonialism. For generations, centuries, or even millennia in some regions, people in remote areas have encountered government officials and religious proselytizers seeking taxes, tithes, bodies, and souls; but exposure to external people, forces, information, and images has never been greater than it is today.

A proliferating and bewildering array of alien actors and agents now intrudes. Tourism has become the world’s number-one industry. Development agents and NGOs entice local people toward their plans, projects, goals, and ideologies. Along with formal educational opportunities, the mass media spread information to rural areas. Development agents and the media preach that work should be for cash rather than mainly for subsistence. Young people feel too educated or too world-exposed to accept traditional jobs in the fishing craft or in fields where their elders expected to make their living and where many older people still do labor.

However, today’s world has too many young people and too few jobs to meet their expectations. Globally there is an unparalleled generation gap. The elders were raised in the context of ancestral tradition, mainly local experience, and a mainly
subsistence economy. Young men and women, by contrast, have grown up in the presence of global forces, agents, images, and information, with opportunities for formal education and expectations of eventual cash employment. Because few nations, within their formal economies, provide enough jobs to meet current qualifications and expectations, young people must pursue various alternatives. Worldwide, “informal” economic activities are often illegal and dangerous, with a transnational dimension. Such activities include cattle raiding and rustling (often for eventual sale to foreign markets), piracy, trade in arms and drugs, urban hooliganism and gang activities, and banditry. Fairly well-educated young people make up a significant proportion of the migration stream that currently links southern and northern countries. Underemployed and dissatisfied, youths join not only teams, gangs, and raiding parties but also militia, and fundamentalist and terrorist movements. Young men play a disproportionately large role in war and terrorism. Paradoxically, this age/gender-based contrast—this new global generation gap, particularly as it applies to young men—has received little systematic attention from scholars and policymakers. Globally, among men, generational differences may be even sharper than they are among women. The generation gap, and its effects by gender, class, and country, is an important issue demanding further study within the context of global diversity.

An Aging Population

The population of older people is growing, especially in North America and western Europe. In the United States the 65+ aged population has increased from 3.1 million people in 1900, to 12.3 million in 1950, to some 39 million today (He et al. 2005; World Almanac 2009). In 2008, in terms of elderly populations, the United States ranked third (39 million) among nations, behind India (60 million) and China (106 million) (World Almanac 2009). Elderly people, defined as those aged 65 and older, represent one-eighth of the U.S. population. Table 11–2 shows statistics on the elderly population of the United States in 2008.

The oldest old—people 85 and over—compose the most rapidly growing elderly age group in the United States. Between 1960 and 1994, their numbers rose 274 percent, compared with just 45 percent for the overall U.S. population. By 2050 the oldest old are projected to number 19 million, between 4 and 5 percent of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 11–2</th>
<th>Elderly Population of the United States in Millions, 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youngest old (65 to 74)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle old (75 to 84)</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldest old (85 or older)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly total</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 7.
U.S. population. The health of and care for this rapidly growing elderly population will become pressing issues (He et al. 2005).

The implications of age vary by gender. Men tend to have higher death rates at every age than women do. Figure 11–1 shows the number of men per 100 women by age group in 2008. In the U.S. population under age 20, there are 105 males per 100 females. By age 85, the ratio reverses dramatically, with more than two women for every man. As a result of this disparity in survival, elderly men are much more likely than their female counterparts to be married and living with their spouse (72 percent of men versus 42 percent of women in 2008). Elderly women are three times as likely as elderly men to be widowed (42 percent versus 14 percent in 2008) and thus to live alone (He et al. 2005; Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 7).

Compared with other Americans, older people tend to be politically active and economically secure. Politicians are well aware that the elderly are the most reliable of all voters. (One wonders whether this is a cohort effect or an age effect. That is, do older people vote more consistently because their generation always has done so, or is there something about getting old that motivates people to go to the polls?) In constant dollars, the median income for elderly households nearly doubled between 1967 and 2003, rising from $12,882 to $23,787. That figure had reached $28,305 by 2008. The median income of elderly women living alone, however, was only about 80 percent that of their male counterparts. Older women also had a higher poverty rate (14 percent in 2008) than elderly men (8 percent) (He et al. 2005; Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 698).

**FIGURE 11–1** Number of Men per 100 Women, United States, by Age Group, 2008

*SOURCE: Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 7.*
Among the elderly, health is better than might be assumed. In one survey, a striking 77 percent of Americans aged 65 to 74, and 68 percent of those aged 75 and older, considered their health to be good or excellent (He et al. 2005). Despite the prevalent idea (and fear) of the nursing home lurking around the corner, most seniors actually live independently or with family members. Women over 65 are more likely to live with relatives (other than the spouse) than elderly men are. As well, there is considerable variation in senior living arrangements by ethnic group. For example, older Asians and Hispanics are more likely to live with relatives than members of other ethnic groups are. Older men are more likely to be institutionalized than older women are. In fact, there has been a decline in the percentage of Americans living in nursing homes, dropping from 5.1 percent in 1990 to 4.5 percent in 2000 (U.S. Census 2000b). A new autonomy for the elderly, most of whom now live in their own homes (either married or alone) with adequate incomes, has a clear economic basis. In general, seniors have more assets than younger people do. Although 35 percent of elderly Americans were poor in 1959, that figure had dropped below 10 percent by 2008. Other segments of the American population have not done nearly as well as older people in terms of over all poverty reduction.

Many older Americans work outside the home. Figure 11–2 shows that women compose a growing percentage of the “near-old” labor force (55–64 years old). In this age group, male labor participation dropped almost 20 percentage points (to 67.7 percent) between 1950 and 2008, while the female percentage increased from below 30 percent to 57 percent (He et al. 2005; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009). Many Americans retire and then reenter the workforce. Census Bureau data (Table 11–3) show a generational increase in the percentage of older Americans who are employed. Of men aged 65 to 69, almost 34 percent worked in 2008, versus 27 percent in 1995 and 26 percent in 1990. Among women 65 to 69 years old, almost 26 percent worked

![FIGURE 11–2 Labor force participation rates for the population aged 55 to 64 by sex: 1950 to 2008](image)

*NOTE:* The reference population for these data is the civilian noninstitutionalized population.

TABLE 11–3

Employment Status of the U.S. Population Aged 55 and Over by Age and Gender 2008

(Numbers in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and Gender</th>
<th>Total in Population</th>
<th>Total Employed</th>
<th>Percentage Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>16,123</td>
<td>10,919</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69</td>
<td>5,246</td>
<td>1,779</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 and over</td>
<td>10,756</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>17,367</td>
<td>9,893</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69</td>
<td>5,995</td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 and over</td>
<td>15,165</td>
<td>1,169</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On August 29, 2009, in New York City, supporters of Health Care Reform demonstrate for a public option. Citizens routinely use collective action to influence public policy. Have your own actions ever influenced public policy?
in 2008, versus 17 percent in 1995 and 1990. There also has been a trend toward more full-time work among employed older Americans. In 2008, 72 percent of employed men aged 65 to 69 were working full-time, versus 57 percent in 1995 and 56 percent in 1990. Among working women aged 65 to 69, 55 percent worked full-time in 2008, versus 43 percent in 1995 and 44 percent in 1990 (Purcell 2008).

The Aging Process

The aging process offers opportunities for personal expression and collective identity. A woman in her early 20s expresses her young adulthood and educational status by serving in the Peace Corps before pursuing a degree in law. Members of the “Golden Club” shop at their local grocery store on “senior discount day.” American children, by virtue of their age, become “preschoolers.” Menopausal women, by virtue of their age, construct a support group to help ease a life-course transition. While aging implies physical decline, elders’ social engagement continues as long as their minds are healthy.

In colonial times “the powers and privileges of old age were firmly anchored in the society” (Fisher 1978, p. 58). Veneration of the elderly was due in part to the fact that old age was fairly rare. Given the economic and political structure of early, Puritan North America, wealthy old white men were valued and protected by the state, while poor widows often were marginalized (Fisher 1978). In Chapter 9 we argued that women’s status increases relative to their participation in the economy. The value and treatment of the elderly also are linked to their role in production.

Aging is a human universal. The experience and meaning of being old vary, however, according to sex, class, and national or ethnic affiliation. In rural Africa, the elderly, although few in number, tend to be powerful socially and symbolically, as guardians of cultural knowledge. In Hong Kong, physical well-being and productivity decline during the 50s, and being old is associated with inability to work rather than with formal retirement. In Ireland and the United States, senior status is marked around age 65, relative to eligibility for pensions and for full Social Security benefits (Fry 2000).

The well-being of the elderly depends on cultural interpretations of old age and on the social support available to senior citizens. Health-related self-profiles of 252 elderly people in the United States, India, and Congo/Zaire revealed a relationship between biological decline and sociocultural systems of elder care. The American elderly expressed a denial of death and valued physical and mental health, autonomy, and proactive health behaviors. Congolese elderly accepted decline in strength and mobility, expected support from their children, and hoped for a good death. Indian elderly feared psychophysical decline, ill health, and dependence. Their concern for a peaceful death found expression in meditation and other behaviors intended to improve their health (Westerhof et al. 2000).

Gerontological theory and practice must consider the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of aging along with the economic conditions and biomedical
issues of the aged. Personal and professional trajectories lead people across state boundaries and oceans, away from hometowns and family. Most North Americans continue to care for their parents by making regular visits, sending money, calling regularly, and including them in family affairs. Elder care is designed to help those who no longer can function as independent adults. In Europe and North America, caregivers include professionals employed by private and government agencies. Paid assistants, including neighbors and friends, also help the elderly with house maintenance, transportation, and shopping. During her field research with elderly Greek people in Chicago, Kozaitis helped her research participants by driving them to various destinations and helping them run errands. She also served as their interpreter during visits to their doctors, the Social Security office, and the local recreational facility for retirees (Kozaitis 1987).

Medications, along with labor-saving and strength-preserving devices, help elderly people who can afford them to live a fuller, more active life. In a market society where goods and services related to elder care can be bought, the wealthier elderly have an easier time than the elderly poor. Elder care also subsumes geriatric care centers, assisted living facilities, continuing care residential communities, and nursing homes—all of which are costly.

Elder care remains a challenge for families and governments. The demographic shift (the baby boom) between the end of World War II and the start of the Vietnam War has produced what Peterson calls the approaching “Gray Dawn” (1999). Increased life expectancies translate into a large retiring population concerned about financial security, housing, health, and social well-being. Scholars, local communities, and policymakers urge development of strategic plans to accommodate the “age wave” that a retiring but diverse baby-boom generation in the United States, Japan, France, and Germany has ushered into the 21st century (Villanueva 2000).

Organized efforts to build political unity among the old proliferate—promoting their safety, health, and general well-being. For many retirees, old age offers new opportunities for self-actualization in the form of creative pursuits, new friendships, and exploration of new horizons through travel and relocation. A culture constructed by, of, and for the “new aged” is taking root in our society. The saying “Go south, old woman, go south” describes the migration patterns of the elderly to Florida, Arizona, southern New Mexico, and the Rio Grande valley in Texas, where they design and pursue a lifestyle of their own (Rose 1997; Economist 2002). In the United States, there is substantial segregation—social and residential—between age groups, compared to African, Asian, and European societies.

**Intergenerational Conflict**

In North America and western Europe, the cost of supporting an aging population has become a political concern. In the United States this issue will become more volatile after 2011, when the baby boomers start turning 65. People are living longer, and their care has become a personal issue as well as one of policy. Baby boomers, for example, now face a new generational predicament. They are being characterized as the
sandwich generation. This term describes them as sandwiched between the generations before and after them. Added to child care responsibilities are elder care obligations. In practice, women especially tend to be burdened. As our kids finally get raised, our parents start declining. If that nursing home does indeed lurk around the corner, it will cost as much annually as an Ivy League college, with no degree or future at the end.

What resources are available for support and care of the elderly? How long will Social Security be solvent? Because the answers to these questions remain uncertain, hearsay answers and dire predictions abound. Regularly, we hear these through the mass media, which provide an excellent channel for monitoring social concerns, ideas, and divisions in our society. Young white male workers, in particular, use call-in shows to complain about benefits they perceive as being taken from them and given to other groups, such as Social Security recipients, welfare mothers, women, and immigrants. On the other hand, minorities complain that white males still have privileged access to resources.

The allocation of social benefits by age isn’t just a North American issue. It is even more problematic for western European countries, whose social programs have tended to be more generous than those of the United States. The German retirement system, for example, was established by Chancellor Bismarck following the first German unification in 1871. Benefits began by age 65, in an era when the average life expectancy at birth was 45 years, versus over 78 years today. The German retirement age, which used to be 60 for women and 63 for men, was raised in 1996 to 65 for both. It is scheduled to be raised to 67 in 2029 or 2035 (Hessler 2006).

In the German system current workers and employers directly subsidize retired people, with matching contributions by workers and employers. Retirees get 70 percent of the salary they earned during their last few working years. This is somewhat like the U.S. system, in that current Social Security payments also fund much of current expenditures, but the German benefits are much more lavish. Also, the supply of future workers to support the older generation is much scarcer in Germany than in the United States. In Germany, Spain, and Italy, the average couple has about 1.25 children, versus 2.05 in the United States. Pension contributions by guest workers, immigrants, and their employers can reduce some of the projected deficit.

Given Germany’s low birthrate, fewer and fewer native-born young people will enter a workforce on which more and more older people will depend for their pensions. In Germany 19 percent of the population is 65 or older, versus 12 percent in the United States. And only 14 percent of the German population is 15 or younger, compared with 20 percent in the United States (Population Reference Bureau 2006).

A growing social tension between young and old is expressed in more extreme form in many European nations, including Germany. As an official of the Education Ministry in Bonn observed, “We are not talking left/right as the basic social division but young/old” (Cowell 1997, p. A8). The newspaper *Die Woche* has commented that “the prospect of lower pensions at the end of a working life marked by higher contributions is causing many young employees to doubt the validity and justice of the system” (Cowell 1997, p. A8).
The Gray and the Brown

Parallels to the German generational opposition are emerging in the United States. Drawing on a 2010 Brookings Institution report titled “State of Metropolitan America: On the Front Lines of Demographic Transformation,” Ronald Brownstein (2010) analyzes an intensifying confrontation between groups he describes as “the gray and the brown.” Brownstein and demographer William Frey, one of the authors of the Brookings report, focus on two key U.S. demographic trends:

1. Ethnic/racial diversity is increasing, especially among the young, with minorities now comprising 44 percent of all children under 18.
2. The country is aging, and about 80 percent of the senior population is white.

The under-18 share of the U.S. population is projected eventually to stabilize at around 23 percent, as the senior share rises steadily from about 12 percent today to 20 percent by 2040. The U.S. population is projected to become more dependent, as the working-age population shrinks from about 63 percent today to 57 percent in two to three decades.

Frey sees these trends as creating a “cultural generation gap” (Frey in Brookings, pp. 26, 63). This refers to a sharp contrast in the attitudes, priorities, and political leanings of younger and older Americans. Whites now constitute 80 percent of older Americans, but only 56 percent of children—a 24-point spread. In 1980, the spread was only 14 percentage points, expanding to 18 points by 1990 and 23 points by 2000. Knowledge of this gap helps us understand what often is characterized as the increasing polarization of American society.

Politically the two groups—the gray and the brown—are poles apart. The aging white population appears increasingly resistant to taxes and public spending, while the minority population values government support of education, health, and social welfare. In the 2008 election, young people, especially minorities, strongly supported Democrat Barack Obama, while seniors, especially white ones, voted solidly for Republican John McCain. Obama drew support from two-thirds of voters under 29 and four-fifths of minority voters while losing a majority of seniors, including nearly three-fifths of white seniors. Those differences persisted after President Obama’s election. In Gallup’s weekly tracking poll through mid-July 2010, Obama received positive ratings from two-thirds of nonwhite voters and three-fifths of young people, compared with only one-third of whites over 50 (Brownstein 2010).

Despite their political opposition, the gray and the brown are more interdependent economically than either usually realizes. If minority children benefit disproportionately from public education today, minority workers will compose an increasing percentage of the nation’s workforce in the future. As such, they will pay an ever-greater share of the payroll taxes needed to support the social programs that most directly benefit old white people. Older Americans need younger workers paying into the system to sustain Social Security and Medicare, and society as a whole benefits from investing in the education of its future workforce. Better-educated workers will fill the higher-paying jobs needed to generate the tax revenue to maintain a robust retirement safety net.
The history of national immigration policy helps us understand how the cultural generation gap between the gray and the brown arose. Federal policies severely curtailed immigration from the 1920s until Congress loosened immigration restrictions in 1965. With immigration limited, whites constituted the overwhelming majority of the American population through the mid-20th century, including the years of the post–World War II baby boom (1946–1964). Most baby boomers grew up and lived much of their lives in white suburbs, residentially isolated from minorities (Brownstein 2010). As they age and retire, many older white Americans are reconstituting such communities in racially homogeneous enclaves, often gated ones, in the Southeast and Southwest.

In such communities, except for their yard and construction workers and house cleaners, older white Americans live apart from the minorities who represent a growing share of the national population. Since 1965, expanded immigration and higher fertility rates among minorities have transformed American society. As recently as 1980, minorities made up only 20 percent of the total population (versus 35 percent today) and 25 percent of children under 18 (versus 44 percent today). The minority share of children is projected to rise to nearly 55 percent by 2030.

The gap between brown and gray is most evident in states with large Hispanic populations, especially in the Southwest. The largest spreads between older whites and younger minorities are in Arizona (40 percentage points), Nevada (34), California (33), Texas (32), New Mexico (31), and Florida (29). In all these states, most young people are nonwhite while most seniors are white.

In these and other states, the two groups’ contrasting perspectives and priorities fuel cultural clashes over such matters as public school curricula and government spending. Conservative whites on school boards push for more “traditional” curricula and seek to curb lessons like the ones offered in the book you are reading right now. For example, in May 2010, Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona signed legislation cutting state funds for school districts offering ethnic studies programs. One such district was Tucson, where 60 percent of young people are minority and 80 percent of senior citizens are white.

Arizona’s ethnic studies dispute was soon eclipsed by the controversy surrounding a tough immigration law that Brewer also signed in 2010. That law sharply divided the state along ethnic/racial lines. About 70 percent of Hispanics (and 63 percent of other minorities) opposed the law, while nearly two-thirds of white Arizonans supported it. National reactions to the Arizona immigration law followed the same pattern.

Proponents of the Arizona immigration law and the campaign against ethnic studies claimed their goal was to uphold traditional standards—such as respect for the law in curbing illegal immigration. Those who opposed ethnic studies sought to revive the traditional assimilationist, melting-pot (versus multicultural) vision of immigrants’ proper place in American society.

Many supporters of these and similar initiatives view themselves as fighting against changes they perceive as undermining national traditions. A common rallying cry in 2010 politics was that “we” need to take back the country from [fill in the blank]. Critics view these positions as appeals to whites who are uneasy about the ethnic/racial
changes occurring around them, including the election of the first African-American president. Is it realistic to think that 21st-century Americans can turn the clock back to the preponderantly white society that many of today’s seniors remember from their youth?

Government budgets represent another central point of contention between younger minorities and older whites. Whites increasingly voice doubts about public spending and government’s ability to solve problems. That skepticism is especially marked among older white Americans. In a Pew Research Center survey in spring 2010, only 23 percent of white seniors said they preferred a larger government that offers more services; 61 percent preferred a smaller government offering fewer services. The attitude was reversed among minorities, with 62 percent favoring a larger government and 28 percent a smaller one (Brownstein 2010).

Both state and federal governments have to grapple with deciding between programs for seniors (e.g., home health care, Medicare, Social Security) and services that help children (e.g., K-12 and higher education). Republican politicians, who aim their appeals primarily at white voters, prefer to balance budgets by cutting spending, rather than raising taxes. Democrats tend to be more tolerant of tax increases—especially on the wealthy.

Mainly reflecting expenditures for Medicare and Social Security, Washington spends $7 per senior American for each $1 it spends per child, according to a 2009 report by Julia Isaacs, a fellow at the Brookings Institution (reported in Brownstein 2010). Even including spending by state and local governments, which fund most education costs, government at all levels still spends more than twice as much annually per capita on seniors (about $22,000) as on children (about $9,000) (Brownstein 2010). Advantaging the elderly—investing in the past rather than the future—remains a strong federal priority. (Remember that seniors tend to be more reliable voters than young people are.)

Older whites, who will depend on the payroll taxes paid by younger minorities, will benefit if the latter get good educations. Today, only about 60 percent of Hispanics and 80 percent of African Americans finish high school, compared with about 90 percent of whites. Similarly, a much larger percentage of adult whites (about 30 percent) than blacks (17 percent) and Hispanics (under 13 percent) hold college degrees. According to Frey, if college completion rates for minorities don’t improve, the overall percentage of college-educated Americans will decline sharply in the next decade. This will have negative implications for the tax base available to help all Americans, including older whites.

The Tea Party Movement

In 2008 the American Mainstream Media (MSM) was accused of fawning over presidential candidate Barack Obama. Then, in 2009–2010, many commentators found media coverage of the antigovernment “Tea Party” movement to be excessive. However, we cannot ignore that movement in our discussion of activism and new social movements, especially those related to age and cohort. The movement takes its name from the Boston Tea Party of 1773 and its theme of “no taxation without representation.” In that event,
American colonists resisted a newly imposed British tax on (imported) tea by dumping three shiploads of taxed tea into Boston Harbor. Colonists viewed the British Parliament’s Tea Act of 1773 as violating their right to be taxed only by their own elected representatives. Parliament countered the Tea Party in 1774 by passing the Coercive Acts, which halted Boston’s commerce. Colonists then engaged in further protests, eventually convening the First Continental Congress. The crisis escalated, and the American Revolution started near Boston in 1775.

On and around April 15, 2009—Income Tax day—assemblies were held throughout the United States to protest (among other things) perceived overspending and wasteful spending of tax revenues. Protest organizers aimed to form a new “Tea Party” movement in the aftermath of the 2008–2010 recession, the election of President Barack Obama, government bailouts and takeovers of failing firms, and congressional passage of a large economic stimulus package. Fueled by right-wing media, especially talk radio and Fox News, the Tea Party movement attracted considerable attention from the MSM and gained recognition in 2009–2010 as a significant political force.

Who were the Tea Party protesters of 2009–2010? According to an April 14, 2010 New York Times/CBS News poll, fewer than one-fifth (18 percent) of Americans expressed support for the Tea Party movement. Anyone who has attended a Tea Party rally (see Blow 2010) or seen one on TV will not be surprised to learn that most participants have been white, male, older than 45, married, and Republican. Disproportionate among Tea Partiers are “grays” (as contrasted with “browns” in the previous section). Most Tea Party supporters said they usually voted Republican and did not favor formation of a third party. The percentage of Tea Party supporters (57 percent) holding a favorable opinion of former President George W. Bush almost exactly matched the percentage of Americans in general who viewed him unfavorably. While most Americans blamed the Bush administration or Wall Street for the recession, Tea Party supporters tended to blame Congress.

Tea Party supporters also were, on average, wealthier and better educated than the general public and more likely to characterize their personal financial situation as good. Still, more than half of them worried that someone in their household might lose his or her job. More than two-thirds said the recession had been difficult for them personally. Like most Americans, Tea Party supporters considered the most pressing problems facing the country to be the economy and jobs. They also were like the general public in saying their tax burden was fair and in returning their 2010 household census form, even as some conservative leaders were urging a boycott of the census.

Compared with Republicans in general, Tea Partiers held even more conservative views on a range of issues and were more likely to describe themselves as “angry.” As reasons for their anger, Tea Party supporters cited health care reform, government spending, and a feeling that their opinions were not represented in Washington. Tea Party goals included electing “true conservatives” and combating Democratic Party initiatives on the economy, the environment, and health care. Tea Partiers saw Obama administration policies as disproportionately aimed at the poor rather than the middle class or the rich. More than twice as many Tea Partiers (25 percent) as Americans in general (11 percent) thought the Obama administration favored blacks over whites. Ninety-two percent of Tea Partiers considered President Obama to be moving the
country toward socialism. On winning the nomination for a U.S. Senate seat from Kentucky on May 18, 2010, Republican Rand Paul proclaimed: “I have a message from the Tea Party. We’ve come to take our government back.” A glance at the supporters who flanked him helped clarify the meaning of Paul’s “we.”

Despite their professed commitment to smaller government, Tea Partiers tended to send their children to public (i.e., government-run) schools and to favor the two most costly domestic government programs—Social Security and Medicare. Rather than trimming either of those popular programs, Tea Party supporters favored cutting “waste.” Some defended being on Social Security while opposing big government by saying they had paid into the system and thus deserved its benefits.

As with the other social movements we have considered, a small activist group was behind most events, commentary, and publicity. Just 20 percent of Tea Party supporters (or 4 percent of the general public) had given money or attended a Tea Party event. These activists were the most likely to describe themselves as very conservative, very angry, and very antagonistic to Obama, government, and deficits. Prominent among the activists were such media commentators as Glen Beck and Rush Limbaugh.

The Social Construction of Childhood

The previous sections contrasted the attitudes and political leanings of the old—defined arbitrarily in that discussion as 65 and older—and the young—arbitrarily defined as 18 and younger. Like other aspects of diversity discussed in this book, age grades, such as childhood, adulthood, and old age, are constructed socially and culturally. Such age grades or developmental stages in the life cycle are recognized in all societies, but the names, lengths, perceived attributes, and expected behavior of those stages vary among societies.

In any human population, children and adults are biologically different, but cultures vary in their opinions about when childhood (and humanity) begins and ends and about what the characteristics of childhood are. Among the Betsileo of Madagascar (Kottak 1980), children acquire their humanity gradually. During infancy they are seen as fragile and not quite human, and they get special treatment designed to enhance the chances of their survival. Parents apply a special paste to babies’ heads to ensure that the cranial sutures will close properly. Infants are not praised or complimented, since that might attract the attention of envious ancestors, who might steal the baby for the spirit world. Instead babies get insults. Never does one hear, “What a cute baby!” Instead it’s proper to call infants little dogs, anthills, or pieces of shit. If an infant dies, it is excluded from the ancestral tomb and buried in the rice fields. Given survival past infancy, humanity develops gradually and may be marked eventually in a name-changing ceremony.

In his oft-cited book Centuries of Childhood, the social historian Philippe Aries (1962) argues that the very concept of childhood was missing in medieval Europe. His analysis of the paintings of that time suggested that children beyond infancy were seen as miniature adults. By the 18th century, Aries argues, the notion of childhood as a distinct stage and sphere of life had developed. The Industrial Revolution, which began around 1750, separated the adult-focused world of work from the home, where
nuclear families and children lived. Industrial society constructed childhood as a distinct stage of life, with special attributes and needs (see Stephens 1995).

If childhood did not exist in medieval society, it seems to last forever in our own. The illusion of perpetual youth captures men and women, serving as the basis for thriving cosmetic, clothing, and fitness industries. “Grow up,” radio therapists admonish callers who fail to accept adult responsibilities. How long can we go on living with our parents before we finally “get a life”? TV shows revel in the infantile behavior of adults. The horde of helping professionals who write books and promote them through the electronic media have propagated the ideas of “adult children” and “the inner child” (Ivy 1995).

In some segments of North American society, childhood seems to go on forever. But in other segments and contexts, the adult world increasingly intrudes on childhood. In a larger sense, contemporary North America seems to be witnessing a blurring of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Little bodies are glamorized—dressed up, cosmeticized, and encouraged to emulate teen pop stars and beauty pageant dolls. As homes are penetrated by television, cable, recording devices, video games, and the Internet, kids have increased exposure to violence, sex, and other adult fare. Formerly privileged information, available only to mature people, is now more generally accessible. In our own society, age-based differences involving knowledge and information appear to be decreasing. But in the rest of the world, as we have seen, a chasm has developed between the old subsistence-oriented, traditional generation and the new media-exposed, cash-oriented, globalized one.

Remembering that diversity exists within any social category, we should not overlook the children (and adults) who are forced to live underprivileged lives. Those include the children of poverty, of illness, and of social disorder—homeless children; children of the streets; brain-damaged and HIV-infected children; and other children who, before or after birth, have been otherwise abused or victimized. The world’s street children, of whom there are millions, including those in such North American cities as Los Angeles and Toronto, habitually fend for themselves, with the help of their age mates more than their parents. The world of street children, who often support themselves by sex work, begging, robbery, and other illegal activities, includes abused substances and bodies. In many developing societies, children continue to make important contributions to family income. In countries such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Sudan, children have been among the most powerless victims of war, starvation, and refugee crises. Generally, in Africa and Asia, when kids get AIDS, it is because they have inherited the HIV virus from their parents. People in societies with poor public health and high death rates, especially high infant mortality, tend to have many children, hoping that some will survive.

The Politics of Age and Aging

Age isn’t just a demographic variable. Age categories have entered the domains of public policy and identity politics. Prejudice and discrimination against children, adolescents, and the elderly are forms of ageism based on physical, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics and stereotypes associated with these age grades. What do these
three groups have in common? Why should they be included in a discussion of diversity and multiculturalism?

In our society youth represents life, hope, meaning, activity, health, beauty, and legacy. Norms and expectations about conduct and behavior apply to children as a social category. Parents arrange play dates and make sure their kids go to school. Most children in the United States and Canada are healthy and secure and live under favorable conditions. However, because of their age and relative powerlessness, children are at risk of abuse and neglect, and vulnerable to the wills of those who care for them and to economic and political shifts in society.

Late adulthood typically is associated with a gradual physical and mental decline, a long period of ups and downs, in which the latter eventually win out over the former. Genetics and the environment influence the quality of life for all of us, and the elderly are no exception. Reaching 65 or 70 usually doesn’t mean serious or terminal illness, social disengagement, or a sharp decline in cognitive functioning. Most older adults are active, healthy, and socially integrated well into advanced age. However, as a social category defined by age, older people receive particular attention from the social institutions of their society, including the economy, government, and the family (Papalia et al. 1996/2007).

As we argue in this book, diversity and multiculturalism are associated with (1) cultural variation within a nation-state, (2) related social inequalities based on a human attribute, such as age, and (3) collective activism by, or on behalf of, culturally constituted individuals to ensure their human rights. Initiatives by elite representatives of marginalized groups, popular agency by members of disfranchised minorities, and their use of culture to gain power are key criteria of multiculturalism.

As social categories, children and the elderly have not yet joined, or have left, the mainstream. They may be seen as weaker, as dependent on family members for their well-being, and as needing government intervention and legal protection. Under capitalism, both children and retired people may be viewed as productively useless, but the young are favored as investments because of their future labor participation. The old are devalued because their role as producers has run its course, and a new, younger, and cheaper workforce is there to replace them.

Children are especially vulnerable to poverty conditions, including low and irregular incomes and unsafe housing. In 2003 one out of six children in the United States lived in poverty. Those children were disproportionately African American and Hispanic. Among an array of problems, poverty correlates with lack of access to a high-quality education. Educational disadvantage plagues all poor children, particularly those who live in isolated rural areas and those who belong to urban minorities (Children’s Defense Fund 2003).

Along with youth, the elderly may face neglect or harm from social institutions, relatives, and other individuals. Adults, including parents, may abuse children psychologically, physically, and sexually. According to the Human Rights Watch, adults force thousands of children, especially orphans, to work long hours, illegally, in hazardous conditions and for meager, or no, wages, in restaurants, farms, street peddling, crime, drug-trafficking, and prostitution. The elderly also may suffer abuse by adult children and other relatives, who may fail to help them meet their needs, including nutrition, hygiene, health care, sociality, and companionship.
Our society fosters and rewards rugged individualism, self-actualization, sexual freedom, geographic mobility, careerism, and financial success for men and women. The onset of this profile occurs around age 18, when most American teenagers launch their independence. The lifestyle that it requires continues at full speed until into our mid-60s. At some point in this life trajectory, most people find the time, energy, resources, and support to take care of others, most notably their dependent children and/or parents. Such caregiving, if done well, may require commitment of 30 years or more. There is increasing pressure on the “sandwich generation,” people in their 40s and 50s who are at the peak of their professional career, to care for adolescent children and aging parents at once.

What are Americans to do, and how might they construct a society to pick up the slack? That’s what culture is for! Ageism turned on its feet, socially reconstructed from a burden into a cause, mobilizes people to advocate for policies and programs aimed at child welfare and elderly rights and benefits. Activists in many organizations have made it their life’s work to speak and act for vulnerable children. Such groups include the Children’s Defense Fund, Children’s Welfare League of America, Human Rights Watch, and United Nations Children’s Fund. On the other side of the age range, not just tea party protestors, but also identity politicians within the elderly movement fight for policies to improve the living conditions of all aged Americans, especially those who experience poverty and racism. Advancing the interests of senior citizens are the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Older Americans Act (OAA), and the National Council on Senior Citizens (NCSC). Structural changes to accommodate the age-based others include the proliferation of day care centers, preschools, after-school programs, Big Brother/Big Sister organizations, retirement communities, and elder care facilities. Whether these policies and programs meet the needs of children and the elderly, or those of their parents and adult children, respectively, remains an empirical question.

At seven years of age, and living in severe poverty in Thisvi, a small village in Greece, Kozaitis was selected by an international organization known as Save the Children and assigned to a middle-class married couple in the United States. Those two college professors sent small installments of money to her parents periodically. These funds helped that young Greek girl thrive physically and intellectually. Just two months before her fiftieth birthday, Kozaitis received in the mail an unsolicited packet from AARP to apply for membership. A new social status promised to grant her “the resources and information you need to get the most out of life over 50.” In addition to 22 AARP benefits, Kozaitis was informed that “the AARP is standing up for your rights,” including “confronting discrimination by employers,” “strengthening social security,” “protecting pension and retirement benefits,” and “fighting predatory home loan lending.” Things could be worse.

**Key Terms**

age grades (187)  
age sets (187)  
ageism (186)  

geriatrics (186)  
gerontology (186)
Like gender, race, and sexual orientation, health is socially constructed. Societies attribute different meanings and functions to the human body. A prevalent perception is that the body should be young, healthy, fit, and without defects. So pervasive is the ideal of a sound body that a blemish of any sort triggers a battle for self-esteem.

Our culture’s beauty ideal is supermodel thin. No wonder women get anxious during pregnancy. The pregnant body, which nonindustrial societies view as a sacred vessel, is considered by ours to be compromised. Employers remind us that pregnancy lessens capacity, performance, and appearance. The female director of a medical school’s fellowship program admits to rejecting applications from women: “They get pregnant and don’t finish on time.” A professional woman seeking a job in a large corporation concealed her “reproductive agenda,” fearing rejection as a desirable employee. “Don’t tell your advisor; he’ll have a fit!” a departmental secretary warned a pregnant graduate student.

For many people, a physical ailment becomes some kind of meaningful, life-altering event. For example, regarding cancer as a “disease of repression or inhibited passion” may encourage one to suddenly find meaning in life, indulge in self-expression, get a handle on priorities, and exercise autonomy in new ways. On the other hand, cancer perceived as “debris” or “residue” accumulated during an active life of uninhibited growth and development may encourage one to engage enthusiastically in its treatment regimen. Chemotherapy and radiation take on the form of spring-cleaning, a cleansing and tune-up of the body to ensure efficient functioning and continued self-actualization.

Fitness requires both biochemical treatment and psychosocial management. A man encourages a woman in therapy for breast cancer: “The doctors will do what they can, but we’re talking to the man upstairs!” “We’re all behind you,” someone else chimes in. “We need you; you’re too valuable to us,” a third asserts. Still another insists, “Big girls just handle it—SNAP!”
Nonwesterners always have known something that medical anthropologists are teaching the industrial West: Health reflects a person’s psychological state, or positive attitude. An optimistic mental outlook is itself generated and reinforced by social support. Disorders of the body don’t exist independently of the person. Since persons don’t exist independently of society, one’s health status is intrinsically both a psychological, private predicament and a social, public concern. In The Body Silent (1990) the anthropologist Robert F. Murphy describes his experience with a spinal tumor that resulted in paralysis. He found that his physical deterioration was accompanied by a reduction in his social status and his sense of self. His new profile raised his awareness of our society as one that treats disability as abnormal and disabled people as aliens.

Capitalist, market-based North America has little tolerance or patience for those with less than optimum capacity to produce for profit. Our social structure selects out and marginalizes persons with any physical or cognitive limitation from the pool of the fit. Such classifications as “the disabled,” “the impaired,” and “the handicapped” tend to stigmatize individuals by accentuating the disorder and minimizing their humanity.

Kozaitis has worked with young people with sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia, and cancer. She observed a tendency for neighbors, teachers, and classmates to disengage from sick children. But those children themselves were not interested in assuming a new identity as “a patient,” as “special,” or as “sick.” The kids were even less eager to accept a way of life as, in the words of a 16-year-old girl with Hodgkin’s disease, “damaged goods.” Because of their chronic illness, all the kids spent long periods of time in the hospital as patients. Nonetheless, their self-images as children, teens, and students continued and dominated their conversations and interests. This knowledge led to a treatment plan requiring numerous home and school visits by the social worker to ensure that all interventions were designed with the whole child in mind. The treatment team devised ways for the children to continue to participate in neighborhood and school activities (e.g., through birthday parties and homework) to the extent they were able.

Social structures and institutions alienate, marginalize, and often threaten people with disabilities. Supported by our economic and political structure, the media promote the body as a commodity. Bodies are objects to be bought and sold, provided they are young and healthy, with mass aesthetic appeal. American national character prides itself on strength, endurance, and self-reliance. Our predecessors advanced an ethos of rugged individualism and independence. These values still drive us to compete and to conquer, especially in the world of work: “Only the strong survive.” The adage “The early bird catches the worm” alerts us that achievement and success, financial and social, require an early start, speed, and competition. This strategy generates a pecking order of later birds who end up with fewer worms. Accepting another American value, “Effort counts,” Americans with disabilities may overcompensate by pushing their bodies to meet goals and perform tasks using standards their “abled” counterparts set and reward.

Countering the social construction of disability, contemporary civil rights movements by people with disabilities reflect the cultural construction of fitness. Educated people who understand the role of agency in creating culture fight to dispel
the popular misconception that “disability” means “inferiority.” They have forged a civil rights movement that helps them claim their embodiment by encouraging expression of personal interpretations of the body and defining the collective experience of “being different.” A person with AIDS explains that he always feels “so diseased” in the presence of colleagues at work, but that with other persons with AIDS and with supporters he feels “safe, normal, and protected.”

America’s mainstream contains various groups of people who use particular conditions as the main criterion of membership around which they create experience and meaning. The formation of cancer support groups; Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) support groups; and communities such as those for people who are deaf, blind, or autistic provide shelter for individuals who find themselves alone and misunderstood. Such people struggle to win a place apart from society’s margins as “the disabled” and within its mainstream as “human beings who happen to have a disability.” In doing so, they create a “culture of disability.” That is, they develop organized conceptions of living that integrate conditions related to an illness or impairment. Collectively they seek to show that societal participation continues despite a physical limitation, that contribution to society includes not-for-profit goods and services, that productivity may be measured as much by quality as by quantity, and that beauty isn’t always visually apparent.

Their efforts resist and subvert the social standards of fitness that alienate and exclude them. Such groups promote standards of nondiscriminatory presentation and practice and fair representation of people with disabilities. One of their initiatives focuses on eliminating discriminatory language that devalues and depersonalizes the human being by emphasizing the disability. Such terms include “handicapped,” “able-bodied,” “physically challenged,” “memory impaired,” and “differently able.” Use of phrases like “people who are deaf,” “people with vision impairment,” and “people with epilepsy” is preferred. There are no “victims of AIDS,” only “persons living with AIDS.” A person “uses a wheelchair,” not is “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound.” According to the code of conduct that people with disabilities have established, they are not to be pitied, feared, or ignored. Neither should they be treated as heroic, courageous, or special, but as another way of being normal.

Culture and the Body

Like our ages, and related to aging, our bodies also make us different. Here we are referring not to the racial and gender differences discussed in previous chapters but to other kinds of contrasts in bodies and their adornment. Among African Americans, for example, variations in skin color and type of hair are important in personal identity, just as differences in hair and eye color are important among whites. Regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, there are fat people, thin people, pretty people, ugly people, short people, tall people, well people, sick people, body builders, and pierced people.

In the discussion in Chapter 7 of sports success in relation to race, gender, and culture, we considered how culture molds phenotype by promoting certain activities,
discouraging others, and setting standards of physical fitness and attractiveness. Bodies—ideal, actual, and normal—vary from culture to culture and within one culture over time. This chapter examines bodies and enhancements to them.

Ideal bodies change from generation to generation and, with the influence of the mass media, even from decade to decade. Old movies make it easy for us to study bodies and clothing over time. Such movie stars of the past as Humphrey Bogart and Barbara Stanwyck wore stylish hats and smoked cigarettes. Contemporary American men and women wear baseball caps and lift weights. When asked how he recognized Americans in the street, one European mentioned lifting (of weights, and its effects on the body) and tennis shoes (an item of dress considered inelegant in Europe, but a mainstay of hard-core American touring).

Ideas about the attractiveness and fitness of bodies also vary in time and space. In today’s North America, muscles are in vogue for both men and women. The late Rosemary Clooney (a popular singer in the 1950s and the aunt of movie star George Clooney) never did push-ups when she sang America’s number-one song, as contemporary singer Gwen Stefani has done in videos.

If many are more muscular, many Americans also are fatter than the average American man or woman of the same age a generation ago. The categories labeled “underweight,” “healthy weight,” “overweight,” and “obese” are determined by the body mass index (kg/m$^2$), which is the ratio of weight (in kilograms) divided by height (in meters squared). An adult body mass index between 25 and 30 signals overweight; one over 30 indicates obesity; and one below 18.5 indicates underweight or malnutrition. A body mass index of 18.5 to 25 signals healthy weight. American women are slightly more likely to be underweight (2.3 percent to 1.5 percent) than men are. The obesity rate of 33 percent is virtually the same for men and women. Overall, women are more likely to have a healthy weight than men are (37 percent to 28 percent), and more men than women are overweight or obese (71 percent of men versus 60 percent of women). American women tend to worry more about being fat than men do and are more likely than men are to suffer from body image eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia. (The numbers here are from the Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 106.)

Cultures vary in their emphasis on beauty as well as in their beauty standards. In Brazil feminine beauty is an obsession among the elites. Brazilian culture still views women mainly as sex objects and reproducers rather than producers. Brazilian women who can afford to lift sagging faces and bodies do so, both through exercise and by means of the surgeon’s knife. Plastic surgery has been in vogue for rich, and even middle-class, Brazilian women longer than it has been in the United States, where it is now a spreading industry catering to aging baby boomers of both sexes. Nip, tuck.

Relevant to the cross-cultural understanding of beauty and the body is the contrast between ascribed and achieved status. Remember that individuals have little control over the ascribed statuses they occupy (e.g., age, gender), which depend on intrinsic qualities, what one is rather than what one does. On the other hand, people have more control over—more to do with—the achieved statuses (e.g., student, tennis player) they occupy. Since—in the eyes of American law, if hardly in reality—we start out the same, American culture emphasizes achieved over ascribed status. An
American’s identity emerges as a result of what he or she does or fails to do. We are supposed to make of our lives and ourselves what we will and can. Success comes through achievement—making it or making it over.

In Brazil, by contrast, social identity rests on being rather than doing, on what one is from the start, within a family, kin network, and social class. Family position and network membership contribute substantially to self-image, identity, and fortune. How does the contrast of being versus doing apply to beauty? Brazilian culture treats physical attractiveness as an intrinsic attribute. Kids who are identified as beautiful or handsome in early childhood tend to keep that label as part of their self-image throughout life. Those considered plain or ugly also internalize those labels. Such perceptions usually persist—within a sibling group, for example—regardless of what people look like as adults. They last even into old age, when the “pretty sister” remains just that, regardless of her actual appearance. One might argue that in Brazil the role of plastic surgery is to maintain or restore beauty, whereas in the United States plastic surgery is more often used to create or augment beauty, as with breast implants and penis enlargement. In America most nose jobs are done to correct blemishes that have been there from the start.

In a “doing culture” like that of the United States, we believe we can do something about our appearance, and new technology has fueled this perception. Body image has become an achieved status, over which we believe we have considerable control. When one’s body doesn’t fit, or no longer fits, our image of what it should be, there are entire industries (e.g., plastic surgery, cosmetics, fitness centers) waiting to help. A generation ago the best hotels offered pools for lounging and tanning but not lap swimming. Missing then, too, were hotel health clubs, replete with weight machines, StairMasters, and treadmills. Movie stars may have had personal trainers, but young urban professionals did not, as many do today.

The media constantly remind us that we, or some expert, can do something about the way we look and about the ways our bodies (and minds) function. Waiting out there to help us build better bodies, look better, and feel fitter are thousands of products and devices: home gyms, exercise machines, AbSculptors, bun builders. And if hard work or “just minutes a day” can’t do it, there are always surgeons standing by, to do penis augmentation, breast enhancement or reduction, and liposuction.

This same tendency to see us in control of our bodies shows up in our habit of assigning blame for illness. When we hear that someone has lung cancer, we immediately ask whether he or she smoked.

Our wish to assign responsibility for misfortune is reminiscent of witchcraft among the Azande of Africa, as described by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1929/1970, 1937). When a wooden granary collapsed and killed a man seated underneath, the Azande blamed witchcraft for the accident. The Western, “rational” explanation for that event was that destruction by termites caused the structure to fall (plus bad luck for the man seated below). But the Azande ask: Why did it fall when it did? And why did that particular man happen to be the one who was killed? Clearly, someone was using witchcraft to attack a specific other. (To find out the witch’s identity, the Azande consult oracles.) For the Azande it is necessary to assign blame for misfortune, and it is witches, discovered through oracles, who get blamed.
Like the Azande, Americans also have ideas about individual responsibility for misfortune, but they don’t usually involve malevolent witches. If a third party bears blame, lawyers, judges, and juries (our oracles) are available to conduct our version of the Azande witch-hunt. More often, our value of individual responsibility leads us to blame ourselves or to blame victims for their illnesses. Thus, we tend to blame people with sexually transmitted diseases for their unwise or promiscuous sexual behavior. The focus on the power of doing, or achieving, creates an irrational attitude that we can fend off all risks if we just live right (and regulate the activities of others, such as smoking, pollution that may damage the environment and endanger public health).

American culture has been called youth-obsessed. The huge baby-boomer generation, known for its narcissism and conspicuous consumption, began turning 60 in 2006. It surely will carry its search for the perfect body, and willingness to pay for it, with it into its 60s and beyond. Plastic surgery and cosmetics will flourish as boomer men and women turn increasingly to face-lifts, liposuction, hair transplants, and other forms of surgical body alteration. Men will go on adding and removing facial hair. Men and women will continue to change their hair length, color, and styles.

In a fitness-minded culture, with trainers, instructors, and equipment all around us, we can always do something about our appearance. In today’s North America, firm bodies and working out are in vogue—for both men and women. Here a fitness instructor pumps iron.
The way we dress is part of our “look” and thus of the body image we project. The beauty and fashion industries are built on our wishes to look good, to dress well, and to fulfill certain images. Although our own body image may not correspond very closely to what others see, or to what actually is, body types and images do affect our self-confidence and the way we are treated. Certain looks are valued more and others less, and differentially by context. The emaciation of certain models may make them grotesque or ugly outside the context of photography. American society tends to discriminate against people who are fat, small, or ugly. But there is hope. In a fitness-minded culture, with body improvement consultants all around us, we can always do something about our appearance.

Looks, and stereotypes about them, have class implications, thus helping Americans make social distinctions in a culture whose dominant ideology is opposed to class distinctions. What can facial hair tell us about class? Patterns of eating and exercising, which are associated with socioeconomic class, have all kinds of effects on the body. Smoking leaves an immediate imprint (odor) on clothes and the body, as well as having longer-term health implications. Old movies remind us that smoking used to be fashionable, with Bette Davis and Humphrey Bogart as incarnations of that image. Although the U.S. smoking rate periodically stages a slight comeback from its overall decline since the 1960s, the image of cigarettes is decidedly more negative now than it was before then. Cigarette smoking today is something of a class marker. In her study of social class contrasts in American high schools, Penelope Eckert (1989) showed cigarette smoking to be the key identifying symbol of working-class kids (burnouts) versus their middle- and upper-middle-class public school colleagues (jocks). Those today who consider it cool to smoke are likely to belong to a particular social group. (A power image may be associated with cigars.)

Long hair, permed hair, blond hair, and versions of facial hair move in and out of fashion, but at any one time, a fad has class attributes. Besides class, certain groups, such as lesbians and gay men, may be marked by looks, gestures, and mannerisms. Like our use of language (Chapter 15), our looks, dress, and gestures are means we employ, consciously and unconsciously, to communicate about ourselves. Consider the costumes that mark certain contexts and professions, and the implications of dress and body image for the way we are perceived, received, and treated socially. In one study, physicians took more seriously the health complaints of an actress dressed in a business suit and with subtle verbal expression than those of the same woman dressed in gaudy attire and speaking flamboyantly (New York Times 1997).

Costumes mark professions. Kottak remembers a colleague, Daniel Moerman, commenting that men in positions of authority (judges, doctors, priests) tend to wear “dresses.” Uniforms are badges of certain professions, like law enforcement. Suits are mandatory in many business firms and law offices.

Still, people of every social class wear jeans at least occasionally and in casual contexts. Individuals tend to pick a jeans brand and be loyal to it. Thus, as we engage in mass consumption of the same product, we still express our individuality by affiliation with a brand. (Brand loyalty is a variant, perhaps less intense, of the team loyalty we see in sports.)

Distinct bodies and on-the-field attire are associated with athletic pursuits. What images come to mind when you think of a basketball player, a quarterback, a
running back, a golfer or a tennis player? Athletes may be stars in contemporary North America, but there is also discrimination against them. As our culture maintains stereotypes about dumb blondes, bimbos, and twinks, college students also have stereotypes about the off-the-field behavior and abilities of football and basketball players. In an academic setting, team sports bear some stigma among those who do not play. The idea that brains and brawn can’t coexist in the same body has diminished somewhat but is still around.

Well and Sick Bodies

Bodies may be well, or they may be sick, temporarily or permanently. Ill bodies may become the basis for an identity and thereby enter the arena of identity politics. Robert Murphy (1990) points out that the “sick person” (especially one who is chronically or very ill) is expected to play a role. He or she is expected to bear the illness with stoicism and good humor, cooperating and minimizing complaints to caregivers and visitors. Our culture inculcates an attitude that people should be grateful for the health care they receive. Infractions of this attitude, by people who are militantly disabled, for example, conflict with American views about proper “sick person” comportment.

Some illness behavior is culturally learned; some is physiological. Some cultures encourage people to talk about being sick; others are more stoic. Brazilians have no compunction about publicly discussing their bouts with diarrhea, as an American youth might declare, “I’m wasted, man.” But if the ill don’t tell us, how do we know when
people are unwell? When cats and dogs get sick, their fur droops, and they look unkempt. Are there similar signs with people? Sneezing and coughing fits are distancing mechanisms; people move away from us when we show signs of infection. What does it mean when someone says, “You look tired”? Knowing one has HIV, herpes, asthma, hemophilia, or a heart condition affects body image and feelings about fitness, as does surgery for breast cancer, or even for appendix removal, which may leave a telltale scar.

A permanent physical or health condition can become the basis of an identity, such as a person with a disability. The medical profession may play a role in labeling people with reference to an illness and thus contribute to the internalization of a health condition as part of a person’s identity. Physicians and nurses may refer to people by their malady, for example, as “diabetics” or “asthmatics.” (In Brazil, people with AIDS are called *aideticos*. The American translation would be “aidetics.”) The illness becomes an ascribed status, part of what one is, a fact considered paramount in treating the person, socially and medically. According to labeling theory, in society people are assigned labels with associated roles. Eventually they come to internalize the label as part of their sense of self and to learn and act out the stereotyped behavior that society assigns to the role.

Today, both reflecting and resisting such labels, people with illnesses and disabilities organize politically. Identity politics encompasses illness-based identities, such as people living with AIDS. The group names stress that these are people first, unlike the medical profession, which tends to treat them as cases and to use disease-based identity labels (e.g., diabetic). There are also militant organizations of people with disabilities; some advocate wearing the disability like a badge.

There are class-based, age-based, and gender-based differences with respect to health, fitness, and illness. (Women’s health issues are the focus of a special section of the *New York Times* regularly published in June.) Wealth and health are correlated; the working rich get better health care than do the working poor. There are diseases of aging. The older one gets, the shorter the future life expectancy. On average, American men don’t live as long as American women do. The gap has widened from two to three years in 1900 to more than seven years today. Men face more dangers, such as accidents and homicide.

There are some striking differences in the causes of death for men and women. Of the top 10 causes of death, accidents rank third for men and sixth for women. The number of HIV/AIDS deaths per year among men fell steadily from 18.5 (per 100,000 population) in 1990 to 5.9 in 2006, while the (much lower) female death rate remained the same—2.2. Men were four times more likely to commit suicide than women (18.0 versus 4.5 suicide deaths in 2006). Among causes of death, suicide ranked seventh for men, but did not enter the top 10 for women. The two leading causes of death—heart disease and cancer—are the same for men and women. Stroke is third for women and fifth for men (*Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2010, Tables 123, 122, 119, 121; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009).

Politics can shroud medical reality. Given the success of the breast cancer awareness movement, many women erroneously believe that breast cancer, which kills about 39,000 American women annually, is the leading cause of female deaths. Actually, heart disease kills about eight times more women (about 315,000 each year) than
breast cancer does. Nor is breast cancer even the leading cause of cancer deaths for women. Lung cancer, which kills about 157,000 Americans annually, ranks first for cancer deaths among both men and women. Yet, given the political clout of the breast cancer awareness movement, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) still funds breast cancer research much more generously ($833 million in 2009) than research on lung cancer ($214 million), prostate cancer ($357 million) or colorectal cancer ($329 million) (National Institutes of Health 2010). A burgeoning prostate cancer awareness movement among men may explain why that disease draws more research support at NIH than either lung or colorectal cancers—both of which kill more Americans than either breast or prostate cancer.

Age, cohort, gender, ethnicity, and class all affect both our health conditions and the ways we use medical care. Older women, for example, may not mind seeing male doctors, while younger women prefer female MDs (Elder 1997). Illustrating increased identity-based specialization are medical practices geared at gay men and fields like elder care and adolescent medicine. Teen girls prefer female doctors, whom they may see in high school clinics, for consultation about STDs, pregnancies, and issues involving sexuality. Nowadays, teen girls are more likely to smoke and to abuse prescription drugs than teen boys are, and they drink alcohol and use nonprescription drugs (e.g., marijuana) as much as their male counterparts do (Connolly 2006).

Men are diagnosed more frequently than women for substance abuse, sexual deviance, and out-of-control behavior. Women are diagnosed more often for eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. Although women attempt suicide more than men do, men commit suicide more often (Stillion and McDowell 1996). Men who accept traditional gender roles, yet feel they aren’t fulfilling the male role, often experience psychological distress. Although men need psychotherapy as much as women do, they are less likely to seek help, and they often end therapy prematurely (Kilmartin 2000, pp. 294–296). Kilmartin (2000) finds parental conflict and divorce to be especially detrimental to boys’ psychological health.

There are also images and stereotypes associated with gender and health. Some examples: Women take pain better than men do. Women get sick more often than men do. Women see doctors more, and make more health care decisions, than men do. A survey showed that women tend to think that doctors take men’s health problems more seriously than they do women’s. Better-educated women were especially likely to have this opinion. The issue of whether personal physicians take men’s health concerns more seriously than those of women remains open. However, for the past 25 years, research on women’s-only illnesses has been at least as common as research on men’s-only diseases (Elder 1997).

**People with Disabilities**

The U.S. Census Bureau regularly gathers data on disability. Sources have included the decennial (10-year) census of population, the annual ACS (American Community Survey), and the SIPP (Survey of Income and Program Participation). The ACS is a detailed nationwide survey designed to provide up-to-date information on American communities. Its use permits the census form received by every American household...
Chapter 12  Bodies, Fitness, and Health

every 10 years (such as in 2010) to be much shorter and less intrusive than in the past. Mailed to 2 percent of the U.S. population annually, the ACS asks a series of demographic and housing questions. The SIPP is a national survey in which a group of households is chosen for study. The households are interviewed every four months for at least two years. Both the ACS and the SIPP include a set of disability questions.

Matthew Brault (2009) discusses the three major domains of disability: communication, mental, and physical.

1. **Communication disabilities** are those that limit one’s ability to hear or see. The ACS, for example, asks “Is this person deaf, or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?” and “Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?” The 2008 ACS found that about 10.4 million Americans (3.5 percent of the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged five years and older) experienced difficulty hearing. About 6.8 million people (2.3 percent) had trouble seeing.

2. **Mental or cognitive disabilities** have psychological or neurological roots. Asking “Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?” the 2008 ACS found that about 13.4 million Americans (4.8 percent) had a cognitive difficulty.

3. **Physical disabilities** involve respiratory, metabolic, muscular, and skeletal limitations to movement. The ACS asks, “Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?” In 2008, about 19.2 million people (6.9 percent) did so.

The ACS also collects data on two other disability categories—limitations in performing (1) Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and (2) Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL). ADLs involve caring for oneself at home (e.g., getting around the house, getting into or out of a bed or chair, bathing, dressing, eating, and toileting). An estimated 7.2 million (2.6 percent) had such an ADL limitation. Compared with the ADL, the IADL category includes slightly more complex activities (e.g., going outside the home, including to the doctor, keeping track of money or bills, preparing meals, doing light housework, and using the telephone). In the 2008 ACS, about 13.2 million people (5.5 percent of the civilian noninstitutionalized population 15 years and older) reported an IADL limitation. Overall, according to the 2008 ACS, some 36.1 million people (12.1 percent of the civilian noninstitutionalized population) reported at least one disability category (all figures are from Brault 2009).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 defines disability as a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities.” This encompasses difficulties in seeing, hearing, speaking, lifting and carrying, using stairs, and walking, as well as limitations in ADL and IADL as just discussed. The ADA prohibits discrimination in hiring and requires employers of 15 or more people to make reasonable accommodations for disabled workers. Such employees include those who were disabled when they were hired as well as those who became disabled during employment. In 2002, 18 percent of Americans (51.2 million people)
said they had a disability. (Note that this figure, based on self-reported disability status, is significantly higher than that in the 2008 ACS, but the measures are not com-
parable.) Twelve percent (32.5 million) of Americans in 2002 reported a severe dis-
ability (Bernstein 2006), and this is close to the 2008 ACS figure of 12.1 percent.
People with a severe disability are those who need help walking, bathing, shopping,
or using the phone (American Demographics 1997).

Table 12–1 shows the percentage of employed Americans with particular kinds
of disabilities. We see, for example, that people with impaired hearing are about twice
as likely to work as are people who have trouble walking. Disabilities, of course, tend
to increase with age. Figure 12–1 shows disability presence (people needing assis-
tance with everyday activities) among American men and women by age group. Some
74 percent of Americans 80 and older had disabilities, compared to about 8 percent
of Americans aged 15 and younger (McNeil 2001; He et al. 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Percentage Employed&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty hearing</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty seeing</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental disability</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty walking</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Persons may have more than one type of disability.


**FIGURE 12–1** Percentage of people aged 15 and over needing assistance with everyday activities by
age and sex: 1997

*NOTE:* The reference population for these data is the civilian noninstitutionalized population.

*SOURCE:* McNeil 2001, Table 1.
The ADA and Employment Rates

The ADA was passed in 1990 and took effect in July 1992. As of this writing it had just celebrated its twentieth anniversary. To what extent has the ADA worked to mainstream people with disabilities? Despite its undeniable contributions in increasing access by people with disabilities to facilities and services, the effects of the ADA on employment remain unclear. Consider what happened between 1989, the peak year of the 1980s business cycle, and 2000, the peak years of the 1990s business cycle. The mean household income of men with disabilities fell by 2.9 percent during that period, while that of women with disabilities rose 5.6 percent. Simultaneously, mean household income of men and women without disabilities increased by 9.4 percent and 12.6 percent, respectively. The employment rate of men without disabilities fell during the recession of the early 1990s, then grew during the recovery years that followed. By contrast, the employment rate of men with disabilities fell not only during the recession years but even more so during the recovery years. The employment rate of women without disabilities grew during both the recession and the recovery years, but grew much more during the growth years. The employment rate for women with disabilities, however, declined during the entire period (figures from Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003).

While their employment rates were falling, income from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) was rising for Americans with disabilities—33.8 percent for men and 48.6 percent for women. Those increases nearly offset the 34.6 percent decline in mean work earnings for men with disabilities and added substantially to the gain of 13.8 percent in the labor earnings of women with disabilities during the period 1989–2000 (Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003).

The apparent decline in the employment rate of Americans with disabilities has generated a major debate about two questions: (1) How accurate are the prevailing measures of disabled Americans and their potential employment status? and (2) If the decline in employment is real, what are its causes?

Measurement issues: When people are asked in a survey whether they have a "disability" or, more specifically, a "work disability," their answer may well depend on their current employment status. Someone who is working despite a significant disability might answer no—they have no work disability (because they are working). A similar person who is unemployed might say yes; they have a work disability—a condition that prevents them from working. This means there probably are more working people with disabilities than the usual statistics suggest.

An edited book titled The Decline in Employment of People with Disabilities (Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003) brings together contributions by several scholars (mainly economists) weighing in on this debate. All the authors in the book agree that, despite problems with various measures:

1. The overall employment rate of Americans with disabilities declined during the 1990s, or at least did not increase, while the overall employment rate of working-aged people without disabilities was growing.

2. The proportion of working-aged Americans with disabilities who claimed to be “unable to work at all,” or were unavailable for work, increased during the 1990s.
3. Among working-aged people with disabilities who said they were available or able to work, an increasing proportion was employed.

Possible causes: People with disabilities often have chronic conditions requiring substantial medical care. Rising health care costs have made it more expensive for employers to employ people with disabilities. Employers have been shifting more of the costs of health insurance to workers and/or are offering more restricted plans. Rising insurance costs may have made employers more reluctant to hire people with disabilities. Simultaneously, potential workers with disabilities may find government benefits to be equal to or better than work and private insurance costs.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes). Designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people with little or no income, it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a federal program that provides aid to people who are “unable to work at all” because of a permanent disabling condition. The disability must have lasted, or be expected to last, a minimum of 12 months. To be eligible, the individual must also have earned sufficient work credits (from work done before the onset of the disabling condition) to qualify for SSDI. Usually, this means the person must have paid Social Security taxes for 5 of the 10 years prior to becoming disabled. Social Security pays only for total disability. No benefits are payable for partial disability or for short-term disability.

The requirement to be “unable to work at all” may have led people with disabilities to leave the labor force so as to qualify for benefits. Some Americans with disabilities might conclude that the benefits of not working outweigh those of working, giving the costs of work—both monetary and nonmonetary.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the civilian noninstitutionalized population of the United States aged 16 and older included 26 million people with disabilities (a rate of 10.9 percent) in July 2010. The labor force participation rate of Americans with disabilities that month was 21.5 percent, compared with 70.6 percent for Americans without disabilities. (Note that these low rates pertain to all people 16 and older, including those in high school, college, and retirement. Employment of Americans with disabilities is highest—just over 30 percent—in the 25–34 and 35–44 age categories.) (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 601.) Why might that be?

Mental Health

Mental disorders are certified as such in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–IV), the 886-page clinical “bible” published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994 and updated in 2000 (DSM–IV–TR). DSM–V revision is scheduled for publication in 2013. Therapists routinely consult the DSM to identify a set of behaviors as a mental illness. More than 300 conditions are certified now as mental disorders. Critics contend that the DSM “medicalizes” behavior once considered traceable to character flaws. Many disorders have powerful lobbies in the pharmaceutical, therapeutic, and political worlds, because
of the DSM’s influence on health care spending. Codes in the DSM are used to bill for mental health care and third-party insurance payment (Sharkey 1997). Americans spend about $2 trillion annually on health care. The mental health industry lobbies to require insurers and HMOs to cover treatment for mental disorders and the cost of psychotropic medications (see Kirk and Kutchins 1998; Tsao 2009).

When first published in 1952, the DSM listed only 106 mental disorders. In the mid-19th century, the federal government recognized just one: idiocy/insanity. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2010), about one in four American adults (26.2 percent of the population 18 and older) exhibits a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Only about 6 percent, however, suffer from a serious mental illness. Mental disorders (principally severe depression, aka major depressive disorder, which affects about 15 million people each year) are the primary cause of disability in the United States and Canada in the population aged 15 to 44. According to the Alzheimer’s Association (alz.org), some 5.3 million Americans now have Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia among Americans 65 and older. The NIMH predicts that more than half of all Americans will experience some form of mental disorder at some point in our lifetimes.

Table 12–2 is based on data gathered from the NIMH website in 2010. It summarizes the major mental disorders that affect Americans. Most common are depression, phobias, and personality disorders that negatively affect daily life and social interaction. Like any health condition, mental health exists in a social context and reflects the gender, age, ethnic, and class status of the person behaving in a certain way. Behavior that might be deemed merely eccentric for a wealthy white man might be evaluated very differently when displayed by a poor minority man on a city street.

Consider teen rebellion, which the DSM–IV would have trouble distinguishing from what it labels “oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).” In her well-known book Coming of Age in Samoa (orig. 1928), Margaret Mead wrote of teen rebellion as being a normal part of adolescence in the United States. She contrasted it with the more placid teen behavior she found in Samoa. DSM–IV defines ODD as “a recurrent pattern of negativistic, defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that persists for at least 6 months.” Its manifestations are losing one’s temper, arguing with adults, actively defying requests, refusing to follow rules, deliberately annoying other people, blaming others for one’s own mistakes or misbehavior, and being touchy, easily annoyed or angered, resentful, spiteful, or vindictive. Does this sound as much like a stereotypical American teenager as someone who is mentally ill?

The DSM–IV does suggest making a diagnosis of ODD “only when the problem behaviors occur more frequently in the child than in other children of the same age and developmental level.” But how different from the norm does a child or teen have to be to label him or her “abnormal.” One also wonders how often DSM diagnosticians bother to consult with social scientists (who measure norms) before deciding whether a given child does or does not deviate enough to be considered ODD (see also Tsao 2009).
# Table 12–2

## Mental Disorders in America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Mental Disorder</th>
<th>Americans Affected in a Given Year</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number in Millions</td>
<td>Percentage aged 18 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mood Disorders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major depressive disorder</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysthymic disorder</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar disorder</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schizophrenia</strong></td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anxiety Disorders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic disorder</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Phobias</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agoraphobia</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific phobia</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eating Disorders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anorexia nervosa</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia nervosa</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge-eating disorder</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cont.)
DIVERSITY IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Good health is a universal human value. For Greeks hygeia, as in hygiene (health), marks daily interpersonal communications. “To your health” is Greek for “cheers,” “hello,” and “good-bye.” “Always with health” is a recommendation about how to live one’s life. “With health” is a wish about how one should enjoy any new possession, from clothes, to a house, job, or haircut. “First is health” means that all things are possible when one is healthy. “May they have their health” offers reassurance that people in the midst of all kinds of crises will cope as long as they are healthy. And “Are you well?” means “How are you?”

So important are health and a healthy image to Greeks that they habitually hide, conceal, or lie about illness. When people learn of a relative’s or friend’s chronic or
terminal illness, they invariably ask, “Does she (he) know?” Parents don’t tell their children about a serious diagnosis. The healthy spouse, in agreement with the physician, conceals the prognosis from the sick one. Adult children lie to their elderly parents about their health status. Parents should not be told by a doctor, or anyone, that their child is dying. Following a diagnosis of prostate cancer, a 60-year-old orthopedic surgeon from Greece came to the United States for an operation. His 10-year-old daughter, siblings, and friends knew only that he was touring North America with his wife. When Kozaitis informed her relatives in Greece that she was diagnosed with breast cancer, they all whispered on the phone, “Don’t worry; we won’t say anything to anyone. Nothing, to no one! Of course, you aren’t saying anything to the kids. Does your mother know?”

Aware of tradition, Kozaitis assured them that sharing the news of her illness with other members of the extended family was fine, since she was not “on the market” as a candidate for an arranged marriage. In Greek agrarian culture the health status of a marriage prospect, indeed that of his kin three generations back, is critical to successful matchmaking. (Also critical is dowry, in the form of land and virginity in women, and character and intelligence in men.) A father refused to accept as a son-in-law a man from another region in Greece, because he could not verify whether there were any “sick, crazy, crippled, criminals, thieves, or stupid people in his clan.”

Experiences of health and illness vary with age, gender, race, and ethnicity. The elderly suffer more from chronic diseases and require more medical attention than younger people do. Girls, enculturated to be concerned with body image, are more likely to have anorexia than boys are. Men, enculturated to associate masculinity with endurance, tend to deny or hide their mental problems. Native Americans are more prone to alcohol-related illnesses such as diabetes and cirrhosis of the liver than are other populations. Hispanics are more at risk of lung cancer and high blood pressure than are white ethnic immigrants. Civil status also is associated with health status. People who are married, or cohabiting as domestic partners, are healthier and live longer than those who are separated or divorced (Wu et al. 2003; Weitz 2004). Class is a primary indicator of health status. Poverty would threaten the health and longevity of any American, regardless of other social or cultural indicators.

Matters of health and healing are personal (e.g., nutritional habits), political (e.g., access to health insurance), and cultural (e.g., health-seeking beliefs and behaviors). From multiple sclerosis, to HIV/AIDS, to hearing impairment, Americans are defined, diversified, and organized in relation to an illness. Myriad support groups provide structure for people who share an illness to construct an affinity group. From these emerges a cultural identity (e.g., “cancer survivors”). As a collective, members of such a group engage in social and cultural events, such as banquets, and they promote disease-awareness activities, such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, or colon cancer awareness months.

Like all cultures, illness identity groups have heroes, who stand for strength, courage, advocacy, and protection of their community. In the 1970s, John Tyler, who suffered from polio, advocated for the rights of people with disabilities by parking his wheelchair in front of bus stops in Seattle, Washington. His act of courage led to the addition of wheelchair lifts in public transportation. Michael J. Fox, who is living with
Parkinson’s disease, raises public awareness and millions of dollars on behalf of others who share his condition. The late Christopher Reeve, whom a riding accident left paralyzed in 1995, spent his remaining years raising funds through his nonprofit Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation. He advocated “hope” as the coping mechanism for a debilitating illness.

Contrasts involving health are especially pronounced between healthy people and sick people. The former represent the core, the fortunate, and the normal; the latter, the periphery, the unfortunate, and the abnormal. As in other socially constructed hierarchies, healthy people enjoy more privileges than do people who are seriously ill. The benefits of good health include economic promotions, social inclusion, sexual appeal, and mobility. A healthy 65-year-old man may be more desirable as an employee, a guest at a formal dinner party, a lover, and a travel companion than a man in his 30s who suffers from a physical disability, a chronic disease, or an emotional disorder. Like older people and children, people with disabilities are categorically weaker and may be stigmatized as “an economic drain” to a capitalist society. Prejudice and discrimination against citizens who are variably abled fuels their identity politics to affirm their common humanity. Aware of the power of culture as an adaptive apparatus, people with disabilities follow the same strategies as other marginalized groups. They (1) construct shared ways of thinking and being in the world, (2) essentialize and homogenize themselves into a political interest group, and (3) engage in a social movement for human rights on the basis of difference (disability in this case). To combat the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, activists in Botswana organized the Miss HIV Stigma Free Beauty Pageant to demonstrate that with proper treatment, people living with HIV can be active and productive citizens (Goering 2005).

The disability rights movement (DRM) has had remarkable influence in shaping our multicultural society. Launched in the 1970s, the DRM advocated for independent living. Disability rights legislation followed, including the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Activists fight for people with disabilities, promoting integration of their abilities in the workforce. The movement has sought and won improved access to buildings (e.g., wheelchair ramps), technology to accommodate manual inabilities (e.g., a tool allowing a postal worker who uses a wheelchair to reach mailboxes), and, as in the case of frail elderly and children, social accommodation of those who move at a slower pace.

Just as all humans face age-based dilemmas, many of us also will have to confront a serious illness or debilitating condition. It’s safe to assume that all of us—the sick and the well—believe health to be the highest good. But does illness have secondary gains? Hippocrates, the Greek father of medicine, was right when he said, “A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how, by his own thought, to derive benefit from his illness.” This might even be a good motto of the disability rights movement.

**Key Term**

body mass index (209)
CHAPTER 13

CLASS

REFLECTIONS: “Dude, Money Can’t Buy You Class”

❖ Class in America
❖ Forms of Socioeconomic Stratification
  Industrial Stratification
  Poverty and Homelessness
  Closed Class Systems
❖ Domination, Hegemony, and Resistance
❖ Class and Values across Cultures
❖ Diversity within Social Categories
  Social Movements

“Dude, Money Can’t Buy You Class”

This statement came from Bill, husband of a stay-at-home wife, and father of three daughters. After 12 years of work in an automobile factory, his annual income was $84,000. Despite this achievement, Bill still wishes “I had done my homework and gone to college.” At age 32, Bill now reads the books his mother begged him to read during his adolescence. So determined is he that his daughters go to college that he devotes hours to their education. He volunteers in their classroom, reads to them, helps with homework, and rewards them generously for the A’s they bring home. His “real reward” for tutoring his daughters is “finally getting the education I never got when I should have.”

Why does Bill lament his neglect of study in high school and his lack of a college education? What is he missing? Is it a higher-paying job, a bigger house, a better car, more leisure time, credentials or prestige? What constitutes class in today’s world? Do occupation and education determine class? How useful is class in understanding our multicultural society?

Class is a category denoting socioeconomic status (SES)—economic position and rank in a social hierarchy. Relative to the means of production, class implies social stratification and inequality. Capitalist state societies stratify segments of the population. Subordinated segments may include racial and ethnic groups, women, children, and people raised in poverty. The unequal distribution of goods and privileges assigns an “objective” class status to segments of our population (e.g., welfare class), while individuals ascribe to themselves “subjective” class identity (as in, “We are finally middle class!”).

Stratification is global. Billions of people have variable access to health, wealth, power, and well-being. Strong disparities in income and living standards exist among and within nations. Few people have full control over their economic circumstances.
Workers may be “laid off”; even people with graduate degrees may be “let go” due to downsizing.

The United States and Canada haven’t eliminated social inequality—disparities in income, power, and prestige. The creed of equal opportunity and efforts by civil rights activists to enhance access to education and employment haven’t erased the hierarchy of ranked categories of people. Class, or socioeconomic status (SES), permeates our social behavior and thought. Income and education correlate with job security and satisfaction, family size, political attitudes, and cultural values. Wealth correlates with elite education. Poverty shortens life expectancy.

Such labels as upper-upper class, lower-middle class, and working class help us understand differential access to strategic resources and the cultural variation and stratification that result from it. People with similar incomes and educational levels tend to have similar lifestyles. But in today’s multicultural society, classes tend to be more varied internally than they are unified in opposition to other classes. An open class system favors the upward mobility of members of many identity groups, be these class-, ethnicity-, or gender-based.

An open class system rewards people who accept a meritocratic ethic. Such people work hard. If at first they don’t succeed, they try, try again. Among the high achievers are some people who succeed through a fierce determination to compensate for having had a lower class status at birth. Symptomatic of an open class system in a multicultural society is a hierarchy of ranked segments that represent significant sociocultural variation within each class. The Cuban assistant professor, the African-American nurse, the Irish Catholic priest, the Greek building contractor, the Haitian bank teller, and Bill the autoworker in our story—all identify as middle class. And based on income range, they are indeed middle class. One need only pay attention to the lifestyles of middle- and upper-class Americans to realize that working class isn’t limited to blue-collar occupations (work involving manual labor). For most Americans, upward mobility also implies longer, more intensive work schedules, the rewards of which aren’t always commensurate with the time and labor invested.

Upward mobility doesn’t always extinguish the “hidden injuries of class” (Sennett and Cobb 1972/1993). In an interview about his book All Over but the Shoutin’, Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Rick Bragg (1997) describes his “ugly memories of people who considered themselves a class above us.” Bragg’s childhood was plagued by poverty. Lingering “resentment and condescension” drove him to “prod forward,” all the way to “the most prestigious college in America.” His receipt of Harvard’s Nieman Fellowship did little to diminish his imposter complex. His doubts were expressed by his “raining sweat” during his interview for the fellowship. Privately he thought he “had about as much business at Harvard as a hog in a cocktail dress.”

The Information Revolution and the multicultural movement have heightened our awareness and appreciation of different cultures and the people who create them. Although certain societies may be less wealthy or “progressive” than others are, they still may offer legitimate and meaningful designs for living. They may be respected for their belief structures, their health care systems, their courting and mating rituals, their art, or their recreational outlets. Many North Americans enhance their own class status by consuming other people’s cultural and intellectual property. They have the
financial ability to travel abroad, and such travel symbolizes “worldliness” and “cultural sophistication.”

In today’s global economy, a new, transnational, mass “consumer class” is on the rise. Persons from varied birth origins, geographic locations, social strata, and national identities share consumption patterns of culture—objects, services, language, traditions, heroes, and ideas, including notions about class. Like most Americans, Bill believes in upward mobility, as it relates to income. However, his point is that his money doesn’t gain him entry into the “cultured class.” His regrets have less to do with access to creature comforts than with choices that affect life chances. Have you ever considered the difference?

CLASS IN AMERICA

Socioeconomic classes represent another aspect of diversity affecting North American identities, lifestyles, and life chances. An interesting part of being different in the United States is the fact of class contrasts, coupled with a simultaneous unwillingness to discuss them.

Americans deny the benefits of a higher-class background when we tell and accept stories suggesting that, with sufficient determination and a little bit of luck, we can all rise from humble roots, as in rags-to-riches tales. Our work ethic suggests that anyone can succeed as a self-made man or woman if he or she works hard enough. While playing down the advantages of a privileged background, we easily recognize signs of class in images and behavior, as in the bodies and dress habits mentioned in the previous chapter.

Although Americans may feel uncomfortable talking about class, we do regularly use social labels related to class, such as yuppies (young urban professionals, who are educated people with disposable incomes). Other terms for class include rich, status, highfalutin’, middle class, white collar, blue collar, working poor, urban poor, the homeless, welfare mothers, rednecks (adding a southern regional component), and underclass.

Following the Great Depression, which began in 1929, living standards rose for most Americans. When W. Lloyd Warner and his associates did their classic social research in a New England town they called Yankee City during the 1930s, they found a class structure that differed substantially from today’s American class system (see Warner and Lunt 1941; Warner 1963). With educational opportunities more limited then, and a much smaller inventory of professions for people to aspire to, the elite and middle class were much smaller during the 1930s than they are now.

The post–World War II American economy emphasized heavy-goods manufacture, with a unionized blue-collar workforce. Men with high school educations and union jobs could support their households and even think of sending their children to college. More recently, the United States has shifted away from such a manufacturing economy toward one based on the provision of services and the processing of information. Lower-paid workers have been hurt by the loss of low-skilled jobs in
manufacturing and a related decline in unionization. In the new high-tech economy, education has become much more important in landing a good job—or any job at all. It is much more difficult now for a mere high school graduate to find a good job and to earn enough to support a family. In late August 2010 the unemployment rate for college graduates was 4.5 percent, compared with 9.5 percent for the American population as a whole. Typically today, both partners in a marriage work outside the home. When they are well-educated professionals, their combined income permits a life of relative luxury, if not of leisure.

There are substantial differences in income and wealth between the richest and the poorest Americans, and the gap is widening. According to U.S. Census data from 1967 to 2000, the top (richest) fifth, or quintile, of American households increased their share of national income by 13.5 percent, while all other quintiles fell. The percentage share of the lowest fifth fell most dramatically—by 17.6 percent. The divergence continues: In 2009 the highest quintile of households received 50.3 percent (versus 49.7 percent in 2000) of all national income, while the lowest fifth received 3.4 percent (versus 3.6 in 2000). Comparable figures in 1967 were 43.8 percent and 4.0 percent. The 2009 ratio was 15:1, versus 14:1 in 2000 and 11:1 in 1967. In other words, the richest fifth of American households, with a mean annual income of $170,844, is now 15 times wealthier than the poorest fifth, with a mean annual income of $11,552 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2010).

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![FIGURE 13–1](kot17011_ch13_225-242.qxd) Percentage of wealth owned by percentile of U.S. population

*SOURCE*: Kennickell 2009, p. 35.
When we consider wealth (investments, property, possessions, etc.) rather than income, the contrast is even more striking: 1 percent of American families hold just over one-third of the nation’s wealth (Council on International and Public Affairs 2006). As Figure 13–1 shows, the top 1 percent owned 33.8 percent of all wealth in the United States. By contrast, the bottom 50 percent owned just 2.5 percent. In fact, the top 1 percent owns more than the bottom 90 percent combined (Witt 2010, p. 229).

**Forms of Socioeconomic Stratification**

The class structures of contemporary North America are variations on a more general theme of socioeconomic *stratification*, which the anthropologist Morton Fried discussed in his classic article “On the Evolution of Social Stratification and the State” (1960). Socioeconomic stratification is not a cultural universal; it arose with the earliest states (or civilizations, a near synonym), which first appeared in Mesopotamia (currently Iran and Iraq) some 6,000 years ago. A few thousand years later states also arose in two parts of the western hemisphere—Mesoamerica (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize) and the central Andes (Peru and Bolivia).

The presence of socioeconomic stratification is a defining feature of the state. That is, all states—and only states—have some kind of class system. In ancient states, for the first time in human history, there were contrasts in wealth, power, and prestige between entire groups (social strata or classes) of men and women. Each stratum included people of both sexes and all ages. The superordinate (the higher or elite) stratum had privileged access to valued resources. Access to resources by members of the subordinate (lower or underprivileged) stratum was limited by the privileged group.

In states, the elites control much of the means of production—for example, land, herds, water, capital, farms, factories, Microsoft, Time Warner, and the New York Times. Because of elite ownership, ordinary people lack free access to resources. Those born at the bottom of the stratified hierarchy have reduced chances of social mobility.

How does social stratification in modern nations compare with that in ancient states? The hereditary rulers and elites of ancient states and empires, like the feudal nobility that ruled Europe before 1500, viewed the state as their property (conferred by gods, tradition, or war), to control and do with as they pleased (Shannon 1989). The most basic distinction in ancient states was between those who controlled the state machinery and those who did not. With industrialization, however, the main differentiating factor became ownership of the means of production.

**Industrial Stratification**

The social theorists Karl Marx and Max Weber both focused on the stratification systems associated with industrial economies. The socioeconomic effects of the *Industrial Revolution*, which began in England around 1750, were mixed. National income and living standards rose, but prosperity was uneven. From his observations in England and his analysis of 19th-century industrial capitalism, Marx (Marx and Engels 1848/1976) viewed socioeconomic stratification as a sharp and simple division...
between two opposed classes: the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (propertyless workers). The bourgeoisie traced its origins to overseas ventures and the rise of world capitalism, which had transformed the social structure of northwestern Europe, creating a wealthy commercial class.

The bourgeoisie were the owners of factories, mines, large farms, and other means of production. The working class, or proletariat, were people who had to sell their labor to survive. With the decline of subsistence production and the rise of urban migration and the possibility of unemployment, the bourgeoisie came to stand between workers and the means of production.

Faulting Marx for an overly simplistic and exclusively economic view of stratification, Weber (1922/1968) defined three dimensions of social stratification: (1) Economic status, or wealth, encompasses a person’s material assets, including income, land, and other types of property; (2) power, the ability to exercise one’s will over others—to do what one wants—is the basis of political status; and (3) prestige—the basis of social status—refers to esteem, respect, or approval for acts, deeds, or qualities considered exemplary. Prestige, or “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1984), gives people a sense of worth and respect, which they may convert into economic advantage.

Having one of the three does not entail having the others, but wealth, power, and prestige do tend to be associated. Again disputing Marx, Weber also argued that social solidarity based on ethnicity, religion, race, nationality, and other attributes often took priority over class (social identity based on economic status).

Class consciousness (recognition of collective interests and personal identification with one’s economic group) was a vital part of Marx’s view of class. He saw the bourgeoisie and proletariat as groups with radically opposed interests. Marx viewed classes as powerful collective forces that could mobilize human energies to influence the course of history. On the basis of their common experience, Marx predicted, workers would develop class consciousness, which would lead to revolutionary change. Although no proletarian revolution was to occur in England, workers did develop organizations to protect their interests and increase their share of industrial profits. During the 19th century, trade unions and socialist parties emerged to express a rising anticapitalist spirit. By 1900, many Western nations had factory legislation, social welfare programs, and rising mass living standards.

In today’s capitalist world system the class division between owners and workers is worldwide. However, publicly traded companies complicate the division between capitalists and workers in industrial nations. Through pension plans and personal investments, many American workers now have some proprietary interest in the means of production. They are part-owners rather than propertyless workers. The key difference is that the wealthy have control over these means. The key capitalist now is not the factory owner, who may have been replaced by thousands of stockholders, but the CEO or the chair of the board of directors, neither of whom may actually own the corporation.

Modern class systems aren’t simple or dichotomous. They include a middle class of skilled and professional workers. Gerhard Lenski (1966) argued that social equality tends to increase in advanced industrial societies. The growth of the middle class softens the polarization between owners and workers. Intermediate occupations
proliferate, creating opportunities for social mobility. The stratification system grows more complex (Giddens 1973). However, in some contemporary nations, the middle class may be shrinking as the rich get richer; and the poor, poorer. There is even evidence for an increasingly bifurcated class system, with a widening gap between the richest few and the poorer many, in the United States.

**Poverty and Homelessness**

For centuries, and continuing to fuel immigration, there has been the view of the United States as a “land of opportunity” where one can make a better living than “at home” in another country. This view may be accurate with respect to the world’s less-developed countries. However, opportunities and life chances in the United States and Canada are not distributed equally. The United States has the highest poverty rate of the 40 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). About 37 million Americans live in poverty. Many of them are rural southerners, black and white, with limited access to job opportunities, particularly those that require higher education. (Mississippi has the nation’s highest poverty rate.)

Poverty persists in North America, although it has been reduced substantially compared with 50 years ago. The U.S. poverty rate (Figure 13–2) declined each year between 1993 and 2000, when it stood at 11.3 percent (its second lowest percentage ever). It rose slightly every year after that, until 2005. That year it fell 0.1 percent, from 12.7 in 2004 to 12.6 percent, where it hovered until 2009, when it jumped to 14.3 percent, the highest figure since 1994 (see Table 13–1). The Census Bureau first started tracking the poverty rate in 1959, when it stood at 22.4 percent. This was a few years before President Lyndon Johnson launched his important War on Poverty. From that all-time high, the rate declined steadily to an all-time low of 11.1 percent.

![Figure 13–2](image-url)
in 1973. The poverty rate was 14 percent or higher from 1981 to 1995. In that period
the number of poor Americans rose from 24.5 million to 36.4 million (Statistical
Abstract of the United States 1991, 1996). The direction of the poverty rate turned in
the mid-1990s, falling steadily from 15.1 percent in 1993 to 11.3 percent in 2000, the
lowest rate in 21 years, as the poor population declined to 31.1 million. Since 2000,
the rate and the number of Americans living in poverty have risen again, most sub-
stantially during the Great Recession that began in 2008. (See Table 13–1.)

The rise in prosperity in the late 1990s was distributed across all social groups.
In 2000, median household income rose to, or matched, the all-time highs for African
Americans, Hispanics, non-Hispanic whites, Asians, and indeed for all American
households. Adjusted for inflation, real household income has fallen for all these
groups, except non-Hispanic whites, since then (see Table 13–2).

The late 1990s posed quite a contrast to the 1980s, when 70 percent of the
increase in American family incomes went to the top 1 percent of the population
(Nasar 1992a, 1992b). The top 5 percent were earning 24 percent of total national
income in 1989, up from 18 percent in 1977. The share of national income received
by the bottom 60 percent declined from 34 to 29 percent in that same period and
stood at 23 percent in 2007. Despite the good news of the late 1990s, the recession
that began in late 2000 became a matter of serious policy concern in 2001, especially

### Table 13–1

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<td><strong>1990</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium household income (constant 2009 dollars)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persons below poverty level (millions)</td>
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<td>Percentage of all persons in poverty</td>
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### Table 13–2

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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Category</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic whites</td>
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<td>Asians</td>
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<td>All households</td>
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Homelessness is an extreme form of downward mobility, which may follow job loss, layoffs, or situations in which women and children flee from domestic abuse. Our work ethic suggests that anyone can succeed as a self-made man or woman if he or she works hard enough, and we tend to look down on those who obviously haven’t succeeded. Part of being different in the United State is class contrasts, coupled with unwillingness to discuss them. Denying class, we see signs of class in images, behavior, bodies, and dress.

after September 11. Another recession began in 2008, and there is worry about a “double dip recession” as of this writing. Although poverty was reduced during the 1990s, the gap between the top (richest) quintile and the other four quintiles continued to widen and has increased steadily since 2001.

Much of the poverty in industrial nations is caused by unemployment. The ongoing North American economic shift from manufacturing to services and information demands a better-educated and more skilled workforce. Less well-educated people find it especially hard to make a living in the new economy. In the United States and throughout the world, members of the underclass (the abjectly poor) lack jobs, adequate food, medical care, and even shelter.

Home ownership, a fundamental part of an American identity, remains an unreachable dream for many Americans. Despite a persistent real estate recession that began in 2007, many Americans had trouble qualifying for low-interest mortgages that would have allowed them to purchase homes at bargain-basement prices. Millions of others lost homes bought at inflated prices during the real estate boom that preceded the bust. Around three million American homes were in foreclosure in 2010, because families could not afford their mortgage payments or defaulted on loans worth more than their home’s current market value.
For many families and single people in urban and rural areas of the country, substandard housing is the best they can get when they depend on welfare or irregular income. As a social worker in Augusta, Georgia, Kozaitis conducted “home visits” to many rural African Americans who were Medicaid patients suffering from cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and hemophilia. Frequently she discovered families living in shacks, lacking plumbing and electricity, with broken windows and leaky roofs, and with inadequate food and drinking water. Is it any wonder that these men, women, and children looked forward to long stays at the hospital?

In American cities, a million homeless people occupy street corners, park benches, and temporary shelters. Most people who live on the street do so because they cannot afford housing. The homeless are people, generally single men and women, many with children, who have lost jobs or have only low-paying jobs, who lack family support, and for whom space is unavailable in temporary shelters. The prospect of homelessness can threaten even middle-class people with highly regarded credentials who become victims of downsizing. Corporate cutbacks and factory layoffs place families at risk of survival, and many Americans live in “fear of ending up homeless.”

Homelessness is an extreme form of downward mobility. Its causes are varied—economic, social, and psychological. The reasons include inability to pay rent or make mortgage payments, eviction, sale of urban real estate to developers, the need to escape domestic abuse, and mental illness. The homeless have become the hunters and gatherers of modern society. They feed themselves by begging, scavenging, and raiding garbage (particularly that of restaurants) for food. The most extreme socioeconomic contrasts within the world capitalist economy today are between the wealthiest people in the richest nations and the poorest people in the less-developed countries. However, as the gap between richest and poorest widens in North America, the social distance between the underclasses of the developed and the underdeveloped countries shrinks. The road to Bangladesh passes close to Washington’s Pennsylvania Avenue.

Closed Class Systems

In nation-states, socioeconomic inequalities tend to persist across the generations. The extent to which they do or do not is a measure of the openness of the class system, the ease of social mobility it permits. With respect to such openness, stratification has taken many forms, including caste, slavery, and class systems.

Caste systems are closed, hereditary forms of stratification, often dictated by religion. Social rank is ascribed at birth, so people are locked into their parents’ social position. The world’s best-known caste system is associated with Hinduism in traditional India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Another castelike system, apartheid, plagued South Africa until recently. Blacks, whites, and Asians had their own separate (and unequal) neighborhoods, schools, laws, and punishments. Slavery, in which people are treated as property, is the most extreme and coercive form of legalized inequality.

In 2009 the film District 9 was one of 10 nominated for the Best Picture Oscar. District 9 projects South Africa’s legacy of apartheid onto a human–alien encounter, as culture-bearing extraterrestrials are forcibly segregated into a concentration camp...
known as District 9. The aliens, although technologically advanced enough to have reached Earth, are denigrated as “prawns” lacking in humanity. Science fiction’s symbolic portrayals of human–alien and alien–alien encounters can help raise awareness of arbitrary and unfair discrimination that exists right here on Earth. Can you think of other examples?

† DOMINATION, HEGEMONY, AND RESISTANCE

Systems of domination—cultural, socioeconomic, political, or religious—always have their more muted aspects along with their public dimensions. In studying apparent cultural domination, or actual political domination, we must pay careful attention to what lies beneath the surface of evident, public behavior. In public the oppressed may seem to accept their own domination, but they always question it offstage. James Scott (1990) uses the term public transcript to describe the open, public interactions between dominators and oppressed. The public transcript is the outer shell of power relations. Scott uses hidden transcript to describe the critique of power that goes on offstage, where the power holders can’t see it—for example, in the slave quarters of the old American South.

In public the oppressed and the elites observe the etiquette of the power relations they are expected to perform. The dominators act like haughty masters; subordinates are humble and deferential. Antonio Gramsci (1971) developed the concept of hegemony for a stratified social order in which subordinates comply with domination by internalizing its values and accepting its “naturalness” (this is the way things were meant to be). According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977, p. 164), every social order tries to make its own arbitrariness seem natural, including its oppression. All hegemonic ideologies offer explanations about why the existing order is in everyone’s best interest. Often promises are made, such as “Things will get better if you’re patient.” Gramsci and others use the idea of hegemony to explain why people conform even without coercion, why they knuckle under when they don’t really have to.

Hegemony, the internalization of a dominant ideology, is one way to curb resistance. Another way is to let subordinates know they will eventually gain power—as young people usually foresee when they let their elders dominate them. Another way of curbing resistance is to separate or isolate subordinates and supervise them closely. According to Michel Foucault (1979), describing control over prisoners, solitude (as in solitary confinement) is an effective way to induce submission.

Often, situations that seem to be hegemonic do have active resistance, but it is individual and disguised rather than collective and defiant. Scott (1985) uses Malay peasants, among whom he did fieldwork, to illustrate small-scale acts of resistance, which he calls “weapons of the weak.” The Malay peasants used an indirect strategy to resist an Islamic tithe (religious tax). The goods, usually rice, that peasants were expected to give went to the provincial capital. In theory, the tithe would come back as charity, but it never did. Peasants didn’t resist the tithe by rioting, demonstrating, or protesting. Instead they used a “nibbling” strategy, based on small acts of resistance. For example, they failed to declare their land, or they lied about the amount they farmed. They underpaid or delivered rice contaminated with water, rocks, or mud,
to add weight. Because of this resistance, only 15 percent of what was due was actu-

Subordinates also use various strategies to protest or resist *publicly*, but again,

Resistance is most likely to be expressed openly when the oppressed are allowed
to assemble. In such contexts, people see their dreams and anger shared by others
with whom they haven’t been in direct contact. The oppressed may draw courage from
the crowd, from its visual and emotional impact and its anonymity. Sensing danger,
the elites discourage such gatherings. They try to limit and control holidays, funerals,
dances, festivals, and other occasions that might unite the oppressed. Thus, in the
southern United States, gatherings of five or more slaves were forbidden unless a white
person was present.

Factors that impede the formation of communities—for example, geographic or
cultural separateness—also work to curb resistance. Thus, U.S. plantation owners
sought slaves with diverse African ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. But diversity
can be overcome. Despite the measures used to separate them, the slaves resisted.
They developed their own tales, popular culture, linguistic codes, and religious vision.
The masters taught portions of the Bible that stressed compliance. But the slaves pre-
ferred the story of Moses, the Promised Land, and deliverance. Prominent in the
slaves’ religious beliefs was the idea of a reversal in the conditions of whites and
blacks. According to Scott (1990), people can always imagine an end to oppressive
conditions. Slaves also resisted directly, through sabotage and flight. In many parts of
the western hemisphere, slaves fled and established free communities in remote and
isolated areas (Price, ed. 1973).

Hidden transcripts tend to be expressed at certain times (festivals and Carnivals)
and in certain places (e.g., markets). Because of its costumed anonymity and its rit-
ual structure (reversal), *Carnival* (a pre-Lenten festival comparable to Mardi Gras in
Louisiana, popular in Brazil and in certain Mediterranean and Caribbean societies)
is an excellent arena for exposing normally suppressed speech and aggression—
antihegemonic discourse. (*Discourse* includes talk, speeches, gestures, and actions.)
Carnivals, which are public rituals of reversal, celebrate freedom through immodesty,
dancing, gluttony, and sexuality (DaMatta 1991). Carnival may begin as a playful out-
let for frustrations built up during the year. Over time it may evolve into a powerful
annual critique of domination and a threat to the established order (Gilmore 1987).
(Recognizing that ceremonial license could turn into political defiance, the Spanish
dictator Francisco Franco banned Carnival.)

In medieval Europe, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), the market was the
main place where the dominant ideology was questioned. The anonymity of the crowd
put people on an equal footing. The deference used with lords and clergy didn’t apply
to the marketplace. Later in Europe, the hidden transcript also went public in pubs,
taverns, inns, cabarets, beer cellars, and gin mills. These locales helped breed a resist-
ant popular culture—in games, songs, gambling, blasphemy, and disorder—that was
at odds with the official culture. People met in an atmosphere of freedom encouraged by alcohol. Church and state alike condemned such settings as subversive.

Class and Values across Cultures

Vertical mobility is an upward or downward change in a person’s social status, a rise or fall in life. A truly open class system would facilitate mobility, with individual achievement and personal merit determining rank. Social status would be achieved through personal effort. Things would actually work the way they are supposed to work in American ideology. Ascribed statuses (family background, ethnicity, gender, religion) would decline in importance.

Compared with ancient states, modern industrial nations have more open class systems. In modern economies, wealth is based to some extent on income—earnings from wages and salaries. Economists contrast such a return on labor with interest, dividends, and rent, which are returns on property or capital.

Like all stratified societies, the United States features socioeconomic diversity based on the unequal distribution of wealth, including inherited wealth. Wealth consists of all assets, including income; a home, vacation property, and other real estate; health, auto, and home insurance; savings accounts; stocks; bonds; and retirement

Because of its costumed anonymity, Carnival is an excellent arena for expressing normally suppressed speech. Shown here, New Orleans’ traditional Zulu parade rolls down St. Charles Avenue and approaches Canal Street during Mardi Gras celebrations on Fat Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2006, the first such celebration after Hurricane Katrina.
accounts. As mentioned previously, class tends to be more marked in wealth than in income. Despite the American core values of hard work, occupational success, and financial independence, the nation is divided and subdivided by wealth contrasts. At one extreme are ultrawealthy business, entertainment, and sports figures. At the other are "the working poor," people who work at least 27 weeks a year but whose meager earnings keep them below the poverty line. Some Americans, most notably the homeless, have even more limited access to basic needs, such as food and shelter (Mishel, Bernstein, and Allegretto 2005).

Many social and cultural differences between the United States and other countries, including Brazil, flow from patterns of socioeconomic stratification, the allocation and distribution of wealth, prestige, and power. Although the distribution of income in the United States is not as even as in Japan or the Netherlands, it is much more so than in Brazil. Latin nations with strongly hierarchical systems of vested wealth and power tend to resist competition and change. Mobility values, found in more open class systems, such as the United States and Canada, work in opposition to established privileges. Brazilian society, for example, is self-consciously hierarchical. American society is self-consciously democratic. This doesn’t mean that the United States lacks socioeconomic contrasts, social classes, or major impediments to social mobility. But Brazilian poverty is much more extreme than poverty in the United States. The most affluent 20 percent of American households average 15 times the income of the poorest fifth. The analogous multiple is more than 30 in Brazil.

Comparing resource distribution, Brazil has a much wider gap between richest and poorest, and Brazilians are much more class conscious than Americans are. Most Americans, regardless of income, consider themselves to be middle class, and most are. As has been stated, Americans have trouble dealing with, and even recognizing, class differences. Like good Weberians (followers of Max Weber), U.S. citizens prefer to make social distinctions in terms of factors other than class, such as region, ethnicity, religion, race, or occupation. With their ideology of equality, Americans feel uneasy using such labels as lower class, working class, or upper class. We are reluctant to acknowledge a role for class background because we believe that ours is an open society in which capable people can rise through their own efforts and hard work. Self-sufficiency and individual achievement are such powerful American values that we resent, and often deny, that class background does affect chances for success. As our culture reconstructs its history, we forget that many of our “self-made men” came from wealthy families.

The United States has a pervasive, although idealized, egalitarian ethos that is notably absent in Brazil. Our Constitution tells us that all men (and, by extension, women) are created equal. Although it is well known that in practice U.S. justice is neither blind nor equal for the rich and the poor, there is supposed to be equality before the law. But in Brazil all is hierarchy. The penal code authorizes privileged treatment for certain classes of citizens, such as people with university degrees.

Brazilians’ social identities are based in large part on class background and family connections, which Brazilians see nothing wrong with using for all they’re worth. Family position and network membership contribute substantially to individual fortune. All social life is hierarchical. No one doubts that rank confers advantages in
Diversity within Social Categories

myriad contexts and encounters in everyday social life. High-status Brazilians don’t stand patiently on line as Americans do. Important people expect their business to be attended to immediately, and social inferiors yield. Rules apply not uniformly, but differentially, according to social class. The final resort in any conversation is, “Do you know who you’re talking to?” (DaMatta 1991). The American opposite, reflecting our democratic and egalitarian ethos, is, “Who do you think you are?”

The contrast is one of doing (United States) versus being (Brazil). In the United States identity emerges as a result of what one does. In Brazil one’s social identity arises from what one is. A person is a strand in a web of social connections, originating in the extended family, which has an established place in the stratified hierarchy of the region and nation. In such a consciously hierarchical society, prestige, power, and privilege rest on the extent and influence of the personal network.

Most Americans, by contrast, probably would argue that what someone does (achieves) is more important than his or her family, class background, or personal connections—in the long run, at least. American culture sees reason for pride in excellence in any line of work. “I may be just a plumber, but I’m a good plumber” is a much likelier American than Brazilian statement.

Class-based diversity is evident in the mainstream media. For example, the lazy rich man, who in the United States is a “playboy” or “ne’er-do-well,” in Brazil (in life and the media) can enjoy gracefully what family status or fortune was generous enough to provide. Americans believe personal worth and moral value come through work, but Brazilian culture has had a “gentleman complex” for centuries (see Wagley 1963). Brazilians who can afford to hire others should not do manual work. Menial jobs should be done by menials, millions of whom are available. The “do-it-yourselfer” valued by North American culture would only take jobs away from millions of lower-class people in Brazil.

McGrath (2005) observes that American TV programs tend to present a homogenized upper-middle-class lifestyle. Social differences are minimized, and the economic underpinnings of class are ignored. Class contrasts are much more evident on Brazilian television. Brazilian characters discuss class identities openly. To rise in life, subir na vida, is one of the most common telenovela expressions. Most telenovelas are modern-day Cinderella stories. A girl or boy from a lower-status family (but never abjectly poor) falls in love with and eventually marries someone from a richer family. A talented young man who “rises in life” on Brazilian TV typically gets a job through his wealthy father-in-law. For the ascendant young woman, the marriage alone is sufficient to grant social mobility. By contrast, and true to American ideology (if not to fact), most American tales with similar themes have the male or female hero make it on his own through work, education, talent, or some kind of self-growth. The expectation is for social status to rise through individual achievement.

DIVERSITY WITHIN SOCIAL CATEGORIES

Class labels, like those associated with race and ethnicity, can conceal considerable diversity. There are ways of being different within the social categories—such as black, white, or poor—and we hear about them every day. For example, differentiation within
America’s black population dates back to the era of enslavement. Those with lighter skin color worked as house servants rather than as field-workers. This status distinction continued through Reconstruction. Early in the 20th century, upward mobility distinguished prosperous urban blacks from their poorer rural counterparts (Frazier 1957). Many African Americans still accord higher status to the “light-skin black.”

Following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the “new black middle class” consisted of teachers, social workers, nurses, small-business owners, and managers (Landry 1987). Some of these positions reflected affirmative-action policies; most were concentrated in the public sector of the American economy. Northern African Americans shared class markers with northern whites, which further differentiated them from southern blacks (Hogan and Featherman 1977). One aspect of stratification among African Americans has been called the “neocolonial model.” This is the idea that African-American professionals negotiate and maintain their own privileged status while perpetuating a disadvantaged, largely black, underclass. Countering neocolonialist tendencies, an active, intellectual, Afrocentric elite works for the advancement of all black people. The Afrocentric movement was launched in the late 1960s and early 1970s to promote black economic equality. Its agenda now involves fostering the political freedom and cultural integrity of diasporic Africans as a people with a past and a future that override enslavement.

Discrepancies in access to information, networks, skills, and employment continue both between and within racial and ethnic groups. Our economy includes “racialized jobs,” such as migrant agricultural work. Low-skill jobs, such as janitorial work in hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and universities, tend to be held by minorities.

Intersections of class and culture are especially illuminating in understanding the position of the poor, regardless of their “race” or ethnicity. Historically, and cross-culturally, the poor have been classified as functionally and morally inferior to their more prosperous counterparts. Distorted images of the poor prevail in our assumptions about “the welfare class.” Diversity among the poor contradicts the popular tendency to see welfare recipients as a “kind of people” with a fixed socioeconomic profile and set of values. Many welfare recipients have previously worked and are participating in the welfare system for a brief period following a crisis. Most welfare recipients actively seek to rejoin the formal labor force (Monroe and Tiller 2001).

A study of 84 welfare-reliant rural women, 80 percent of whom were African Americans, revealed that they prized work, but they were limited by the bleak rural labor market. Having internalized the American work ethic, these women wished for the tangible and symbolic benefits of paid employment. Excluded from the formal labor force, and aware of those peers who “abuse the system,” these women hoped to return to, or to acquire, work for pay. Meanwhile, they engage in informal labor, resource exchanges, and value-added activities to stretch their meager resources. They engage in just about any tactic or strategy—whatever it takes—to survive, keep their children together, fed, housed, and clothed. And they are involved in the daily care of their families, just like many other American mothers. (Monroe and Tiller 2001, p. 827)

How do we judge these activities by welfare mothers? If by “work” we mean paid labor, do we stigmatize middle-class women who are “stay-at-home moms”? How about
upper-class women who volunteer their time to various social causes or engage in leisure and recreational activities with their peers, all without earning wages or a salary?

How much attention do we pay to diversity among whites? Stereotypes about poor southern whites have fueled the idea of a “white trash culture,” characterized as backward or excessive to the norm, from the darker aspects of racial politics and the Ku Klux Klan, feuding, incest, and the cult of the Rebel, to country music, faith-healing and snake-handling, and the phenomenon of Elvis veneration... of violence and excess, of hysterical gorging and indulging in food, drink, and drugs, and of living life large and in mythic terms in a Southern culture rife with cults and worship of the dead and the lost, from fundamentalist Christian sects to the adoration of the Confederate cause. (Sweeney 2001, p. 144)

The experience of poor rural whites as different from, and less than, the social norm may be as painful and destructive as the experience of poor urban blacks. Both groups are victims of a classism that marginalizes and subordinates the poor, whatever their color. According to Sweeney, “White Trash is an aesthetic of ultimate marginalization” (2001, p. 144). In the words of another social critic, to call someone “white trash” is “the last racist thing you can say and get away with” (quoted in Sweeney 2001, p. 144).

Diversity among the poor also reflects age and gender. More children live in poverty (18.5 percent in 2008) than the overall U.S. poverty rate (13.2 percent in 2008). On the other hand, the poverty rate for Americans aged 65 years and older has dropped steadily, and keeps dropping, from 35.2 percent in 1959 to 9.7 percent in 2008. Women are more likely than men to live in poverty, to hold low-paying service jobs, and to earn less than men do, even when they have the same occupation. Women of color and women who are single heads of households are especially prone to poverty. Poverty reduces access to higher education and professional training, which in turn contributes to the disproportionately higher unemployment, underemployment, and poverty rates of minority groups (Mishel et al. 2005). The poverty rate for blacks in 2009 was 25.8 percent, compared with 9.4 for non-Hispanic whites, 12.5 percent for Asians, and 25.3 percent for Hispanics (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 697).

A given class can encompass vast cultural diversity in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, and income. However, the divide between the poor and the rich is not only economic—an objective status marked by unequal possession of resources, such as food, shelter, property, and health. It is also a matter of culture—the subjective experience of those who find themselves in a predicament that diversifies and subordinates them on the basis of material wealth, and contradicts their felt identity as Americans.

Social Movements

During the 20th century and beyond, labor unions have played a vital role in winning benefits for workers in jobs and professions as different as municipal workers, teachers, teamsters, umpires, sports players, performers, and autoworkers. The influence of unions has declined as the American economy has shifted from manufacturing toward services and information. Less effective than unions, and even than other social reform
movements, such as those aimed at environmental justice, have been poverty-based identity politics. Impoverished people are heterogeneous socially and weak politically. Social movements thrive on collective political action fueled by “worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitments” (Tilly 2004). As we have argued, multiculturalism depends on effective leaders who have the education, financial stability, and political power to organize and mobilize their people. Given the nature of poverty, the poor are less likely than other minorities to produce such leadership.

To be sure, there are public assistance policies and programs designed to help meet the needs of economically disfranchised communities. These include Social Security for older and disabled people; Aid to Families with Dependent Children; the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act; the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children; and the HOPE VI Urban Demonstration Program. A plethora of government-funded school initiatives are available to the poor, including Head Start and Early Head Start programs. In addition there are literacy reform movements, aimed particularly at science, math, and technology, in primary, secondary, and higher education. Although the leaders of such interventions are not poor or disempowered presently, such movements to “change the system from the inside” may well be driven by empowered descendants of historically oppressed and underrepresented minorities, especially first- and second-generation college graduates.

**KEY TERMS**

- bourgeoisie (230)
- Carnival (236)
- class consciousness (230)
- discourse (236)
- hegemony (236)
- hidden transcript (235)
- Industrial Revolution (229)
- power (230)
- prestige (230)
- proletariat (230)
- public transcript (235)
- stratification (229)
- stratified (229)
- stratum (229)
- subordinate (229)
- superordinate (229)
- underclass (233)
- wealth (230)
- working class (230)
CHAPTER 14

PLACES AND SPACES

REFLECTIONS: IT’S NOT JUST A ZIP CODE; IT’S A LIFESTYLE

❖ Regional Diversity
❖ Geographic Mobility
❖ Cyberspace
❖ Cities and Urbanites
❖ Lifestyles and Small Towns
❖ The American Periphery
❖ The Income Gap by State

IT’S NOT JUST A ZIP CODE; IT’S A LIFESTYLE

The link between space, place, and lifestyle translates into perceptions of identity—our own, and that of others. For North Americans today, “home” has varied meanings. We continue to designate and identify with a specific geographic location, often the place where we spent our formative years. “I’m a Texan to the bone,” explains a middle-aged woman who has lived in four other states and has been educated abroad. Some of us speak of a “chosen home,” the place to which we move for higher education, a better career, or a more suitable lifestyle. The working-class kid from Ohio turned Wall Street executive distinguishes himself as a “New Yorker,” a label denoting not only location, but also social status and lifestyle.

Where we live influences how we live. An agrarian way of life and value system distinguish rural communities from urban and industrial centers. Greeks differentiate between islanders and mainlanders, Athenians and villagers, locals and expatriates. In Greece one’s ascribed status is inextricably linked with his or her place of birth, irrespective of achieved social standing. For example, a village-born, internationally educated top surgeon at the most prestigious hospital in Athens carries with him a childhood identity as a peasant—a self-image his Athenian wife rejects and his city-born colleagues never let him forget.

The stigma that some Americans associate with being “southern” represents a rejection of rural culture—associated with living off the land, close-knit relations, and conservative values. Poor rural southerners must contend with cultural standards imposed by a national urban elite. Values of the dominant culture, such as cosmopolitanism, wealth, and formal education, tend to marginalize the rural poor. An illustrious academic record and star status at Yale’s law school did not protect a young woman who grew up in the Tennessee hills from having to justify her roots to herself, and to the legal establishment in New York City, where she is now a successful attorney.
Industrialization brought rural people into a global subculture—as people different from, and considered inferior to, dominant urbanites. In many countries peasants are perceived as backward, simpleminded, old-fashioned, and parochial. In Guatemala, city dwellers consider mountain people to be uncouth and wild. Stereotypes distort group images and are used to justify discrimination against those who live outside industrial regions.

Urban living quarters, such as ghettos, barrios, and ethnic enclaves, accommodate specific segments of the population for whom integration may or may not be an option. Earlier waves of immigrants settled in ghettos and barrios chiefly because housing was affordable and they could live with “people like us.” Such neighborhoods served as temporary settlements until individuals earned enough money to “move on up” to more integrated, middle-class neighborhoods, usually in the suburbs. More recently, ethnic and gay enclaves, such as New York’s Chinatown and San Francisco’s Castro district, respectively, provide residents a potentially long-term, integrated, multiclass, and relatively self-sufficient sociocultural milieu with its own local infrastructure.

The unpredictability of the labor market, the search for job advancement, and the core value of upward mobility drive most North Americans to relocate several times during a lifetime. A common question urbanites ask one another is “Where are you from?” Of course, the assumption is that one is “not from here.” Answering the question typically leads the individual to mention numerous residences—where she was born, where his parents moved, where her dad was transferred, where his wife got a job, where her son or daughter lives. Consider the middle-class child who, by his seventh birthday, had lived in six different neighborhoods, four cities, two states, and two countries, because his parents have maintained a dual-career family.

Consider the following reflection by a Jewish woman who was born and raised in the United States but now lives and works in Israel: “What I find amazingly touching is that I’ve managed to make a circle of friends ranging from their late 20s to their 60s—native-born Israelis as well as those, like me, who came from somewhere else. However, very few if any of them are originally from the USA. In fact, the same is true of my friends in the USA! Diasporan reality is the only one I know and find comforting” (our emphasis).

Often people live where they can afford to, rather than where they would choose to. Immigrants settle in enclaves where housing is affordable and transportation is accessible. Workers live where the jobs are. During the 1950s immigrants from southeastern Europe settled in U.S. cities with steel mills. Adults with young children left clean, rural communities to live in industrial neighborhoods. One such community in Detroit was so near a factory that its residents had to contend with constant soot on their bodies, furniture, and carpets.

Like most resources, desirable space is distributed inequitably. Research shows a correlation between class, race, and the likelihood of exposure to environmental hazards. The poor, immigrants, and minorities often live in areas where toxins are concentrated. The bumper sticker “It’s not just a zip code, it’s a lifestyle” may have been created by people who are socioeconomically privileged and proud of their neighborhood, but it also describes much less appealing locations where the poor are located.
To their rescue comes the environmental justice movement. American environmentalists have fought for cleaner, healthier neighborhoods for decades. Today, an increasing number of political activists include minority group members seeking justice and equity in their living conditions. They work to protect vulnerable communities from exposure to threats linked to hazardous facilities. Human agency, a key determinant of social change in a multicultural society, is evident once again.

Regional Diversity

North Americans live in communities of various sizes and types: cities, towns, suburbs, exurbs (located further out than suburbs), gated and retirement communities, and rural areas. We are geographically mobile, following the job market, but planes, trains, automobiles, phones, and the Internet help us maintain our social networks as we move. The links provided by modern systems of transportation and communication and by the national economy have reduced somewhat the role of regional contrasts in promoting diversity among us. Because Americans move a lot and are exposed to the same media and national chains, Atlantans and New Yorkers are not as different now as they once were.

But regional diversity does persist. Table 14–1 lists the population of the United States by region. It shows that the South and West are increasing, while the Northeast
and Midwest are decreasing, their share of the American population. This trend is more than a generation old and is becoming more pronounced.

The places and spaces we inhabit determine our degree of exposure to other kinds of diversity, such as that based on age, education, race, ethnicity, and class. Although ethnic diversity is increasing in North America as a whole, some states (e.g., Texas, California) and cities (e.g., New York, Los Angeles, Toronto) are much more ethnically diverse than others are.

On August 15, 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau released (for the first time since 2000) key demographic and social data for areas with populations of 65,000 or more. The bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) provides annually updated information on the nation’s population. It offers a timely supplement to the decennial census held every 10 years. The ACS covers some 7,000 areas, including all congressional districts and counties, cities, and American Indian/Alaska native locales with 65,000 or more residents.

Consider age-based variation. According to the 2005 ACS, the median age for the U.S. household population was 36.4 years. Among the nation’s 15 largest cities, the highest median ages were in San Francisco (39.4 years of age), New York (35.8), and Philadelphia (35.3). The lowest median ages were in Phoenix (30.9), Dallas (31.9), and Columbus, Ohio (32.1).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median age of all Americans increased to 36.8 years in 2008. The five U.S. states with the oldest median age were Maine (42.0), Vermont (41.2), West Virginia (40.6), Florida (40.2), and New Hampshire (40.2). The five youngest states were Utah (28.7), Texas (33.2), Alaska (33.3), Idaho (34.4), and California (34.8). What factors might explain this variation in age among states? Consider that minorities tend to be younger on average than non-Hispanic whites and that some states have higher rates of reproduction, and thus more children, than other states do.

Other contrasts between cities and states involve education. In 2008, approximately 27.5 percent of the American population aged 25 and older held a bachelor’s degree or more. San Francisco led all large cities, with more than half its residents having completed at least undergraduate studies. Other highly educated cities included San Diego (40.4 percent), San Jose (36.1 percent), and New York (32.2 percent). The most educated states were Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, Virginia, New York,

| TABLE 14–1 |

Population of the United States by Region, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
Vermont, New Jersey, and Colorado (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 228). The District of Columbia has an even more educated populace than any state. Why might that be?

The foreign-born percentage of the United States overall was 12.7 percent in 2007, compared with 39.9 percent in Los Angeles, 39.8 percent in San Jose, 36.8 percent in New York City, and 35.3 percent in San Francisco. Conversely, Detroit (5.4 percent), Memphis (5.5 percent), Baltimore (5.8 percent), and Indianapolis (7.3 percent) were large cities where the foreign-born percentage was substantially below the national average.

Steven Holmes (1997) noted the emergence in the mid-to-late 1990s of a population trend in which white Americans move from minority-rich metropolitan areas, such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Detroit, to smaller towns and rural areas to escape urban gangs, crime, and pollution. This movement reverses a previous trend toward decline in the rural U.S. population. As metropolitan areas, including their suburbs, become more ethnically mixed, whites now are moving to exurbs, rural areas, and small towns. Supporting this trend is the decline of major urban industries. Large businesses and factories need their plants and workers concentrated in a particular area, but for small businesses the need is less. With modern transportation and communication systems, it’s easier than ever to conduct business from non-metropolitan areas. Most of the target states of the new white flight have been in the West. Holmes (1997) thinks that current population shifts may be increasing racial and ethnic polarization. Certain states, mainly along the East and West Coasts, are becoming more heterogeneous, while other regions, such as the Rocky Mountain states, the upper Midwest, and New England remain overwhelmingly white.

Regional differences (and regional stereotypes, which, like ethnic stereotypes, are often negative) still exist and have social significance. American national prejudice against southern accents surely has affected public evaluations of Presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Because southern speech continues to be stigmatized, southerners who move outside the South usually change their speech to fit national norms or to meet new local standards. With speech closer to national norms, northerners who are transplanted to Atlanta are more secure linguistically than are Atlantans in New York. Northerners feel less need to trade in their speech for a more favored dialect.

Regional differences involve not just speech, but also religion, politics, race, and ethnicity. The American South traditionally has been a region of Protestantism and political conservatism, whereas Boston and New York are, respectively, more Catholic and more Jewish (and both more liberal) than the rest of the country. Those who are different by virtue of religion have faced persecution in many areas of the United States. Best known in the South, the Ku Klux Klan (which originated in Michigan) has attacked Catholics and Jews as well as blacks. The year 2010 witnessed resistance to the construction of Islamic cultural centers and mosques from New York City to Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Nevertheless, Mosques have joined Protestant churches, Roman Catholic chapels, and Jewish synagogues in many states and Canadian provinces. For members of all those religions, this spread of their houses of worship makes it easier to maintain their participation even as they relocate and travel.
Regions are adapting to globalization. Today, there are Asian and Latino restaurants, and Asian and Latino immigrants, all over the United States and Canada. With the growth of larger communities (including virtual communities and self-conscious, politically organized diasporas), transnational migration, and other globalizing trends, regional difference per se may become less important.

Or maybe not. Robert D. Kaplan (1994) speculates that regional and ethnic identities could threaten the United States and Canada. Politically, the American South increasingly stands out as a region of more conservative politics than the rest of the country. Compared with the United States, Canada is more split by region, language, and culture (English-speaking Canada versus Québec), as well as by political orientation (with more regionally defined political parties in its multiparty system). Canada features a major linguistic contrast associated with region, pitting French-speaking Québec against the rest of the country, where mainly English is spoken. In the United States one is more likely to hear Spanish in California, Florida, New Mexico, New York, and Texas than in other states. California, the scene of so much immigration, particularly from Asia, has more linguistic diversity than other states have. But, as we’ll see in Chapter 15, multilingualism faces a tougher road in the United States than it has faced in Canada.

Geographic Mobility

Americans move around a lot. Consider the authors. Kottak was born and raised in Atlanta, studied in New York City, spent most of his life in Michigan, and now makes his primary residence in coastal South Carolina. Kozaitis moved from Greece to Michigan and now lives in Atlanta.

Because of cultural background, historical experience, economic necessity, and media reinforcement, Americans are mobile, exploratory people. Our fondness for mobility and for wide-open spaces is not characteristic of all cultures. Brazilians, for instance, tend to prefer densely packed cities and constant human contact. The pursuit of the frontier has created an American history replete with travel, adventure, and encounters with strangers. Growing up in the United States still entails separation from those who raised us. Issues of venturing out, leaving home (breaking away from family and, perhaps, from class background), and creating ties with strangers have been critically important in American history. It is no wonder then that so many American creations, from literature to the mass media, express these themes—our willingness "to boldly go where no one has gone before."

Costs of moving include loss of personal contact with and support from close family and friends and disruption of children’s schooling. Benefits of migration may include better opportunities for social integration, a safer environment, or a more pleasant climate. However, the primary reason to migrate is to increase earnings (Borjas 1994). A labor market with substantial geographic mobility results in higher labor force participation. Our economy encourages flexibility in hiring and firing practices, and ongoing changes in conditions of work, types of jobs, and job descriptions. Accordingly, and compared to other technologically and economically advanced societies, the United States has a more mobile workforce.
According to Rodgers and Rodgers, “moving has a significant, positive effect on earnings” (2000, p. 124). Six years after moving, the earnings of migrants had increased about 20 percent over what they would have been without the move. The financial benefits were greatest for men younger than 40 years old and with household incomes below $50,000 (Rodgers and Rodgers 2000, pp. 124–129).

Not surprisingly, moving rates are associated with aspects of diversity. Young adults, renters, Hispanics, Asians, poor people, and well-educated people are the most likely to move (Bergman 2004). College graduates are more likely to move than are Americans without a college education. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, five years after graduating from college, 30 percent of graduates move out of the state where they went to college. What was the reason for your last move?

People move seeking stronger economies, lower unemployment rates, higher earnings, lower housing costs, retirement havens, and ethnic homogeneity (Kodrzycki 2001). The last illustrates a phenomenon that has been characterized as “white flight.” The populations of the West and especially the South continue to increase, as those of the Midwest and Northeast decline, both relatively and absolutely. The 10 states whose populations increased the most between 2000 and 2008 were all in the West and South. In order, they were Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Georgia, Idaho, Texas, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 13). Many of these states experienced both state-to-state and international immigration. Migration from more to less ethnically diverse communities also occurs within states, as is shown in the next section in a discussion of two contemporary communities in Michigan.

The American moving rate declined from 14 percent in 2001 to 12 percent in 2008 (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 30). A slump in the U.S. housing market that began in 2007 has made moving more complicated. Although mortgage rates are at historic lows, it has become much more difficult to qualify for a loan than it was during the housing boom that preceded the bust. Americans today have the chance to buy low, but they must sell low as well, if they can. The need to sell a previous home before acquiring a new one complicates the moving process and keeps Americans tied down to place, unless they choose the foreclosure route, as many have done.

When Americans do move it is for all sorts of reasons. Education is an important one. Chances are you’re reading this book on a college campus, or perhaps commuting to one, hopefully via public transportation. You are away from home, and eventually you plan to have a place of your own. If you are residing out of state, you may seek a summer job there, or somewhere else entirely, rather than in the state you came from. When you graduate, you may be willing to look for the best job available, no matter what its distance from your hometown.

Primed to travel if necessary to make it on their own, Americans are predestined commuters. There are many forms of commuting. For some it’s a matter of daily physical commuting via automobile or mass transit. Some married couples, residing duolocally (maintaining separate residences near their different workplaces), see each other on weekends or during leaves or vacations from their jobs. Business travelers and tourists have fueled the growth of hotels as homes away from home. It has become
much easier than it used to be to maintain contact with home and office, by phone or electronically, even as we move. Access to the Internet has become a necessity, for business travelers and all others who have come to depend on “connectedness,” including social networking, through cyberspace.

Kottak can transport the laptop computer on which he is currently writing (at home, as it happens) anywhere he goes. With his built-in wireless card and his smartphone, he can surf the Internet at will and check his e-mail almost anywhere he is physically. Via e-mail and phone he has maintained his ties with his son in northern Mozambique and his daughter in the southeastern United States. During times of little activity, Kottak even chaired his anthropology department from afar via e-mail, phone, and fax. The futurists were right: The virtual office has arrived. Such constant long-distance communication was impossible a generation ago. The ability to work through cyberspace via the Internet is one reason for the decline in the American moving rate in recent years.

Cyberspace

Cyberspace describes the nonphysical universe created by computer systems—the world of the Internet and online participation. Online systems allow people to do research, get information, communicate with one another, shop, play, fantasize, and imagine. Some programs, particularly computer games, create a virtual reality, in which users receive sensory feedback that makes cyberspace feel more real.

Researchers disagree about the effects of computer-mediated communication on face-to-face social interaction. Some contend that online interaction, including such social networking sites as Facebook, is promoting the decline of face-to-face social relations. Actually, a trend toward impersonality in industrial societies is much older. Social scientists long have linked a decline of face-to-face interactions to urbanization. In several books, the anthropologist Robert Redfield (1941) contrasted rural communities, whose daily social relations are on a personal basis, with cities, where impersonality, including constant interaction with strangers, characterizes many aspects of life.

In many ways cyberspace is like New York City—filled with impersonality, anonymity, and strangers. The city never sleeps, but its residents do sleep, wake up, and work in different spaces, having little contact with their residential neighbors. At work they interact with their co-workers. Outside work they get together in varied settings with family, friends, and others who share their interests. Online communication can play a role in integrating physical communities by providing residents with information about local events and common concerns, such as severe weather (see Kling 1996). The Internet plays an even stronger role in promoting social integration by facilitating regular communication among family, friends, and groups based on identity and affinity (people with common identities, conditions, experiences, or interests, especially based on work). One of its main roles has been to establish and maintain links between physically dispersed people, especially family, friends, and workmates, who have much—and come to have more—in common.

The Internet links people in different regions, even nations, in a common communication network. As it is the favored language in commerce, English has become
the key language of international cyberspace. Because of this, online communication may be promoting linguistic uniformity, even as it reinforces other kinds of diversity, for example, affinity groups based on special interests (e.g., those that lead people to different chat rooms, user groups, and other Internet forums).

In UCLA’s World Internet Project, as described by Evans (2004), a series of questions explored whether the Internet helped increase contact with family and friends and/or with affinity groups—people who share hobbies, politics, religion, or profession. The percentage of users who said they had increased their contacts with family and friends through the Internet ranged from a high of 44 percent in the United States to 11 percent in Germany and 8 percent in urban China. A whopping 47 percent of urban Chinese users said the Internet had strengthened their contacts with people who shared their hobbies or recreational activities. In most countries, this figure ranged between 13 and 26 percent. In China, 21 percent of urban users said the Internet had put them in contact with people who shared their political interests. Elsewhere in the world this figure was under 10 percent, as were contacts with coreligionists. Professional contacts, by contrast, were much higher in all other countries, from the high 20 to the low 30 percents.

Interestingly, in all the countries surveyed, Internet users spent more time socializing in person with friends than nonusers did. In the United States, which was near the bottom in time spent with friends, Internet users barely edged out nonusers (8.4 versus 8.2 hours per week). The most social country sampled was Taiwan, where Internet users spent 23 hours a week with friends, compared with 18 hours for nonusers.

The UCLA researchers also concluded that Internet use comes mainly at the expense of watching TV. This trend, first observed in the United States, has become worldwide. American Internet users watch an average of 12 hours of TV per week, versus 17 hours for nonusers. In Germany it is 18 versus 23, and in Japan 21 versus 26 (Evans 2004).

Cities and Urbanites

Urbanization is the transformation of rural, or agrarian, social organization into organized life in cities. Most Americans are urbanites; they live in or near an urban area, which is a spatial concentration of inhabitants, whose lives depend on a services and information economy, including low-skilled, low-income jobs, midlevel professions, and highly credentialed and high-paying careers. Cities are spaces that accommodate more sociocultural diversity and stratification than do suburbs, exurbs, small towns, or farming communities.

Urban anthropology is the anthropological study of cities. Anthropologists have investigated urban issues, problems, social organization, and lifestyles in North America and abroad. For example, from her classic ethnographic study of a small city in the American Midwest, anthropologist Carol Stack discovered that close-knit social networks can exist in urban settings. Her book *All Our Kin* (1975) shows the strength of expanded family networks and of close-knit, kin-based relationships among urban African Americans. Ethnographers have influenced social policy by showing that
strong kin ties exist in city neighborhoods whose social organization often is considered fragmented or problematic.

One expression of being different is residential preference. Many of us have place orientations just as we have sexual orientations. Some people hate New York; some think it’s a nice place to visit; and many can’t imagine living anywhere else. Arriving in the city, migrants from small towns may discover their “little town blues are melting away.” Many people like cities precisely because of the impersonality, anonymity, freedom, and challenges they offer. Lots of Americans enjoy living in, or at least visiting, places where nobody (rather than everyone) knows your name. “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” To some extent, the anonymity of urban life can be replicated in cyberspace, where we can, more or less privately, craft new identities and chart personal paths in search of new images and information.

Cities themselves tend to be more diverse than smaller places are, and many of the groups discussed so far in this book tend to be overrepresented in cities. (That is, members of such groups are more likely to live in cities than in other places, and their demographic percentages are higher in cities than they are in the nation as a whole.) The ethnic and racial diversity of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, and Toronto is well known. Cities are known not only for their ethnic mix but also for their ethnic clashes, of which the most extreme (given the diversity of ethnic groups and intensity of passions) was probably the Los Angeles riots of 1992. Such cities tend to be politically liberal; to have a higher percentage of Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus,
and Buddhists than smaller communities do; and also to have larger and more concentrated gay, lesbian, and transgender populations. Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco–Oakland, and Toronto all have recognized gay and lesbian districts.

Differing in income, household organization, and ethnic affiliation, neighborhoods influence their residents’ quality of life and their opportunities for upward mobility. In low-income neighborhoods, recreational and learning opportunities for children are limited. Parents save money to buy a house “in a good neighborhood,” with “a good school,” typically meaning a middle-class neighborhood.

The market fuels patterns of housing inequities and “location inequalities” (Alba, Logan, and Stults 2000, p. 589). Immigrants tend to live near other low-income minorities. This may be in an inner-city barrio, ghetto, or neighborhood, or it may be along old highways that radiate out from cities like Atlanta. Acculturation and upward mobility may offer a “ticket out” of the ethnic enclave and into more integrated, higher-income neighborhoods. One study of ethnic groups in five metropolitan areas found non-Hispanic whites to be the most “locationally advantaged.” Most disadvantaged were African Americans, with Asians and Latinos/as falling in between (Logan et al. 1996).

Gentrification is the purchase and revitalization of abandoned and low-value homes and neighborhoods by middle- and upper-class people and corporate developers. Tax incentives may be offered to increase the concentration of wealthier residents and merchants in such areas. Urban renewal projects aim to improve infrastructure, repopulate the cities, and enhance the quality of urban life.

Improvements in infrastructure attract new businesses and new residents. Property values tend to rise, as does the morale of people who can afford to live there. Renewal and gentrification may diversify an urban population, while also reinforcing racism and classism. Low-income residents who are forced out of their old neighborhoods typically find, at best, only substandard housing in other parts of the city. The underprivileged may lose access to jobs, transportation, and schools.

The relationship between someone’s residence and his or her identity may be one of pride or of shame, internally or externally constructed. Identity markers involving loyalty to space and place distinguish and divide urbanites from suburbanites and farmers, northerners from southerners, and New York Yankees fans from the “Red Sox Nation.” However, space and place may constitute a “limited good,” signifying sharp discrepancies in the quality of life that favor some segments of the population over others. When this happens, where we live may change from being primarily a personal issue and become a matter for political action aimed at redressing residential and locational inequities.

Human rights campaigns may arise to combat discrimination based on space and place. Grass-roots organization by local stakeholders can include former residents, small-business owners, school officials, and community development corporations (CDCs). Such self-empowered change agents work to improve local conditions, including better opportunities for employment, schools, housing, and spaces for recreation and leisure.

Popular images of “city life” and “the inner city,” especially stereotypes held by suburbanites, town dwellers, and rural residents, involve sexual freedom, risk,
crime, fear, broken families, strangeness, decadence, and poverty. Cities may be seen as places where our “passions come to life.” And indeed, among the human traits and passions that find expression in metropolitan centers are visual, performing, and culinary arts, as well as sports, human rights campaigns, child rearing, other forms of clean recreational activities, and plain-old wholesome fun.

In contemporary North America, a few true cities, such as New York, San Francisco, Montreal, and Toronto, recall such European cities as Amsterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. Known as the city that doesn’t sleep, New York is the truest American city. All kinds of people (men, women, old, young, gay, straight, drunk, sober, addicted, drug-free, of all races and ethnic groups) use its urban space 24 hours a day. Many other cities shut down at night, except for marginal groups, such as the homeless.

In much of North America, people commute by car from suburbs and exurbs to work in cities. In Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Washington, downtown residential areas tend to be marked racially and ethnically. The populations of such downtowns are much more varied during the workday than at night. In these typical American metro centers, much of the daytime urban population is car dependent and commutes from outlying areas. Millions of Americans and Canadians commute daily, working in the city while keeping and educating their children in the suburbs and exurbs. Inner cities, suburbs, exurbs, and rural areas vary markedly in what we might call their diversity index. This contrast has political implications. Downtown residents tend to vote for Democrats, whereas exurbanites and small-town dwellers tend to prefer Republicans.

Small towns, at the other extreme from cities, are known for various expressions of homogeneity, such as racial/ethnic uniformity, conformity, reduced privacy, constant public scrutiny, restricted lifestyle choices, and political and social conservatism. For generations, social scientists have used face-to-face social relations to contrast small towns with the more impersonal ties that characterize cities. Despite a recent resurgence in small-town, exurban, and rural living, the decline of the small town has provided fodder for numerous books, TV shows, and movies. Even though small-town life may be reviving today, it is vastly different from how it was one or two generations ago. Satellite, cable, and Netflix may have doomed small-town movie houses, but there may be a resurgence of small-town-center life as more affluent people move in. Modern telecommunication systems allow most small-town residents, including dispersed small businesses, to be as much a part of the televised and online worlds as urbanites are.

**Lifestyles and Small Towns**

What draws contemporary Americans to small towns, exurbs, and rural areas? Reasons to move aren’t just economic. People have to make lifestyle choices, balancing work, family, and personal needs. Brian Hoey (2005, 2006, 2008) has described “lifestyle migration” from urban centers like Detroit and Chicago to more tranquil locales such as Traverse City, Michigan, where he does ethnographic research. Hoey’s “lifestyle migrants” include professional men and women who have chosen a calmer and less materialistic lifestyle in Traverse City over their former harried corporate
work schedules and/or long commutes. Usually they choose jobs that pay less or new business ventures that offer greater flexibility and self-fulfillment than working for bosses and in impersonal work settings. Individual self-fulfillment is a prime factor in such lifestyle migration. Among the factors that draw people, usually white, to Traverse City are its spectacular natural scenery, including views of Grand Traverse Bay; its public schools; and its reduced crime level.

Similar factors (excluding the view) draw young couples and families to Dexter, a small town of about 10,000 people in southeastern Michigan, which has been studied ethnographically by Lara Descartes and Conrad Kottak, one of your authors (Descartes and Kottak 2009). Founded in the 19th century, originally as a farming community, Dexter has grown rapidly in recent years, reflecting, among other things, its pleasant small-town atmosphere, and the reputation of its public schools. It also is within fairly easy driving distance of the universities, colleges, and hospitals of the Ann Arbor area, and is in commuting distance of such larger centers as Detroit, Dearborn, Flint, Jackson, and Lansing.

Dexter consists of a village center and a surrounding township. Older farmhouses are spread throughout the township, interspersed with new subdivisions of high-end homes built on converted farmland. The drive from the outer limits of the township to the town center can take half an hour or more and can involve long stretches of dirt roads. All the schools and most of the township’s services are located in the central village (Descartes, Kottak, and Kelly 2007).

Dexter is an ethnically homogeneous, almost all white, community where middle-class parents move their families and then travel out to their jobs. Half the township residents who commute to work drive one-way for a half hour or more; 18 percent have an even longer drive—45 minutes or more each way (U.S. Census 2000). Men usually have the longest commutes, in part because they are likely to hold good professional jobs, which are scarce in Dexter itself. Women who work for pay tend to seek jobs closer to home, in order to be more available for their children.

Young families who choose to live in Dexter make tough choices in balancing the expectations and demands of work, family, and lifestyle. The men (and a few women) with long daily commutes work at well-paying, but often demanding and sometimes inflexible, jobs in order to support themselves, their families, and their households. They have precisely the kinds of daily schedules that motivate people to move to Traverse City and “downsize” their financial expectations, accepting “a view of the Bay for half the pay” (Hoey). Mothers in Dexter usually work part-time or “stay at home”—a misnomer when one considers their actual daily routines, to be described shortly. Many of Dexter’s women have postponed (and in some cases have abandoned—intentionally or not) the professional careers to which their degrees might entitle them. Instead, they spend much of their time engaged in activities designed to enhance their children’s success. They live in a safe, homogeneous, middle-class community with access to excellent public schools. The trade-off is that they, like their husbands (and millions of other middle-class Americans), spend considerable time moving through schedules set by someone else.

According to U.S. Census figures, between 1990 and 2000, Dexter’s village and township populations grew almost 30 percent. The racial/ethnic composition remained
overwhelmingly (98 percent) white. Most children in Dexter, including 96 percent of township children, live with two parents. Most (78 percent) of the two-parent families in Dexter have two incomes. If only one parent is employed, it's usually the father. Women who work for pay are far more likely than men to work part-time. Dexter’s working fathers include many doctors, lawyers, scientists, and engineers. Dexter’s professionally trained women have degrees in nursing, dental hygiene, education, and social work.

The children of such couples are firmly in the middle class, and their parents intend for them to stay there. Hays (1996) shows how middle-class American mothers believe that having their children participate in diverse extracurricular activities provides them with “appropriate cultural capital” (p. 159) for their future class positions (see also Warner 2005). Lareau (2003) describes how such activities, which build self-confidence in dealing with authority figures, facilitate subsequent employment in the white-collar world. Fletcher, Elder, and Mekos (2000) report that adolescent involvement in extracurricular activities corresponds to better high school performance and increased likelihood of attending college. However, as most American parents know all too well, participation in such activities is complicated by transportation issues. Dexter’s “stay-at-home” women may spend even more time behind the wheel than its commuting men do.

Extensive driving time is necessary to get children to the many activities of middle-class childhood (see Descartes, Kottak, and Kelly 2007). Such activities included T-ball, Little League, soccer, hockey, dance, horseback riding, drama workshop, language class, religious studies, basketball camp, medical care, tutoring, music lessons, and music therapy. Many of these activities take place outside the community proper. Dexter lacks the population density needed to provide such an array of specialized services and activities locally. Thus, parents may have to get one child to music lessons in Ann Arbor at the same time that another child has soccer in a town 20 miles away. Even if a service is available in Dexter, selection is limited, and parents may choose to go elsewhere. For example, some parents drove an extra 15–30 minutes one way to get their child to a preferred allergy specialist or day care.

Daily child transportation is complicated further by the fact that many Dexter parents don’t want their children riding school buses for up to an hour each way. Even parents who let their kids ride the bus may have to get a child directly from school for extracurricular activities. One mother complained that she had to pick her son up from school to allow him to attend soccer practice 30 minutes after school in a town that is a 20-minute drive away. This activity was actually scheduled by the school system, yet no school-based transportation was provided.

Another kind of lifestyle move is for retirement. People seek milder climates—and perhaps lower taxes—in the South and West. (Florida, for example, has no state income tax.) In gated communities from South Carolina to Arizona, seniors find relative safety and a demographic homogeneity that compares with that of Dexter, Michigan, except the people are older. Millions of older Americans live in middle-class, mostly white, gated communities throughout the United States, but most notably in the South and West. So great can be the desire for homogeneity that some such communities even ban children as permanent residents. The United States now contains
hundreds of age-restricted communities. One is Sun City, Arizona, a town of more than 40,000 residents located outside Phoenix (Lacey 2010). To remain a restricted retirement community, at least 80 percent of Sun City’s homes must have at least one occupant aged 55 or older. By statute, no newborn, toddler, child, adolescent, or teenager can call Sun City home. Households are allowed limited child visiting time: 90 days per year total. For someone with 10 grandchildren, each one can visit for nine days each. (Note that Traverse City, Dexter, and Sun City all are at least 96 percent white.)

Most senior-oriented communities lack such rigid age restrictions, even though less than 10 percent of their population may be below 50 years of age. Often these are havens where older white people attempt to re-create the kinds of social relations they remember from their high school days. Local social organization, like that of a high school, may include teams and cliques based on sports—golf and tennis now versus football, basketball, band and cheerleading back then. Exchange clubs offer senior citizens the chance to participate in service organizations similar to those (e.g., Demolay) they joined in high school. More progressive residents, like high school outsiders, often find fault with the lack of diversity and the Republican politics usually characteristic of such communities. Not only retirees live in such communities; older working people can still lead active lives elsewhere through the electronic office.

The American Periphery

We’ve just examined the growth of small towns and rural areas that are attracting more affluent residents—even as thousands of others shed population and stagnate. Poverty in North America has rural as well as urban expressions. Job scarcity in rural areas is a prime reason for rural–urban migration, including across national borders. In a comparative study of two counties at opposite ends of Tennessee, Thomas Collins (1989) studied the effects of industrialization on poverty and unemployment in these rural areas. Hill County, with an Appalachian white population, is on the Cumberland Plateau in eastern Tennessee. Delta County, predominantly African American, is 60 miles from Memphis in western Tennessee’s lower Mississippi region. Both counties once had economies based on agriculture and timber, but jobs in those sectors declined sharply with the advent of mechanization. Both counties maintain unemployment rates more than twice that of Tennessee as a whole. More than a third of the people in each county live below the poverty level. Given very restricted job opportunities, the best-educated local youths have migrated to northern cities for three generations.

To increase jobs, local officials and business leaders have tried to attract industries from outside. Their efforts exemplify a more general rural southern strategy, which began during the 1950s, of courting industry by advertising a good business climate, meaning low rents, cheap utilities, and a nonunion labor pool. However, few firms are attracted to an impoverished and poorly educated workforce. All the industries that have come to such areas have very limited market power and a narrow profit margin. Such firms survive by offering low wages and minimal benefits, with frequent layoffs. These industries tend to emphasize traditional female skills such as sewing, and they mostly attract women.
At the time of Collins's study, the garment industry, which is highly mobile, was Hill County’s main employer. The knowledge that a garment plant can be moved to another site very rapidly tends to reduce employee demands. Management can be as arbitrary and authoritarian as it wishes. The high unemployment rate and low educational level ensured that many women would accept sewing jobs for a bit more than the minimum wage.

In neither county had new industry brought many jobs for men, who had a higher unemployment rate than did women (as did blacks, compared to whites). Collins (1989) found that many men in Hill County had never been permanently employed; instead, they worked temporary jobs, always for cash.

The effects of industrialization in Delta County were similar. That county’s recruitment efforts likewise had attracted only marginal industries. The largest was a bicycle seat and toy manufacturer, which employed 60 percent women. Three other large plants, which made clothing and auto seat covers, employed 95 percent women.

In both counties the men maintained an informal economy. They sold and traded used goods through personal networks. They took casual jobs, such as operating farm equipment on a daily or seasonal basis. Collins found that maintaining an automobile was the most important and prestigious contribution these men made to their families. Neither county had public transportation; Hill County even lacked school buses. Families needed cars to get women to work and kids to school. The men who kept an old car running longest got special respect.

Collins (1989) found that the limited opportunities for men to do well at work created feelings of lowered self-worth, which expressed itself in physical violence. The rate of domestic violence in Hill County exceeded the state average. Spousal abuse arose from men’s demands to control women’s paychecks. (Men regarded the cash they earned themselves as their own, to spend on male activities.)

One important difference between the two counties involved labor unions, which were more developed in Delta County. At the time of the study, there was just one unionized plant in Delta County, but recent campaigns for unionization at two other factories had failed in close votes. In the rural South, attitudes toward workers’ rights tend to correlate with race. Rural southern whites, such as those in Tennessee’s Hill County, usually don’t vote for unions when they have a chance to do so. African Americans are more likely to challenge management about pay and work rules and to unionize. Local blacks tend to view their work situation in terms of black against white, rather than from a position of working-class solidarity. They are attracted to unions because they see only whites in managerial positions and resent differential advancement of white factory workers. One manager told Collins that “once the workforce of a plant becomes more than one-third black, you can expect to have union representation within a year” (Collins 1989, p. 10). Considering the probability of unionization, businesses have avoided building plants in the primarily African-American counties of the lower Mississippi, preferring instead the “whiter” central and eastern parts of the state.

Poverty pockets in the rural South (and other areas of contemporary North America) should not be viewed as pristine survivors from a more rural past but as influenced by larger trends, including the expansion of industry and world capitalism. Through mechanization, industrialization, and other changes promoted by larger
systems, local people have been deprived of land and jobs. After years of industrial development, a third of the people of Hill and Delta counties remain below the poverty level. Emigration of educated and talented people continues as local opportunities shrink. Collins (1989) concluded that rural poverty will not be reduced by attracting additional marginal industries, because such firms lack the market power to improve wages and benefits. Different development schemes are needed for these counties and the rural South generally. Or maybe, someday, affluent gentrifiers from outside may move in and build electronic offices.

The Income Gap by State

Diversity in the places and spaces we inhabit is correlated with our exposure to other kinds of diversity, including that based on class, employment, and income. Figure 14–1 shows state-by-state variation in the gap between average family incomes of the top and bottom fifths (quintiles) of each state’s population in 2008. The states with the largest income gaps were New York, Alabama, Mississippi, Massachusetts, Tennessee, New Mexico, Connecticut, California, Texas, and Kentucky (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities 2008). In New York, where the gap was widest, the richest fifth had an average income 8.7 times that of the poorest fifth. The very richest New York families, the top 5 percent, had an average income 15.4 times that of the poorest 20 percent. In Utah, the state where the gap was narrowest, the comparable figures were 5.4 and 8.1. The states with the smallest gaps included Utah, North Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Maine, Nebraska, and Minnesota. Looking at these lists and at Figure 14–1, can you conclude anything about the relationship between the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity of a state and its income gap?

**FIGURE 14–1** The Income Gap by State, 2008

New York, California, and Texas all have large populations of immigrants, who tend to accept lower wages for unskilled labor than do native-born Americans. These states also have high-tech industries and large concentrations of well-educated professionals, working in services and information processing. Widening the family income gap are their higher salaries and tendency to choose domestic partners with similar professions. The decline in manufacturing jobs and union benefits in many states also has contributed to a widening income gap (Gallagher 2006).

Some states are markedly poorer than others are. The states with the highest poverty rates in 2007 were Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, Arkansas, Kentucky, Alabama, West Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. All but one (New Mexico) voted for Republican John McCain for president of the United States in 2008. The states with the highest family incomes in 2008 were Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Hawaii, Alaska, Virginia, Rhode Island, and Minnesota. All but one (Alaska) voted for President Obama in 2008. How might you explain those voting patterns in relation to income, poverty, and other factors? Why do you think the poorer states tend to vote Republican for president while the more prosperous states tend to prefer Democrats?

**Key Terms**

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<td>cyberspace</td>
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CHAPTER 15

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

REFLECTIONS: BECAUSE OF THE RUNT

❖ Linguistic Relativism
❖ Sociolinguistics: The Study of Linguistic Diversity
   Gender Speech Contrasts
   Stratification and Symbolic Domination
❖ Linguistic Diversity and Inequality
   Black English Vernacular (BEV), aka Ebonics
   Nativists and Relativists
   The Language of Power

BECAUSE OF THE RUNT

Depending on where they live, North Americans have certain stereotypes about how people in other regions, and nations, talk. Some stereotypes, spread by the mass media, are more generalized than others. Most Americans think they can imitate a southern accent. They also have nationwide stereotypes about speech in New York City (the pronunciation of coffee, for example) and Boston (“I pahked the kah in Hahvahd Yahl”).

Many Americans also believe that midwesterners don’t have accents. This belief stems from the fact that midwestern dialects don’t have many stigmatized linguistic variants—speech patterns that people in other regions recognize and look down on, such as r-lessness and dem, dese, and dere (instead of them, these, and there).

Actually, regional patterns influence the way all Americans speak. Midwesterners do have detectable accents. College students from out of state easily recognize that their in-state classmates speak differently. In-state students, however, have difficulty hearing their own speech peculiarities because they are accustomed to them and view them as normal.

In Detroit-area high schools, sociolinguist Penelope Eckert, as described in her book Jocks and Burnouts (1989), studied variation in speech correlated with high school social categories. Eckert’s study revealed links between speech and social status, the local high school manifestation of a larger and underlying American social class system. Social variation showed up most clearly in the division of the high school population into two main categories—jocks and burnouts.

Along with teachers, administrators, and parents (particularly jock parents), jocks helped maintain the school’s formal and traditional social structure. They participated more in athletics, student government, and organized school-based activities. In contrast, burnouts (a social label derived from their tendency to smoke cigarettes)
had their main social networks in their neighborhoods. They took school social structure less seriously.

A comparable split exists in many American public high schools, although the specific names of the two categories vary from place to place. Jocks have also been called preppies or tweeds, and burnouts have been called freaks, greasers, hoods, and rednecks. No matter what the opposed groups have been called in different regions and at different times, the social division always correlates with linguistic differences. Many adult speech habits are set when people are teens, as adolescents copy the speech of people they like and admire. Because jocks and burnouts move in different social systems, they come to talk differently.

The first step in a sociolinguistic study is to determine which speech forms vary. In New York City, the pronunciation of $r$ varies systematically with social class and thus can be used in studies of sociolinguistic variation. However, this feature doesn’t vary much among midwesterners, most of whom are adamant $r$ pronouncers. However, vowel pronunciation does vary considerably among midwesterners and can be used in a sociolinguistic study.

Far from having no accents, midwesterners, even in the same high school, demonstrate sociolinguistic variation. Furthermore, dialect differences in Michigan are immediately obvious to people from other parts of the country. One of the best examples of variable vowel pronunciation is the /e/ phoneme, which occurs in words like ten, rent, French, section, lecture, effect, best, and test. In southeastern Michigan there are four different ways of pronouncing this phoneme. Speakers of black English and immigrants from Appalachia often pronounce ten as “tin,” just as southerners habitually do. Some Michiganders say “ten,” the correct pronunciation in standard English. However, two other pronunciations are more common. Instead of “ten,” many Michiganders say “tan” or “tun” (as though they were using the word ton, a unit of weight).

Kottak’s Michigan students often astound him with their pronunciations. One day he met one of his Michigan-raised teaching assistants in the hall. She was deliriously happy. When Kottak asked why, she replied, “I’ve just had the best suction.”

“What?” Kottak queried.

“I’ve just had a wonderful suction,” she repeated.

“What?” He still wasn’t understanding.

She finally spoke more precisely. “I’ve just had the best section.” She considered this a clearer pronunciation of the word section.

Another TA once complimented Kottak, “You luctured to great effuct today.” After an exam a student lamented that she hadn’t been able to do her “bust on the tust.” Once Kottak lectured about uniformity in fast-food restaurant chains. One of his students had just vacationed in Hawaii, where, she told him, hamburger prices were higher than they were on the mainland. It was, she said, because of the runt. Who, Kottak wondered, was this runt? The very puny owner of Honolulu’s McDonald’s franchise? Perhaps he advertised on television, “Come have a hamburger with the runt.” Eventually Kottak figured out that she was talking about the high cost of rent on those densely packed islands.
Just as there are no documented differences in brain complexity among contemporary human populations, no one has ever shown the intrinsic superiority of any language or dialect over another. The doctrine of linguistic relativism recognizes all known languages and dialects as effective means of communication. This doctrine contradicts popular beliefs and stereotypes. Many French people, for example, believe theirs is the only appropriate language for civilized conversation (and they are eager to ban foreign word contamination from their mass media). Many British and North Americans assert the superiority of English as a commercial language. (It is true that the vocabularies of particular languages do grow and develop as they are used repeatedly in particular contexts. However, any language used in a given context can undergo such a process of growth and differentiation, sometimes by borrowing foreign terms, sometimes by elaborating its own.)

Claims of intrinsic linguistic superiority are actually based on cultural rather than linguistic developments. The use of language in particular contexts reflects world politics and economics rather than inherent properties of the language itself. In creating and imposing a nation-state, and thereafter a world empire, the French spread their culture through their language. They asserted to the provinces they attached and the people they conquered that they were engaged in a civilizing mission. They came to equate the French language with civilization itself.

The contemporary use and distribution of a language reflect factors other than features of the language itself. One language spoken in China has more native speakers than English does not because it is a better language but because the population that speaks it has multiplied as a result of nonlinguistic factors. English is the native language of British people, North Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, and many South Africans because of English colonization and conquest. The success of this colonization and conquest had nothing to do with the language itself. Weapons, ships, commerce, and sociopolitical organization played decisive roles.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago a western African (proto-Bantu) population lived in a small area of what is now Nigeria and Cameroon. Today the linguistic descendants of the proto-Bantu populace cover most of central and southern Africa. This population did not expand because their languages were superior as means of communication. Rather, they grew, prospered, and spread because they developed a highly competitive cultural adaptation based on iron tools and weapons and very productive food crops.

No language or dialect can confer, by virtue of its purely linguistic qualities, a differential advantage on its speakers. Only the social evaluation of its speakers and, by extension, of the language itself can do this. Languages are flexible and constantly changing systems. They easily admit and adopt new items and new terms. Speakers modify old forms, borrow foreign words, and create entirely new expressions. This process is so common and constant that some nations, such as France, maintain agencies to safeguard the purity of the standard language and discourage its contamination by foreign words.
Actually, no language is a homogeneous system in which everyone speaks just as everyone else does. One reason for variation is geography, as in regional dialects and accents. The field of sociolinguistics investigates language in its social context, examining relationships between social and linguistic variation. Examples of linguistic variation associated with social divisions include the bilingualism of ethnic groups and speech patterns associated with particular social classes. To show that linguistic features correlate systematically with social, economic, and regional differences, the social attributes of speakers must be measured and related to speech (Labov 1972a).

As an illustration of the linguistic diversity encountered in all nation-states, consider contemporary North America. Besides English and French, Canada includes the languages of its First Nations (Native Americans) and many immigrants. Mexicans speak Indian languages as well as Spanish. In the United States, reflecting ethnic diversity, millions of Americans learn first languages other than English. Spanish is the most common. Most of these people eventually become bilingual, adding English as a second language. In many multilingual (including colonized) nations, people use two languages on different occasions—one in the home, for example, and the other on the job or in public.

Reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity, millions of Americans learn first languages other than English. Yet global linguistic richness is being reduced as people abandon their native languages for dominant and national languages. Shown here, an Apache woman transmits her ancestral language and culture to her grandchildren in Whiteriver, Arizona.
Table 15–1 shows languages spoken at home in the United States in 2007. Eighty percent of Americans speak only English at home, which means that 20 percent speak a language other than English. Spanish (12 percent) is by far the most common. Next comes Chinese, with about 1 percent of speakers—twice as many as the next language on the list (Tagalog).

Whether bilingual or not, we all vary our speech in different contexts; that is, we engage in style shifts. In certain parts of Europe, people regularly switch dialects. This phenomenon, known as diglossia, applies to “high” and “low” variants of the same language, for example, German and Flemish (spoken in Belgium). People use the high variant at universities and in writing, professions, and the mass media. They use the low variant for ordinary conversation with family members and friends.

Just as social situations influence speech, so do geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. Many dialects coexist in the United States and Canada with Standard (American or Canadian) English (SE). SE itself is a dialect that differs, say, from BBC English, which is the preferred dialect in Great Britain. All dialects are effective as systems of communication, which is the main job of language. Our tendency to think of particular dialects as better or worse than others is a social rather than a linguistic judgment. We rank certain speech patterns because we recognize that they are used by groups that we also rank. People who say *dese, dem, and dere* instead of *these, them, and there* communicate perfectly well with anyone who

**Table 15–1**

Languages Spoken at Home in the United States, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Speakers 5 Years Old and Older</th>
<th>Percentage of All Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak only English</td>
<td>225,506</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>34,547</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2,465</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog (Philippines)</td>
<td>1,480</td>
<td>LT1 Less than 1 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French (incl. Patois, Cajun)</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African languages</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Creole</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>LT1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 53.
recognizes that the \( d \) sound systematically replaces the \( th \) sound in their speech. However, this form of speech has become stigmatized, an indicator of low social rank. We call it, like the use of \( \text{ain’t} \), “uneducated speech.” The use of \( \text{dem} \), \( \text{dese} \), and \( \text{dere} \) is one of many phonological differences that Americans recognize and look down on.

**Gender Speech Contrasts**

Women’s speech tends to be more similar to the standard dialect than men’s is. Consider the data in Table 15–2, gathered in Detroit. In all social classes, but particularly in the working class, men were more apt to use double negatives (e.g., “I don’t want none”). Women are more careful about “uneducated speech.” This trend shows up in both the United States and England. Men may adopt working-class speech because they associate it with hard labor and thus with masculinity. Perhaps women pay more attention to the mass media, where standard dialects tend to be employed. Also, women may compensate for the socioeconomic barriers they have faced by copying the linguistic norms of upper-status groups.

According to Robin Lakoff (2004) and Deborah Tannen (1990), the use of certain types of words and expressions has reflected women’s lesser power in American society. For example, “Oh dear,” “Oh fudge,” and “Goodness!” are less forceful than “Hell,” “Damn,” and many stronger expressions. Men’s customary use of forceful words reflects their traditional public power and presence. Watch the lips of a disgruntled athlete in a televised competition, such as a football game. What’s the likelihood he’s saying “Phooey on you”? Men can’t normally use certain “women’s words” (*adorable*, *
charming*, *sweet*, *cute*, *lovely*, *divine*) without raising doubts about their masculinity.

In certain domains, such as sports and color terminology, men and women have different sorts of vocabularies. Men typically know more terms related to sports, make more distinctions among them (e.g., runs versus points), and try to use the terms more precisely than women do. Correspondingly, influenced more by the fashion and cosmetics industries than men are, women use more color terms and attempt to use them more specifically than men do. Thus, to make this point when lecturing on sociolinguistics, Kottak brings an off-purple shirt to class. Holding it up, he first asks women to say aloud what color the shirt is. The women rarely answer with a uniform voice,
as they try to distinguish the actual shade (mauve, lavender, wisteria, or some other purplish hue). He then asks the men, who consistently answer as one, “Purple.” Rare is the man who on the spur of the moment can imagine the difference between fuchsia and magenta.

Another gender contrast noted by Lakoff (2004), which she links to linguistic insecurity, is women’s greater tendency to end a declarative sentence with the intonation of a question? The gender difference even shows up in cyberspace communication. Using expletives or beginning a message with the salutation “Dude” suggests male identity. And female use of cyberspace sometimes shows some of the sociolinguistic insecurity that has been noted in other contexts (Tannen 1990; Lakoff 2004). From postings we have read, we suspect that women are more likely to end their messages with disclaimers, such as “But that’s just my opinion.”

Language is our principal means of communicating, but it isn’t the only one we use. We communicate whenever we transmit information about ourselves to others and receive such information from them. Our facial expressions, bodily stances, gestures, and movements, even if unconscious, convey information and are part of our communication styles. Deborah Tannen (1990, 1993) discusses differences in the communication styles of American men and women, and her comments go beyond language. She notes that girls and women tend to look directly at each other when they talk, whereas boys and men do not. Males are more likely to look straight ahead rather than to turn and make eye contact with someone, especially another man, seated beside them. Also, in conversational groups, men tend to relax and sprawl out. Women may adopt a similar relaxed posture in all-female groups, but when they are with men they tend to draw in their limbs and adopt a tighter stance.

Tannen (1990, 1993) uses the terms “rapport” and “report” to contrast women’s and men’s overall linguistic styles. Women, says Tannen, typically use language and the body movements that accompany it to build rapport, social connections with others. Men, on the other hand, tend to make reports, reciting information that serves to establish a place for themselves in a hierarchy, as they also attempt to determine the relative ranks of their conversation mates.

Interestingly, the rise of a service economy may be helping to mainstream feminine speech styles. In a study of telephone call-center operators in Great Britain, Cameron (2000) found a particular speech style to be the norm in customer service settings. This speech style emphasized affect, caring, empathy, accommodation, and sincerity—characteristics associated with the speech of women. Men working in customer service settings were also trained to use this communication style. Cameron notes that “the commodification of language in contemporary service workplaces is also in some sense the commodification of a quasi-feminine service persona” (2000, p. 324).

**Stratification and Symbolic Domination**

We use and evaluate speech—and language changes—in the context of extralinguistic forces: social, political, and economic. Mainstream Americans evaluate the speech of low-status groups negatively, calling it uneducated. This is not because these ways
of speaking are bad in themselves but because they have come to symbolize low status. Consider variation in the pronunciation of \( r \). In some parts of the United States, \( r \) is regularly pronounced, and in other (\( r \)-less) areas it is not. Originally, American \( r \)-less speech was modeled on the fashionable speech of England. Because of its prestige, \( r \)-lessness was adopted in many areas and continues as the norm around Boston and in the South.

New Yorkers sought prestige by dropping their \( r \)'s in the 19th century, after having pronounced them in the 18th. However, contemporary New Yorkers are going back to the 18th-century pattern of pronouncing \( r \)'s. What matters, and what governs linguistic change, is not the reverberation of a good strong midwestern \( r \), but social evaluation, whether \( r \)'s happen to be in or out.

Studies of \( r \) pronunciation in New York City have clarified the social mechanisms of phonological change. William Labov (1972b) focused on whether \( r \) was pronounced after vowels in such words as car, floor, card, and fourth. To get data on how this linguistic variation correlated with social class, he used a series of rapid encounters with employees in three New York City department stores, each of whose prices and locations attracted a different socioeconomic group. Saks Fifth Avenue (68 encounters) catered to the upper-middle class, Macy’s (125) attracted middle-class shoppers, and S. Klein’s (71) had predominantly lower-middle-class and working-class customers.
The class origins of salespeople in those stores tended to reflect those of their respective customers.

Having already determined that a certain department was on the fourth floor, Labov approached ground-floor salespeople and asked where that department was. After the salesperson had answered, “Fourth floor,” Labov repeated his “Where?” in order to get a second response. The second reply was more formal and emphatic, the salesperson presumably thinking that Labov hadn’t heard or understood the first answer. For each salesperson, therefore, Labov had two samples of r pronunciation in two words.

He calculated the percentages of workers who pronounced r at least once during the interview. These were 62 percent at Saks, 51 percent at Macy’s, but only 20 percent at S. Klein’s. Labov also found that personnel on upper floors, where he asked, “What floor is this?” (and where more expensive items were sold), pronounced r more often than ground-floor salespeople did.

In Labov’s study, r pronunciation was clearly associated with prestige. Certainly the job interviewers who had hired the salespeople never actually counted r’s before offering employment. However, they did use speech evaluations to make judgments about how effective certain people would be in selling particular kinds of merchandise. In other words, they practiced sociolinguistic discrimination, using linguistic features in deciding who got certain jobs.

In stratified societies, our speech habits help determine our access to employment, material resources, and positions of power and prestige. Because of this, “proper language” itself becomes a strategic resource—and a path to wealth, fame, and power (Gal 1989). Illustrating this, many ethnographers have described the importance of verbal skill and oratory in local-level politics (Bloch 1975). A “great communicator,” Ronald Reagan, dominated American society in the 1980s as a two-term president. Another twice-elected president, Bill Clinton, despite his southern accent, was known for his verbal skills in certain contexts (e.g., televised debates and town-hall meetings), and for his ability to achieve rapport (with some audiences) as well as report. Communications flaws may have damaged the presidencies of Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush. How would you describe the speech of the current president of the United States?

The French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu views linguistic practices as symbolic capital that properly trained people may convert into economic and social capital. The value of a dialect—it’s standing in a “linguistic market”—depends on the extent to which it provides access to desired positions in the labor market. In turn, this reflects its legitimation by formal institutions—the educational establishment, state, church, and prestige media. In stratified societies, where there is always differential control of prestige speech, even people who don’t use the prestige dialect accept its authority and correctness, its “symbolic domination” (Bourdieu 1982, 1984). Thus, linguistic forms, which lack power in themselves, take on the power of the groups and relations they symbolize. The education system, however (defending its own worth), denies this, misrepresenting prestige speech as being inherently better. The linguistic insecurity of lower-class and minority speakers is a result of this symbolic domination.

Research indicates that Americans can infer race and class from speech patterns (accents, grammar, and diction). Americans may use such information to discriminate. Real estate and rental agents, who may discriminate against people of color on sight,
also ascribe to prospective tenants a race or class category on the phone and discriminate accordingly. Phone tag and voice mail provide the means for “racial screening,” protecting the racist landlord from any discomfort or inconvenience that would arise in a face-to-face rejection (Massey and Lundy 2001, pp. 454–455). Telephone audit studies provide one measure of racial discrimination in urban housing markets. One such study of 79 rental units in Philadelphia showed that rental agents do systematically discriminate against African-American callers on the basis of speech. Researchers called rental agents to inquire about apartments listed in the local papers, using one of three linguistic styles: white middle-class English, black accented English, and Black English Vernacular (BEV).

Speech marks race, class, and gender, and speech influenced a caller’s likelihood of reaching a rental agent and of obtaining a rental unit. Compared to whites, African Americans were less likely to get through and speak to a rental agent and to be told of a unit’s availability, and more likely to pay application fees and be questioned about their credit history. The findings indicate that the combination of being black and female limits access to housing even more. The callers who were black, female, and lower-income (signified by speaking BEV) were the most disadvantaged in securing housing (Massey and Lundy 2001, p. 467).

**Black English Vernacular (BEV), aka Ebonics**

No one looks down on someone who says “runt” instead of “rent.” Other forms of nonstandard speech carry greater stigma. Stigmatized speech may be linked to region, class, educational background, gender, ethnicity, or race. A national debate involving language, race, and education was triggered by a vote on December 18, 1996, by the Oakland, California, school board. The board declared that many black students did not speak Standard English (SE) but instead spoke a distinct language called ebonics (from “ebony” and “phonics”), with roots in West African languages. Soon disputing this claim were the poet Maya Angelou, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and the Clinton administration. In fact, most professional linguists regard ebonics as a dialect of English rather than a separate language. Linguists call ebonics Black English Vernacular (BEV) or African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Some saw the ebonics resolution as an attempt by Oakland to increase its access to federal funds available for bilingual programs designed for low English proficiency (LEP) students (mainly of Hispanic and Asian background). Since funds were available to support the educations of immigrant LEP students in California (Golden 1997), some educators argued that similar support should be available for African Americans. If ebonics were accepted as a foreign language, teachers could receive merit pay for studying black English and for using their knowledge of it in their lessons (Applebome 1996).

Early in 1997, responding to the widespread negative reaction to its original resolution, the Oakland board advanced a new one, requiring only the recognition of language differences involving black students, in order to improve their proficiency in SE. School officials emphasized they had never intended to teach black students in ebonics. They just wanted to employ some of the same tools used with students brought up speaking a foreign language to help black students improve their SE skills.
As John Rickford (1997) reports, there is experimental evidence from the United States and Europe that mastery of a standard language is most successful when students’ vernaculars (casual everyday speech patterns) are taken into account and they are taught explicitly how to bridge the gap to the standard. One example: At Aurora University, near Chicago, African-American inner-city students were taught using a Contrastive Analysis approach in which Standard English (SE) and ebonics (BEV) features were contrasted systematically through explicit instruction and drills. After 11 weeks the students showed a 59 percent reduction in their use of ebonics features in their SE writing. A control group taught by conventional methods had an 8.5 percent increase in ebonics features in their SE writing. Despite their controversial original resolution, the worthy goal of the Oakland school board was to help students increase their mastery of SE and do better in school. The plan was to do this by extending Oakland’s Standard English Proficiency program, a contrastive analysis approach widely used in California and already in use then in some Oakland schools. Such considerations led the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) to endorse the Oakland proposal as “linguistically and pedagogically sound” (Rickford 1997).

While recognizing ebonics (BEV) as a dialect of American English rather than as a separate language, most linguists see nothing wrong with the Oakland schools’ attempts to understand nonstandard speech patterns and to use a systematic contrastive approach in teaching SE. Indeed, this is policy and teaching strategy in many American school districts. The Linguistic Society of America considers ebonics (BEV or AAVE) to be “systematic and rule-governed” (Applebome 1997). BEV is not an ungrammatical hodgepodge but a complex linguistic system with its own rules, which linguists have described in great detail (see Rickford 1997). The phonology and syntax of BEV are similar in some ways to those of southern dialects. This reflects generations of contact between southern whites and blacks, with mutual influence on each other’s speech patterns.

Linguists disagree about how BEV originated (Rickford 1999). Geneva Smitherman (1986) calls it an Africanized form of English reflecting both an African heritage and the conditions of servitude in America. She notes certain structural similarities between West African languages and BEV. Their African linguistic backgrounds no doubt influenced how early African Americans learned English. Did they restructure English to fit African linguistic patterns? Or did they quickly learn English from whites, with little continuing influence from the African linguistic heritage? Another possibility is that English was fused with African languages to form a pidgin or creole in Africa or the Caribbean.

One way in which creole speech might have been introduced to the American colonies is through the large numbers of enslaved people who were imported in the 17th and 18th centuries from Caribbean colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados, where creoles definitely did develop (Rickford 1997, 1999; Rickford and Rickford 2000). Also, people who came directly from Africa may have brought with them pidgins or creoles that developed around West African trading forts. There is no doubt that creoles (such as Gullah/Geechee, spoken on the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia) also developed on American soil. The percentage of blacks in early Caribbean populations was between 50 and 90 percent, compared with 40 percent overall in the American colonies.
South, rising to 61 percent in South Carolina (Rickford 1997). Over the centuries, travelers commented on differences between black and white speech, noting creololike features in the former. Certain features of ebonics also characterize the Gullah and Caribbean English creoles (Rickford 1997). Although linguists continue to disagree about its exact origin, they do agree on the systematic nature of ebonics, and on the potential value of taking it into account in teaching ebonics speakers to read and write SE.

Origins aside, there are clear phonological and grammatical differences between ebonics and SE. One phonological difference is that BEV speakers are less likely to pronounce \( r \) than SE speakers are. Actually, many SE speakers don’t pronounce \( r \)'s that come right before a consonant (card) or at the end of a word (car). But SE speakers do usually pronounce an \( r \) that comes right before a vowel, either at the end of a word (four o’clock) or within a word (Carol). BEV speakers, by contrast, are much more likely to omit such intervocalic (between vowels) \( r \)'s. The result is that speakers of the two dialects have different homonyms (words that sound the same but have different meanings). BEV speakers who don’t pronounce intervocalic \( r \)'s have the following homonyms: Carol/Cal; Paris/pass. BEV’s phonological rules also dictate that certain word-final consonants, such as \( r \)'s, \( d \)'s and the \( s \) in he’s, be dropped.

Observing these phonological rules, BEV speakers pronounce certain words differently than SE speakers do. Particularly in the elementary school context, where the furor over ebonics has raged, the homonyms of BEV-speaking students typically differ from those of SE-speaking teachers and students. To evaluate reading accuracy, teachers should determine whether students are recognizing the different meanings of such BEV homonyms as passed, past, and pass. Teachers need to make sure students understand what they are reading, which is probably more important than whether they are pronouncing words correctly according to the SE norm. Phonological rules may lead BEV speakers to omit -\( ed \) as a past-tense marker and -\( s \) as a marker of plurality. However, other speech contexts demonstrate that BEV speakers do understand the difference between past and present verbs and between singular and plural nouns. Confirming this are irregular verbs (e.g., tell, told) and irregular plurals (e.g., child, children), in which BEV works the same as SE.

SE is not superior to BEV as a linguistic system, but it does happen to be the prestige dialect—the one used in the mass media, in writing, and in most public and professional contexts. SE is the dialect that has the most “symbolic capital.” In areas of Germany where there is diglossia, speakers of Plattdeusch (Low German) learn the High German dialect to communicate appropriately in the national context. Similarly, upwardly mobile BEV-speaking students learn SE. That goal is maximized, the research shows, when students’ particular linguistic backgrounds are taken into account in teaching them (see Christensen 2003).

Linguistic Diversity and Inequality

As systems of communication, all languages are equal, but socially linguistic diversity is stratified. What makes some languages socially inferior to others? What makes linguistic varieties normative in one context and deviant in another? How do we explain the link between linguistic diversity and social inequality?
We rank some linguistic varieties, including dialects and accents, as more prestigious and useful than others. We do this by comparing linguistic differences, invariably linked to “marked,” peripheral speech communities, with a single “unmarked,” normative standard, such as Standard (American) English (SE). Linguists know that SE is not intrinsically purer or better as a system of communication than are other linguistic varieties (Urciuoli 2001). But socially we accept SE as the yardstick by which we evaluate and judge all other speech varieties.

The prestige we associate with SE has little to do with the intrinsic qualities of the language itself. Rather, we imbue SE with prestige because its speakers hold power and determine the distribution of resources, including education and employment. Promoting a standard national language that dominates the media and public discourse is a way of regulating (usually by discouraging) linguistic diversity.

Elite speech and formal literacy distinguish the prestigious national language from regional dialects. Consider the case of a highly regarded and wealthy Greek physician born and raised in a village who sought to buy property in an exclusive suburb of Athens. Detecting a village accent, the seller stalled the doctor for months with no explanation. Eventually, when the physician showed up with his wife, a scientist who had been raised in a “good family,” he was offered a contract. This man and woman (his wife) are migrants to Athens, from a village and an island, respectively. Both were educated abroad and hold esteemed positions. The discrepancy in their reception by the urban elite was entirely based on the way each spoke—he with “a peasant twang,” she in “a refined manner.”

In a multicultural society, it stands to reason that linguistic variety reflects cultural variety. A self-constructed affinity group is a speech community. Its members communicate verbally with each other, using words and dialects that define them as a collective, and distinguish them from other speech communities. Examples of such linguistic diversity include black English (BEV), Standard English, “academese,” and “Romanes” (the universal language of Roma [Gypsies]). Although linguistic varieties are flexible and permeable, they reinforce internal cohesion and external distinction, and thus create and valorize a social identity.

**Nativists and Relativists**

Linguistic nativists advocate for legislation making English the official language of the United States. The English-only movement seeks to preserve a common, national language. It resists linguistic variety, which is perceived as a threat to national unity. Rejection of linguistic diversity denies speakers of nonstandard varieties an intrinsic element of a meaningful life—their favored means of expressing themselves. It also stands for exclusion of “foreigners” from “American” resources, benefits, and citizenship rights.

Linguistic relativists, by contrast, oppose the nativist position and other efforts to limit linguistic diversity. They advocate for multilingualism—the right of all speech communities to cultivate, speak, and transmit their native language.

Let’s consider how, in their ordinary lives, immigrants actually deal with linguistic issues. Many first-generation immigrants don’t ever learn to speak English very well. Except for middle-class, formally educated immigrants, most foreign-born adults
continue speaking (colloquial versions of) their native language. This makes it harder for them to gain access to jobs, social services, health care, legal protections, and education. Then, by the next generation, everyone speaks English. Virtually all children born in the United States of foreign-born parents will speak English as their primary language. Of their parents’ language, children may learn a basic vocabulary, but proficiency usually is limited and diminishes year by year. Efforts by parents and linguistic gatekeepers to preserve minority languages tend to reinforce in their children more an ethnic identity than linguistic fluency.

Abandonment of the “home tongue” can be a painful loss for immigrants. Preservation of the native language or dialect (and its symbols) reinforces an ethnic or regional (e.g., southern) identity. This is a linguistic connection to one’s place of origin and to fellow members of the home community or diaspora. Diasporic communities want to preserve their native language by having their children learn it. They want to use language to preserve a cultural heritage as they stay connected to their Americanized children.

Even as immigrant parents and identity politics promote the preservation of minority languages, educational attainment, economic independence, and political power require mastery of English by all Americans. Mastery by minorities of the dominant, national language and dialect is not necessarily volitional; it is instrumental and pragmatic.

Ironically, immigrants may be more loyal to the ancestral language than are people in “the old country.” In Greece, the wealthy send their children to private English schools to ensure they are proficient in the “important, global language,” and consider Greek to be “meaningless in the contemporary world.” Athenians “bastardize” their native language by cultivating Greeklish. This is Greek interspersed with as many English words and phrases as they can pick up from television and other media sources. In so speaking, they distinguish themselves as “modern” from backward and unsophisticated peasants.

Linguist relativists acknowledge that in the United States, and the world over, English is the language of economic and political adaptability. However, they also understand that language, national or minority, is a fundamental component of identity. Accordingly, they promote acceptance and integration of different languages and dialects in the North American mainstream. Practically this ideology includes providing linguistic minorities with information, services, referrals, respect, and assistance in navigating social institutions. Linguistic relativists also promote educational programs designed to preserve native and indigenous languages, including sign language (see below).

The Language of Power

Optimal understanding of a people’s culture requires proficiency in their native language. Language, with an uppercase $L$, is a repository of memories, values, intentions, and meanings. Worldview refers to the way a social group makes sense of its place in the world and articulates its collective experience. Any worldview rests on language—the uniquely human and most critical of our cognitive abilities to link thoughts,
feelings, and desires to symbols. Like culture, speech is dynamic, mutable, and fluid. Groups use Language the way they use Culture—to express their humanity, reveal their cultural diversity, and assert their social interests and roles.

The most productive, proactive, and protective way in which we use language is in creating and expressing our identity—social, political, professional, or sexual. Cultural identity, including an identity based in struggle, is shared among a group of people. Through language, groups construct and deconstruct group identities based on ideological and pragmatic concerns that ultimately find expression in public activities. Construction of internal cohesion also implies a distinct and more powerful profile vis-à-vis other nations. Language as capacity and performance facilitates collective representation for human beings.

The use of language creates social institutions, practices, and the ideology that supports them. Through language we solidify a shared way of life, and differentiate it from others. All humans, by definition, engage linguistically in creating cultural differences and similarities. However, the ruling class relies on language to diversify and stratify the varied segments of the population, thus reinforcing a social order and a monocultural milieu. In turn, minority elites follow suit, but their version of linguistic identity politics has to do with multiculturalism—cultural differentiation among, and political equity across, historically subordinated language groups.

Linguistic diversity and inequality may refer to the speech of racial or ethnic minorities. Another example is sign language (SL), a universal, complex, and culture-laden system of communication. Besides the body and facial language that all humans use, sign language employs manual communication to convey thoughts and emotions by simultaneous movement of the hands and arms, and creation of hand shapes. Sign language is certainly different from, and considered socially as being less than, not only Standard English, but all spoken languages, including minority speech varieties.

Sign language is used by deaf communities, which consist of deaf people and their family members, friends, and interpreters. There are many sign languages in the world, including the American Sign Language (ASL). Their speakers identify globally and locally as a deaf culture—a group of people organized around shared norms, values, needs, interests, and activities. Deaf people cultivate an identity by differentiating themselves from “speech and hearing people,” whom they consider incapable of understanding and appreciating the “deaf community.” Deaf people often marry other deaf people. Many of them hope to have deaf children to whom they can transmit their heritage, language, and culture (Padden and Humphries 1988).

In fact, a wave of deaf activists and supporters advocate the mainstreaming of sign language by teaching “hearing and preverbal” children to use it. Research in this field indicates that babies who learn to communicate in SL benefit developmentally by being able to communicate their needs and feelings before they can speak (Goodwyn, Acredolo, and Brown 2000).

ASL is the language of power for the deaf American community, and the instrument by which they have constructed a culture. It also is the means by which deaf people fight for, and gain, collective rights. Just as the Stonewall Rebellion on June 27–28, 1969, marked the onset of the gay rights movement, an event known as the Deaf President Now (DPN) launched a national campaign for the human rights of
deaf people. On March 6–13, 1988, a student protest at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, led to the appointment of the university’s first deaf president. Throughout its prior history Gallaudet had a series of “hearing presidents,” ever since Congress established the university in 1857 to educate deaf young people. The DPN movement raised international awareness of a proud and empowered deaf culture (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989). With the help of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the deaf community has gained greater political attention and social accommodation.

Once again, we see identity politics at work in organized efforts by culturally discriminated groups who rely on language—written, verbal, visual, or sign—to claim their human rights based on what they define as their culture. Their culture deconstructs the profile that the state and the conventional elite ascribe to them. Then they reconstruct a profile that expresses their history, economic and political status, social roles, beliefs, values, and spirituality. Linguistic diversity is another way that multiculturalism has center stage in the North American mainstream.

**Key Terms**

- Black English Vernacular (BEV) (270)
- deaf communities (275)
- deaf culture (275)
- diglossia (265)
- ebonics (270)
- homonyms (272)
- linguistic relativism (263)
- sociolinguistics (264)
- speech communities (273)
- style shifts (265)
CHAPTER 16

FAMILIES

REFLECTIONS: “WE ARE FAMILY”

❖ Changing North American Families
❖ All Sorts of Families
❖ Family and Work
❖ Media and the Family
❖ The Cult of Childhood “Success”
❖ Kinship and Class
❖ Family Diversity

“WE ARE FAMILY”

A woman who is fully qualified to compete in the national labor force limits her job search to the local market because of “family obligations.” “My husband and kids are here,” she insists. Her “family” consists of the man she has lived with for five years, but who is legally married to another woman, the mother of his two children, whom the woman being quoted considers to be her own.

Two men identify themselves as “domestic partners” and have “a home life” that includes the children of one from a former marriage.

A legally married heterosexual couple and their biological children share a “household.”

“We have a commuter marriage,” claim a “dual-career couple.” The two spouses reside in different states, and “We get together most weekends,” they say.

A 50-year-old man lives with his widowed mother, the “only family” he has ever known.

Which of these scenarios represents the American family? Reflect on this question. Construct what you think is a national standard or a popular conception of the American family. What sources have influenced your answer?

Now reflect on your own experience. How many variants of the “American family” can you identify? Do these types of family match a cultural ideal? What criteria do you use to define your “family”? Whom do you include in it?

The pursuit of “better opportunities” fosters personal independence, which in turn leads people to detach from local ties in search of survival or self-fulfillment. Economic mobility separates individuals from their family of origin. It also disrupts romantic attachments and breaks many marriages. To accommodate particular economic, political, and psychological needs, people pursue a number, and a variety, of “relationships.” For many people, marriage has become nothing more than “a trial-and-error relationship,” rather than “the ultimate relationship.” Monogamy persists as the ideal form of North American...
marriage. However, given the high rate of divorce and remarriage, **consecutive** (aka **serial monogamy**) more accurately describes the pattern for many Americans.

The decline of a marriage imperative in North America fuels the diversity of civil statuses. Adults may seek to “grow old together” with another person, not in law but in friendship. Such arrangements as “living together,” “long-distance relationships,” and “long-term companions” are undeniably familiar. A heterosexual unmarried couple have “been together” 15 years. The “partners” live in different cities; communicate by phone and e-mail; are “sexually exclusive”; and share weekends, holidays, two cats, and “material resources.” When asked about how they define this relationship, the woman replied, “As a marriage of sorts.” Other kinds of households that now characterize our cultural mainstream include “being single,” “having a roommate,” and “sharing a house with a group of people.” These domestic arrangements may be temporary or periodic, but they are common and legitimate.

Cross-cultural studies of kinship show that biology is not a prerequisite to “family.” In our society individuals form strong attachments, loyalties, and interdependencies with persons to whom they are not “blood related,” but “spirit related.” Along with “blood families” and “families-in-law,” many North Americans cultivate **fictive kinship** ties (reciprocal provision of goods and services, including affection, companionship, and shared values, between nonbiologically, nonlegally, but socially related individuals). Some speak of work colleagues as “family,” introduce a close friend as being “like a brother to me,” and demonstrate affection and responsibility toward “surrogate parents.” Every year an elderly widow brings Christmas cookies to her “neighbor family.” A twice-divorced writer looks forward to professional conferences so he can visit with “the extended family I never had.”

Fictive kinship relations may coexist with biological ties, or may substitute for absent biological ties. People aren’t always joking when they speak of their “dysfunctional families.” It is common for mainstream North Americans to admit they “haven’t seen [their] parents in more than a year,” “haven’t spoken with [a] sister in months,” “don’t know all [their] aunts and uncles,” or “don’t like” their family. Nonetheless, “Blood is thicker than water.” Loyalty to our blood relatives remains strong despite how we feel about them. Yet members of industrial urban societies cannot live by blood alone. Survival and well-being often depend more on soul ties than on blood ties.

Estrangement from one’s biological family, by force, necessity, or choice, rarely turns individuals into absolute loners. To bond and to belong is a basic human need. When our “natural family” isn’t available or adequate in meeting our needs, we construct a **family of affiliation**—psychological ties with people we love and can count on for emotional, social, and material support. In her study of gay and lesbian kinship, Kath Weston (1991) discovered that individuals linked themselves with “chosen families.” Friends, lovers, and children form supportive networks that prove comforting for individuals and useful in meeting affective and basic needs.

Familial attachment is both a universal value and a practice. In North America, kinship takes many forms. “Family values” reflect the experience and aspirations of diverse categories of Americans, not just those who ascribe to the heterosexual nuclear family. Domestic organization and civil status are frequently matters not of choice but of adjustment. Contemporary economic conditions, including upward and downward
mobility, threaten family ties. Most Americans struggle to create and maintain a healthy, gratifying, and predictable family life, often in the face of adversity.

The educated elite, and other financially secure professionals, express “personal preferences” in what constitutes “adulthood” and socially approved civil statuses. Disparaging labels such as “spinster,” “confirmed bachelor,” and “divorcée,” which once were accepted usage, have been replaced by more legitimate classifications, such as “career woman,” “feminist,” “single,” and “domestic partner.” A multicultural society acknowledges and accommodates diversity in kinship organization. We are careful to ask that a child’s parent or guardian sign a report card. We aren’t supposed to question a child whose last name is different from his father’s. We may welcome a woman and her female date at the Christmas party, or honor an unwed mother and her kids at a Cub Scout meeting.

However, politeness toward people who don’t conform to our sense of what is “proper” may not translate into actions that ensure their economic security and social integration. Access to strategic resources, such as legal protection, housing, employment, and insurance remains inequitable for many poor families, gays and lesbians, single-parent households, orphaned or neglected children, and long-term companions, regardless of sexual orientation. Families and civil statuses that may differ from our
conception of what is “normal” or “legitimate” require greater understanding and appreciation for their nature and the factors that determine their existence. The American family is not dying; it is changing.

**Changing North American Families**

In the present chapter, we consider contrasting family backgrounds and experience as ways of establishing our individual and social identities and thus making us different. Part of your identity reflects the kind of home you grew up in and your family of orientation. What did you think of your family as you were growing up? Was it like or unlike the families of your friends? Did you think it was an abnormal or a normal family? Were you ashamed of it? What kind of family was it—a nuclear family (parents and kids residing together), a single-parent family (one parent and kids), a blended family (including a parent, a stepparent, one or more children, or stepchildren), or perhaps a matrifocal extended family (mother, mother’s mother, and people related mainly through female links)? If your parents got divorced, how did that affect your image of your family? Was one (or were both) of your parents gay?

Recent decades have produced significant changes in North American households and families. The U.S. Census Bureau defines a household as an individual or group living in a housing unit. A family consists of two or more people, one of whom is the householder (household head), living together, who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. Among households, the proportion consisting of two parents with kids is smaller than ever. Childless couples, single-parent families, and people living alone are increasingly common. As Ken Bryson observes, “the increasing diversity of household types continues to challenge our efforts to measure and describe American society,” and “the ‘typical’ household is an illusion” (Bryson 1996). Table 16–1 summarizes several changes in family and household organization in the United States from 1970 to 2008.

**All Sorts of Families**

The family as an institution is a social universal. Humans in all societies belong to kinship groups. Marriage, a publicly and legally sanctioned relationship, is the most important basis for the formation of kinship in North America. Familial bonds regulate who should have sex with whom, who can bear and raise children with whom, and who can depend on whom for goods and services. The ideology of romantic love and sexual exclusivity associated with marriage in contemporary North America also regulates social and emotional intimacy. In our society “falling in love” is a prerequisite to marriage, and sexual jealousy threatens many marital relationships. Most North Americans are suspicious of extramarital, especially heterosexual, friendships, and consider adultery “grounds for divorce.”

Although all human societies have kin groups, marriage, and families, anthropologists have documented considerable variation in systems of kinship and marriage
among cultures (and over time in the same culture). Among societies, as is also true within the United States and Canada today, it is difficult to single out a statistically “normal” or modal pattern of household organization. Is the “normal” North American household a nuclear family, a couple, or an individual? A global, cross-cultural view reveals many kinds of kin groups, including nuclear and extended families, as well as descent groups such as clans. Among human societies, nuclear family organization is widespread but not universal. In some societies, nuclear families are rare or nonexistent. In others, the nuclear family exists but lacks a special role in social life. Other social units—most notably descent groups (e.g., clans) and extended families—assume most of the functions elsewhere associated with the nuclear family (e.g., raising children).

Cross-cultural study has revealed myriad alternatives to nuclear family organization. For example, in certain Caribbean societies, many women head households with no permanently resident husband-father. We call such units “matrifocal” families or households because the mother (mater) is the household head.

Consider also an example from the former Yugoslavia. Traditionally, among the Muslims of western Bosnia (Lockwood 1975), nuclear families lacked autonomy. Several such families were embedded in an extended family household called a *zadruga*. The *zadruga* was headed by a male household head and his wife, the senior woman. It also included married sons and their wives and children, and unmarried sons and daughters. Each nuclear family had a sleeping room, decorated and partly furnished from the bride’s trousseau. However, possessions—even clothing and trousseau items—were freely shared by *zadruga* members.

### Table 16–1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households</td>
<td>63 million</td>
<td>117 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people per household</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERCENTAGES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couples with children</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family households</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with five or more people</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living alone</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of single-mother families</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of single-father families</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with own children under 18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *zadruga* took precedence over its component units. Larger households ate at three successive settings: for men, women, and children. Social interaction was more usual among women, men, or children than between spouses or between parents and children. Traditionally, all children over 12 slept together in boys’ or girls’ rooms. When a woman wished to visit another village, she sought the permission of the male *zadruga* head. Although men usually felt closer to their own children than to those of their brothers, they were obliged to treat them equally.

On India’s Malabar Coast, among the Nayars, traditional marriage seems to have been hardly more than a formality—a kind of coming-of-age ritual. A young woman would go through a marriage ceremony with a man, after which they might spend a few days together at her extended family compound, called a *tarawad*. Then the man would return to his own *tarawad*, where he lived with his sisters, aunts, and other matrikin. Nayar men belonged to a warrior class, who left home regularly for military expeditions, returning permanently to their *tarawad* on retirement. Nayar women could have multiple sexual partners. Children became members of the mother’s *tarawad*; they weren’t considered to be relatives of their biological father. Indeed, many Nayar children didn’t know who their father was. Child care was the responsibility of the *tarawad*. Nayar society therefore reproduced itself biologically without the nuclear family.

An even stronger contrast with American-type “marriage and family” comes from the Trans-Fly region of Papua New Guinea. Here, although men had to marry, they preferred sexual relations with other men to heterosexual coitus with their wives. Members of one Trans-Fly group, the Etoro, were so disapproving of heterosexual intercourse that it actually was banned for more than 200 days per year (Kelly 1976). Men of the neighboring Marind-anim tribe (Van Baal 1966) also preferred sexual relations with other men. When the ethnographer Van Baal studied them, their birthrate had fallen to the point that, in order to reproduce their population, the Marind-anim had to raid neighboring tribes. Many children who grew up to be Marind-anim had been captured in such raids. Within the realm of cultural diversity documented by anthropology, there are, we see vividly, a series of alternatives to North American images of “marriage and the family.”

“Family” takes multiple forms cross-culturally and within our own society. In the United States, most children are born and raised in a family, but the composition of this unit varies substantially. Families may be extended, nuclear, foster, adoptive, single-parent, gay, or blended. Children aren’t always raised by their biological parents, and adults may be rearing children to whom they are not related by blood or by law. Many children become accustomed to living in “mom’s house” or “dad’s house.” One child, who has grown up from birth in a household composed of his biological parents, a sibling, and a grandmother, confuses museum and theater clerks when he steps up to the ticket counter to announce, “Two children, three parents, please!”

In North America, despite the social reality of changing and varied kinship patterns, the nuclear family remains the cultural ideal. Many Americans look down on other arrangements. According to Wegar, adoptive families constitute “an alternative kinship model in North American culture,” but one that many Americans consider to be “second best and suspect” (2000, p. 363). In one study, people who had been raised
in an adoptive home were generally positive about their own upbringing, but thought that society looked down on adoptive families. The perception of a stigma attached to adoption motivated adoptees to search for their biological parents (March 1995, p. 658).

Anthropologists distinguish between the family of orientation (the family in which one is born and grows up) and the family of procreation (formed when one marries and has children). From the individual’s point of view, the critical relationships are with parents and siblings in the family of orientation and with spouse and children in the family of procreation. The family of orientation plays an important role in enculturation and thus in identity formation. Less than 3 percent of the U.S. population now farms, so that most people are not tied to the land. Selling our labor on the market, we often move to places where jobs are available. Born into a family of orientation, we leave home for work or college, and the break with parents is under way. Eventually most Americans marry and start a family of procreation.

Although the nuclear family remains a cultural ideal for many Americans, Table 16–1 and Figure 16–1 show that nuclear families accounted for just 22 percent of American households in 2008. Other domestic arrangements now outnumber the “traditional” American household more than four to one. There are several reasons for this changing household composition. Women increasingly are joining men in the

![FIGURE 16–1  Households by type: selected years, 1970 to 2008 (percent distribution).](image)

Cash workforce. This often removes them from their family of orientation while making it economically feasible to delay marriage. Furthermore, job demands compete with romantic attachments. The median age at first marriage for American women rose from 21 years in 1970 to 26 in 2008. For men the comparable ages were 23 and 28 (Fields 2004: U.S. Census Bureau: FactFinder, R1205 and R1204).

Economic and social conditions directly influence the roles men and women assume. Today, an increasingly diverse and flexible services-and-information labor market selects more for talent than for gender. Increased participation by women in the labor force offers more choices to women and men. Women who are financially independent may choose to marry, to delay marriage a few years, or to remain single.

Female employment outside the home also liberates men, who may gain more choice in professional pursuits and lifestyle. Men today are freer to choose or reject the obligations and pressure associated with being “the breadwinner.” Men may choose careers that hold more personal appeal to them regardless of the “potential earning power,” a symbol of social manhood. Men may choose to remain “single” or to participate in an egalitarian marriage or a domestic partnership. Others may become “dependents” themselves by assuming such roles as “househusband” or “stay-at-home dad.”

In the context of these changes, the U.S. divorce rate rose as masses of American women entered the labor force in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1970 and 2008 the number of divorced Americans quintupled—some 23 million in 2008 versus 4.3 million in 1970. (Note, however, that each divorce creates two divorced people.) Table 16–2 shows the ratio of divorces to marriages in the United States for selected years between 1950 and 2007. The major jump in the American divorce rate took place between 1960 and 1980. During that period the ratio of divorces to marriages doubled. Since 1980 the ratio has stayed the same, around 49 percent. That is, each year there are about half as many new divorces as there are new marriages.

In contemporary Western societies, we maintain the idea that romantic love is necessary for a good marriage. When romance fails, so may the marriage; or it may not fail, if other features of the marriage are strong. Economic ties and obligations to kids, along with other factors, such as concern about public opinion or simple inertia, may keep marriages intact after sex, romance, and/or companionship fade. Also, even in modern societies, royalty, leaders, and other elites may have political marriages similar to arranged marriages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 16–2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ratio of Divorces to Marriages per 1,000 U.S. Population, Selected Years, 1950–2007</td>
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<td>23%</td>
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The rate of growth in single-parent families also has outstripped population growth, quintupling from fewer than 4 million in 1970 to more than 19 million in 2007. (The overall American population in 2007 was 1.5 times its size in 1970.) The percentage of children (23 percent) living in fatherless (mother-headed, no resident dad) households in 2008 was more than twice the 1970 rate, while the percentage (4 percent) in motherless (father-headed, no resident mom) homes increased almost fivefold. About 55 percent of American women and 57 percent of American men aged 18 or older were currently married in 2008, versus 60 and 65 percent, respectively, in 1970 (Fields 2004; Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Tables 7, 56). Recent census data also reveal that more American women are now living without a husband (even if they have one) than with one. In 2005, 51 percent of women said they were living without a spouse, compared with 35 percent in 1950 and 49 percent in 2000 (Roberts et al. 2007).

Table 16–3 documents comparable changes in family and household size in the United States and Canada between 1980 and 2008. Those figures confirm a general trend toward smaller families and smaller living units in North America (see also Hansen and Garey 1998). This trend is also detectable in western Europe and other industrial nations.

The entire range of kin attachments is narrower for North Americans, particularly those in the middle class, than it is for nonindustrial peoples. Although we recognize ties to our grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, we have less contact with, and depend less on, those relatives than people in other cultures do. This becomes apparent when we answer a few questions: Do we know exactly how we are related to all our cousins? How much do we know about our ancestors, such as their full names and where they lived? How many of the people with whom we associate regularly are our relatives?

The figures showing smaller families, more divorced people, and more and more people living alone suggest that life may be growing increasingly lonely for many

| Table 16–3 |
| Household and Family Size in the United States and Canada, 1980 versus 2008 |
| AVERAGE FAMILY SIZE |
| United States | 3.3 | 3.2 |
| Canada | 3.4 | 3.0 |
| AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE |
| United States | 2.9 | 2.6 |
| Canada | 2.9 | 2.6 |

North Americans. To be sure, we live socially through friendship, work, clubs, sports, religion, and organized group activities. However, the isolation from kin that these data suggest is unprecedented in human history. Because primates (monkeys, apes, and humans) are intensely social creatures, many observers of contemporary society see the decline of kinship as unfortunate and wonder whether these trends are harming our mental health.

**FAMILY AND WORK**

To maintain contemporary lifestyles, men, women, and teenagers need cash employment, but work obligations often stress and strain family life. For example, job demands compete with child care—and child care is an expensive proposition. Depending on their incomes, working families in the United States spend between $142,000 and $394,000 to raise an American child to age 18 (based on figures in Lino 2009). Given such costs, and other obligations, nuclear families have shrunk. More couples now raise one child than two children. “Beaver Cleaver” families, consisting of children, a working father, and a homemaker mother, now make up fewer than 10 percent of all U.S. households.

Between one-half and two-thirds of American preschoolers are in center-based programs, including day care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, prekindergarten, and nursery schools. What are the costs and benefits of such day care arrangements?
Of about nine million American preschoolers in 2005, just over one-quarter (26 percent) had parental care only, mainly from their “stay-at-home” moms. Fifty-seven percent were in center-based programs, including day care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, prekindergarten, and nursery schools. Another 23 percent received care from relatives, usually grandparents. Twelve percent received care from nonrelatives, including nannies, baby-sitters, and other caregivers.

Care arrangements varied with economic status and among ethnic groups. For example, as family income rose, children were more likely to be in center-based programs and/or to have nonrelative caregivers. Those figures were 75 percent and 18 percent respectively for families earning more than $75,000. With such incomes (usually reflecting dual-earner couples) the percentage of children receiving parental care only fell to 11 percent. Among American ethnic groups, Hispanics were least likely to use center-based care (with 43 percent of their children in such programs) and most likely to have parental care only (38 percent). Non-Hispanic whites were most likely to hire nannies and other nonrelatives to care for their children (15 percent). (All figures are from Statistical Abstract of the United States 2010, Table 566.)

> MEDIA AND THE FAMILY

The media help inform us about what’s in and what’s out (including child-rearing expectations, family types and relations, work roles, and living arrangements). Media portrayals are texts, which can be read as lessons in cultural change. For example, changing North American household organization has been reflected in the mass media. During the 1950s and the early 1960s, such television sitcoms as The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet and Leave It to Beaver portrayed “traditional” nuclear families. The incidence of “blended families” (kin units formed when parents remarry and bring their children into a new household) has risen, as represented in programs like The Brady Bunch. Three-quarters of divorced Americans remarry. Television programs and other media presentations now routinely feature coresident roommates, friends, unmarried couples, singles, and unrelated retirees, as well as hired housekeepers, working mothers, and even two moms and two dads.

Because the popularity of television programs tends to reflect their cultural fit, media content illustrates changing values and institutions. Contrasts in media content across time periods and across cultures can be keys to perceiving and understanding cultural differences. Changes in lifestyles are reflected by the media, which in turn help promote further modifications in values concerning kinship, marriage, and living arrangements (Kottak 2009).

There is, for example, a striking contrast between American and Brazilian cultures, reflected in TV content, involving the meaning and the role of the family. North American adults usually define their families as consisting of spouse and children. However, when Brazilian adults speak of their família, they normally mean their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Brazilian adults may include their children as família, but they often exclude their husbands or wives, who have their own família.
Especially for the middle class, Brazilians have less geographical mobility than people in the United States have. Ongoing relationships between parents and their adult children, and among extended family members, are more significant in Brazil in real life, and Brazilian TV content reflects that social reality. Because contemporary Americans tend to lack an extended family support system, marriage and children assume tremendous importance. Marriage provides theme, context, stability, conflict, and dramatic tension for many American TV programs and other “texts.” U.S. culture’s overwhelming emphasis on marital and parental responsibilities—in real life and the media—places severe strains on American marriages. Many social issues addressed by American media reflect this emphasis.

Surprisingly, perhaps, marriages are at least as unstable in Brazilian TV programs as in American prime-time series, even though divorce (which used to be against the law there) is much less common in Brazil. Marital instability in the media reflects a Brazilian social reality that accords relatively less value to the family of procreation (spouse and children) and more to the family of orientation (parents and siblings). On Brazilian TV, the marital tie often yields to the continuing link between adult characters and their parents, siblings, and extended kin.

TV reflects the real-life fact that a Brazilian’s social world is more exclusively familial than an American’s is. In U.S. TV, by comparison, we can also detect a characteristically American theme—leaving home and living with strangers, who eventually become friends. A more subtle contrast in television content between cultures is in the frequency of domestic versus public settings. Prime-time Brazilian programs are usually set in a family home. Family settings also are popular on American TV (from Cleavers through Bradies and Huxtables to Simpsons). Furthermore, many American programs mold their unrelated characters into a quasi-family. However, it is evident to anyone who has watched TV regularly in both the United States and Brazil that American TV much more often depicts its characters in public and work settings. This reflects, among other things, both the North American “work ethic” and the larger real percentage of Americans employed outside the home.

With anthropologist Lara Descartes, Kottak participated in an ethnographic study focusing on how middle-class American parents received and used, or avoided, media messages about work and family (Descartes and Kottak 2009). Our research revealed three important social functions of media, which we labeled comparison, connection, and common ground. We learned how parents use media images of work and family to make comparisons with their own lives. The media show (accurately or not) what others are thinking and doing. Consumers of media can, and often do, identify with, or contrast themselves with media representations. Parents in our study compared themselves with people and situations from the media, as well as with people in their own lives. Media suggest and demonstrate how other people cope with life circumstances. Responses to media accounts varied from “I can do that” to “That’s so not me.”

For some of our informants, media offered connection—a welcome escape from the local and the ordinary, a gateway to a wider world and vicarious experiences. Media messages portraying diversity, difference, alternatives, and escape were attractive to many mothers in our study—often those who worked outside the home. Such
messages, however, could be perceived as threatening by other women—especially those who resent being told that their “traditional” (i.e., “stay-at-home”) choices are not modern ones. Some mothers opted for reduced connectivity and a more confined social world with tighter boundaries. They limited their own and their children’s media exposure, as well as their “real world” social contacts. Many mothers had chosen to “stay home” specifically because they saw the child care options available outside as unsatisfactory. These mothers felt that their role was to be with their children throughout the day. Demonstrating an external orientation, by contrast, most working mothers viewed outside child care as beneficial to their children’s development.

A third social function of media is to provide common ground, shared cultural knowledge and expectations. Our research revealed considerable shared knowledge showing that the media were an ongoing and regular presence in our informants’ lives, offering an array of work and family content that people were aware of and reflected upon. For example, many research participants referred to shows such as *The Waltons* and *The Andy Griffith Show* when discussing elder care within the home and child care by grandparents. The most commonly mentioned program was *Leave It to Beaver*, always used to refer to idealized visions of family life.

Several years ago, one of us (Kottak 2004, pp. 496–497) adopted a teaching technique that took advantage of his students’ familiarity with television: He demonstrated changes in American kinship and marriage patterns by contrasting the TV programs of the 1950s and 1960s with more recent ones. (Students know about the history of sitcom families from syndicated reruns, especially on the cable/satellite channel Nickelodeon.) As Kottak began to diagram family structure using old sitcom material, some students immediately recognized (from reruns) the nuclear families of the 1950s and 1960s, especially the Beaver Cleaver family. When he started diagramming *The Brady Bunch*, even more students joined in, shouting out names: “Jan,” “Bobby,” “Greg,” “Cindy,” “Marcia,” “Peter,” “Mike,” “Carol,” “Alice.” As the Brady cast recitation neared completion, most students were shouting out in unison, as though at a religious revival, names made as familiar as their parents’ through exposure to TV reruns.

In our study, Descartes and I learned how parents encourage their children to consume certain media. Disney and PBS were prominent in the fare our informants offered their kids, as were the old “family” shows offered in syndicated reruns. No parent in our study feared their child would be harmed by exposure to Beaver and Wally Cleaver or Greg and Marcia Brady. As well, American parents can relive moments of their own past as they direct their sons and daughters toward the shows they watched themselves as kids. In so doing, they inculcate a new generation in an older generation’s values.

**The Cult of Childhood “Success”**

As we have seen, the American economy has shifted from an industrial manufacturing one focusing on heavy-goods production toward a postindustrial economy based on the provision of services and information. Today, countries with cheaper labor can
produce cars, steel, and other heavy goods less expensively than the United States can; but the American workforce excels at services. Despite its inadequacies, our public mass education system has no rival when it comes to training millions of people for service- and information-oriented jobs, from salesclerk to computer operator. Schools, the media, high-tech machines, sports, and games all conspire to prepare our children to join the army of 21st-century information processors. The other dimension of the information-processing, services-oriented economy is human services (e.g., health care and education).

Middle-class parents are increasingly sensitive to the need to raise children prepared to succeed in the high-tech world. In the services-and-information society, the experts and the media (which help spread the opinions of the experts) have worked to enlarge our culture’s definitions of child welfare and achievement. Before World War II, parents could do an adequate job by providing responsible care, love, food, and shelter. By the 1950s, parents had added an increasing array of consumer goods to “the necessities of life.” By the 1980s—and continuing today—possessions no longer were enough. The ideals of a traumaless childhood and childhood fulfillment were emerging as parental obsessions. It was no accident that hundreds of thousands of newly trained professionals were now available to help or treat any child who showed the smallest sign of harm or frailty. Ironically, the cultural definition of child welfare and the psychological burden of parenthood expanded just as the mushrooming two-gender workforce made it increasingly difficult to satisfy even the traditional parental responsibilities—to provide attention, loving care, material well-being, and an adequate supply of consumer goods.

To meet today’s expanded definition of proper child rearing, “good” parents need not just money, but also time, energy, good health, patience, and psychological sensitivity. For two parents with full-time jobs outside the home, it is an almost impossible task. No wonder family size has fallen. No wonder we feel guilty, our mental health suffers, and we resort to surrogates and experts. We need help in managing the responsibilities of modern life, including those of parenting.

North American networks of close personal ties are restricted compared with those of other societies. The average number of Americans per household has declined steadily from 4.8 in 1900 to 2.6 today. Modern families confront numerous problems that are dissipated within larger kin networks in other cultures. Obligations and expectations vis-à-vis spouse and children overshadow all others (e.g., to parents or siblings) in our kinship system. When people are expected to manage many stresses and strains in a competitive, achievement-oriented society, tensions mount. Because marriage and children are so important, stresses are particularly evident in these relationships.

Along with the rising cost of raising children, another reason for smaller family size is increasing extradomestic employment. More and more women work outside the home. Fewer than one-third of mothers had paying jobs in 1960, versus more than two-thirds today. The demands of work outside the home reduce the parental time and energy needed for large families. More and more Americans live in small families consisting of at least one parent and a small number of children. Numerous studies have shown that the fewer children parents have, the more they invest in each
child individually. Lino (2009) calculated that expenditures on children account for 27 percent of the budget in one-child households, 41 percent in two-child families, and 48 percent in three-child households. The more children, the less each child gets.

More and more Americans are striving to raise children who can succeed in an even higher-tech future. Each year, the college degree increases its value as the key to professional and financial success, especially when that degree is in engineering, computers, or business (Weston 2006). The average annual income of a college graduate is more than twice that of a high school graduate with no college degree (Francese 1995; Weston 2006). (The difference had been just 18 percent in the 1970s.) Also, college-educated households tend to have two high earners. On average, it cost $222,350 to raise a child through age 17 in the United States in 2009, versus $182,857 in 1960 (in inflation-adjusted 2009 dollars)—or 22 percent more (Lino 2009). Most middle-class parents also will have to spend money on at least one college education. As of this writing an Ivy League college cost more than $200,000 for four years of tuition, fees, room, and board. A state university education can cost more than $100,000. Child-rearing and educational costs are among the economic considerations that lead Americans to limit family size.

Child care and (pre-college) education costs rose from 2 percent of household spending in 1960 to 17 percent in 2009 (see Figure 16–2, based on Lino 2009). This increase reflects a surge in the number of households in which both parents work and pay for child care (and, increasingly, for private schooling). As previously noted, a

![Pie charts showing expenditures on children in 1960 and 2009](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/CRC/crc2009.pdf)

Total = $182,857 (in 2009 dollars)  
Total = $222,360

*U.S. average for a child in middle-income, husband-wife families.

**FIGURE 16–2** Expenditures on a child from birth through age 17, total expenses and budgetary component shares, 1960 versus 2009*

second child does not double those expenses. A new child costs less than the first because parents can take advantage of hand-me-down clothing and nursery furniture.

In their attempts to raise a “successful” child, parents may take special steps from infancy on. In some cases, a child is registered at a series of in-demand schools soon after birth. Eventually, evenings and weekends fill up with a string of extracurricular activities, as described in Chapter 14. Such activities are costly in terms of time, labor, energy, and money.

Through the pressure of middle-class parents, many elementary schools have formally recognized the “gifted” child. Such kids are set apart from their peers and placed on the road to professional success. In middle school they take advanced and enriched classes. In high school come accelerated and advanced placement courses. Science and math are emphasized, for they provide skills considered necessary in an increasingly high-tech society—skills that are basic to the best jobs in information processing and complex data analysis.

Some children, however, are labeled “learning-impaired” or only “average achievers.” Knowledgeable specialists, such as social workers, psychologists, and school administrators, tend to believe that less successful kids often come from “broken homes” with divorced or single parents, or from “dysfunctional” families. “Troubled” children may suffer from an array of behavior problems, such as “acting out” or “hyperactivity.” If the diagnosis is in doubt, many school systems now employ psychologists to provide an appropriate label.

According to some experts, one reason children from broken homes have behavioral and adjustment problems is their lack of appropriate “role models” of both sexes. However, there is a more powerful explanation. The characteristics of individuals aside, social problems have, first and foremost, a socioeconomic basis. To be sure, kids with adjustment problems often come from single-parent families. More significant than any absent role model, perhaps, is the reduction not just in money but in parental time that is almost inevitable when there is just one parent to give the child attention and to ensure that he or she participates in the numerous activities in which our culture expects “successful” children to engage.

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**Kinship and Class**

Most of the people we see every day are either nonrelatives or members of our immediate family. Although we recognize ties to grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, we have less contact with, and depend less on, those relatives than people in other societies do. However, patterns of interaction with kin vary by class. Thus, Carol Stack’s (1975) study of welfare-dependent families in a ghetto area of a small midwestern city showed that sharing with nonnuclear relatives is an important strategy the urban poor use to adapt to poverty. In the American lower class, the incidence of expanded-family households (those that include nonnuclear relatives) is greater than it is in the middle class. The higher proportion of expanded-family households in certain American ethnic groups and classes has been explained as an adaptation to poverty (Stack 1975). Unable to survive economically as nuclear family units, relatives band together in an expanded household and pool their resources.
Although many Americans don’t realize it, strong kin ties exist among unmarried African Americans, as anthropologist Carol Stack (1975) showed in her classic field study of black family structure. Stack demonstrated that although “Beaver Cleaver” families were less common among poverty-level blacks than among middle-class whites, urban blacks still maintained very strong kin ties. Even when fathers lived elsewhere, children often visited their fathers and paternal kin. Furthermore, children saw their extended kin—grandparents, uncles, aunts, great-aunts and -uncles, and cousins—more often than their white middle-class counterparts did.

According to Hamer and Marchioro (2002), a growing number of poor, black, urban fathers are assuming primary care for their children despite economic difficulties. Their study of working-class, low-income, mostly unmarried African-American fathers in an impoverished midwestern city suggested that many of these men had become single parents by default—for one of three main reasons: First, the mother expressed no interest in caring for the child. Second, a child welfare worker contacted the father after removing the child from the mother’s care. Third, the child expressed a preference for living with the father. Parenthood is especially difficult for men with low levels of education, poor access to health care and housing, and inflexible work schedules. To compensate for limited socioeconomic resources, poor, single fathers rely on biological and fictive kin to help provide a home for their children and to build a kind of family that their circumstances permit.

**Family Diversity**

Most of us recognize that family background is one reason we differ. A newly married couple may have to negotiate differences related to not only religious or ethnic backgrounds but also specific family traditions, customs, and expectations. Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists continue to study the ways in which family experiences influence adult personality, security, identity, and behavior. Are people ashamed of their family backgrounds because they deviate from perceived cultural norms? Do men raised by women get along better with women than do men raised by men or by a married couple? How does a girl form a female identity if she is raised by a man? What is the relation between a parent’s sexual orientation and a child’s identity formation? Some of these questions have been addressed in the chapters on race, gender, and sexual orientation. In the present chapter, the focus has been specifically on changing cultural expectations about family organization and on contrasting family backgrounds as ways of establishing our individual and social identities and thus making us different.

Family, in all its forms, remains critical to human well-being. Family diversity, a demographic reality, reflects market forces. Our market society favors unattached men and women. Priorities tend to be individual rather than collective (e.g., family or community). As individuals, poor people do what they can to survive, just as the well-to-do seek self-expression, career advance, or a higher salary as a measure of relative worth. Late marriage, divorce, unmarried domestic partnerships, and living alone are some symptoms of a changing economy.

Family diversity has become not only normative, but promoted, in society. As in every other social reform, family diversity reflects interpretations and practices of
empowered individuals who are both subject to macro socioeconomic changes and architects of micro sociocultural models of daily life. Leading the family diversity movement are educated and financially secure men and women, including single mothers and fathers, gay men and lesbians, artists, and intellectuals. Parents with non-traditional family arrangements benefit from support groups formed by people with similar circumstances. Advocates for family diversity identify varied family configurations, explain them, imbue them with value, and transform a conventional civil status to a postmodern social and political identity.

Family diversity is a given in North America, as is the identity politics that support and elaborate it. However, if there is a hierarchy of family diversity that deserves our attention as multiculturalists, it is that between healthy and unhealthy family units. Hundreds of thousands of individuals, including children, women, and the elderly, are victims of family violence. Americans are more likely to be abused, neglected, assaulted, and killed at home than in other settings, and by members of their own family rather than strangers (Gelles 2000).

An array of violence prevention movements raises awareness of this family tragedy. For example, activists have designated April as the Child Abuse Prevention Month. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available to victims of abuse. Social workers, psychiatrists, and other helping professionals do their part to treat and prevent family violence. Leo Tolstoy noted that “Happy families are all alike. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” From the perspective of identity politics and multiculturalism, unhappy families are a form of diversity we would like to eliminate. Happy ones hold a higher place in the hierarchy; those are the ones we want to emulate.

**KEY TERMS**

- consecutive (aka serial) monogamy (278)
- family of procreation (283)
- fictive kinship (278)
- family of affiliation (278)
- nuclear family (280)
- family of orientation (283)
CHAPTER 17

CONCLUSION

REFLECTIONS: OF TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

❖ Human Diversity, Culture, and Multiculturalism
❖ From Civil Rights to Human Rights
❖ Using Culture to Build Humanity
❖ Human Agency as a Prime Mover of Social Reform

OF TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

A nine-year-old, apparently white, boy enjoys a stroll in downtown Atlanta with his parents. Father and son have taken Mommy away from her computer for an hour or so to share food and fun while listening to the jazz band that entertains the lunch crowd at Woodruff Park. The scene includes college students and professors on the way to and from classroom buildings, executives in suits and heels enjoying a sandwich under a tree, homeless people sleeping on benches, tourists taking photographs of the skyline, and street vendors selling accessories.

Stepping out of a favorite Chinese restaurant, the boy studies his surroundings and asks loudly, without warning, “Mommy, why does it seem there are no black people in our neighborhood? It seems there are tons and tons of white people where we live. But there are no black people there!” (He assumes his family to be white, which is debatable.)

His mother, the social studies queen, as he calls her, replies, taking full advantage of a teaching moment. Mommy’s break turns automatically into work of the kind that is worth doing—thoughtful, leisurely, hopefully accurate, and responsible conversations with youths about social conditions, including unemployment, racism, and gentrification; the causes behind them; and the prospects for improving them.

We ask you, gentle reader: Beyond your own, private thoughts on the subject raised, how would you answer this little boy if he were your brother, nephew, or son? Would your answer be different if you were speaking with a child from your neighborhood? How might your response vary if you were a schoolteacher forced to reply to a pupil on his way to building a social consciousness?

In what ways might your conversation be shaped if you and this little boy were seated among a majority of African Americans, who were by this time amused and intrigued? Would you have an answer for this child at all? Is there a code of etiquette on which you could rely to get yourself through this? If so, begin to identify its origins, rules, content, and functions, and the justification for its existence.
Decorum is a cultural universal. Among North American rules of etiquette are two that we tend to follow, but with variation in consistency: (1) protection of youths from realities of adulthood and (2) discretion in what we reveal in public about our private beliefs, especially our politics and religious beliefs.

Politeness is a way of acting that we deem necessary and desirable. A polite society has and shows good taste. Its citizens are polished, refined, and proper. They know what to say, to whom, how much, and how.

Most of us maintain, to varying degrees, courtesy, tact, and civility in public. We learn norms, manners, and ceremonies that convention establishes as acceptable or required in social relations, in professional interactions, or in official life. Right? When an elderly person gets on a bus that is fully occupied, a younger one automatically offers his seat to her. Or does he? When one meets a woman in a wheelchair struggling to open the door to a restroom, one offers to open it for her. Or does one? A young child or adolescent enters a room full of adults engaged in conversation, waits for a cue of welcome, and proceeds to greet each guest with a handshake and some version of “Pleased to meet you.” Is that right? Or are young Americans more likely to walk right by without a glance, barge in and start talking to a parent, or simply grunt and stand around? When the president of the United States delivers a State of the Union address, is it acceptable for someone in attendance to shout out, “You lie!”?

Propriety, that is, being proper, appropriate, or fitting, assumes knowledge of, and conformity to, an accepted set of standards—good manners. Suitable taste in behavior, speech, dress, and style is achieved easily in small-scale, relatively homogeneous societies, such as a mountain village in Spain, or among members of an exclusive, homogeneous country club in Atlanta.

Conformity to a single, national code of conduct is virtually impossible in the United States or Canada. To follow the Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette: A Guide to Contemporary Living, or Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior, one runs the risk of offending or alienating many North Americans. A society of millions cannot hope to have a unified code of normative ethics—universal understanding and practice of what is socially good or bad, right or wrong, proper or improper, just or unjust. The prospect for this, even if desirable, is not an option in a multicultural society like our own. What’s an American to do? Try anyway.

Political correctness (PC) was developed in the early 1980s by academics and other members of the cultural elite. It entails a set of rules, standards, and patterns of behavior that its agents deem correct and just in achieving equity, equality, and harmony in a multicultural society. PC has, without a doubt, protected many from embarrassing situations, helped others to accomplish social goals, and encouraged communication between some groups and individuals in contexts where avoidance or conflict might otherwise prevail.

To its creators PC may offer a guide to postmodern living, an etiquette for a multicultural society. Yet PC is based more on assumptions about what is correct than on mass agreement, or critical decisions, about social conduct. Like all systems of etiquette, PC is the product of a few, who design and define what is proper for all. A recommendation to a faculty member by the administration of a university to place a “safe space” sign, symbolic of Gay Pride, on his or her office door is not only naive but PI
(politically incorrect). Where do the rest of the students, faculty, and staff go to be safe? Moreover, why should a school require safe space stickers to protect its personnel?

Most North Americans are not privy to the new glossary of PC terms, body language, or styles of interaction that proponents of PC manage with relative ease. But this is only part of the problem. The more serious risk is that PC discourages Americans from talking honestly, or at all, about important issues confronting us today. Because of PC, many people fear talking about homelessness, social welfare policy, intergroup marriages, alcoholism, admissions tests, unemployment, the failure of schools, out-of-wedlock children, AIDS, Social Security, affirmative action, or college curricula. To attempt a conversation in public on these topics is for most people like walking on eggshells. It seems safer to say nothing, to just go with the flow.

The truth hurts, sometimes. More often, it liberates. In either case, it has consequences. PC is not always accurate or responsible. It seems to us that mere politeness, and especially an unfounded or assumed set of standards for social conduct, is not enough to encourage communication or peace between individuals and groups in our society. Honest conversations between people of all cultural orientations and ages, sprinkled with more questions than answers, guided by contemplation and a good deal of listening, is a better way of reaching a critical understanding in a highly complicated, diverse, and rapidly changing society.

The boy in Woodruff Park had the right idea, and his mother followed his cue. In doing so, she taught him something about the human condition, and he taught her the value of being available and taking the time to answer. Political correctness is an admirable and ambitious ideal, but not necessarily politically responsible or socially just. For PC to become reality requires time to study and better understand multicultural societies, efforts invested in developing more humane living conditions, and equity in the distribution of strategic and symbolic capital. Are we North Americans prepared to put action where our rhetoric is?

—Rudyard Kipling

In “The Ballad of East and West” Rudyard Kipling expresses the folklore of his day. The two regions were seen as different, separate, and opposed. Popular notions of the East–West divide may associate the East with passions, spirituality, fatalism, and backwardness, and the West with reason, science, rationality, and progress. Implicit is the view of West as best, and beacon for the rest. Orientalism describes a Western system of scholarship, thought, and politics that includes racist and ethnocentric generalizations about the societies and nations of Asia and the Middle East (Said 1978). There is good reason to question stereotypes that privilege Western ideas, institutions, and behaviors over those of Eastern societies.
East and West remain geographic regions of the world. However, high-speed communications, transportation, and the free market of the 21st century intensify globalization, forming a world that is economically, politically, and culturally connected. Eastern and Western ideas, beliefs, and practices never have been more integrated. As we’ve shown in this book, in the United States and Canada, East and West, and all the rest, don’t just meet; they blend into a social mosaic that defies clear cultural categories and fixed boundaries. Contemporary Americans routinely adopt identity markers different from those considered to be native to their own ethnic group or national affiliation. For instance, Americans of many ethnic and religious affiliations self-identify as *Yogis* (men) and *Yoginis* (women). Yoga is their (physical and mental) fitness pursuit of choice even if they don’t understand its historical, regional, and spiritual roots.

Globalization breeds unity and diversity in social life. Integration results from transnational connections, redeployment of social and cultural practices from one place to another, and worldwide exposure to the mass media. The common view of our global village emphasizes the westernization or Americanization of other societies, nations, and cultures. However, current political, economic, and religious trends actually illustrate a cross-fertilization of myriad forms of diversity (Jeurgensmeyer 2005; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Circular cultural exchanges occur among dominant countries such as France and Canada, core and peripheral regions such as Europe and Central America, First and Third World countries such as the United States and Nigeria, and Third World nations such as India and Kenya. Critical to globalization are three mechanisms of popular agency (i.e., the mediating role that ordinary people play in unifying and diversifying social life). They are (1) multidirectional cultural imperialism, (2) multiterritorialization of culture, and (3) laissez-faire culturalism.

**Multidirectional cultural imperialism** is the reciprocal extension of economic, political, and cultural influence between and across all societies and cultures. People, aware of global supply and demand principles, mediate exchanges by creating, selling, and buying culture. The production, display, and sale of “native” arts, crafts, symbols, and ideas by Alaskan Natives reinforce and strengthen their own indigenous identity. In the process, marginalized communities diversify core societies, whose citizens, while on a cruise to Alaska, consume native cultural materials (e.g., jewelry) to embellish a multicultural identity of their own.

**Multiterritorialization of culture** is the expression in new and diverse territories of activities, rituals, ceremonies, and ideas associated with a particular geographic location. People have the ability and will to *detrerritorialize* culture (remove it from one place), *reterritorialize* it (take it to another place), and *multiterritorialize* it (disseminate and integrate it in a variety of places). For example, consider a recent international conference in Greece, to which educators from 37 countries brought along their own native dress codes and food preferences. In Greece, they displayed these markers in social and recreational settings, as they transmitted information about their society to their multilingual colleagues in English, their only common language. Their colleagues in turn incorporated this information within their own knowledge fund to take back to their own country, where they will disseminate it further.

**Laissez-faire culturalism** is the autonomy that citizens of multicultural societies have to construct cultural identities and lifestyles without interference or regulation by
the state. Global economic, political, and cultural forces invariably influence the ways in which people organize and reorganize communities. However, in multicultural societies, people exercise adaptive agency: We reinterpret and tailor global cultural influences to maximize meaningful ways of life at the local level. For example, Brazilians in New York, Greeks in Montreal, Bosnians in Atlanta, and Filipinos in San Francisco are organized respectively in communities within which they express their ethnicity as fully as they wish, free from interference by the government. Similarly, other groups of Americans (e.g., gays and lesbians, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the poor) invent cultural attributes, traditions, rituals, and symbols of their own to ensure their collective safety, and imbue life with order and meaning.

Kipling was a poet who understood the world of 1889 to be more complex than simply East and West. In the last two lines of his stanza he asserts:

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!

Before social science, before ethnography and survey research, and before global—local articulations became the focus of academic study, Kipling enlightened his contemporaries that globalization was in progress, and that culture, in the hands of “two strong men” (human agency by ethically oriented leaders), is the basis of a multicultural society. In such a society, all men and women are not born equal, but all citizens may become so—irrespective, if not because, of cultural differences.

Using Culture to Build Humanity

Heterogeneity is a defining feature of North America. The historical and political context of the United States and Canada rests on the contributions of the first settlers (indigenous tribes, then colonial northern Europeans), followed by Africans, Asians, and southeastern Europeans, and more recent arrivals from Latin America and elsewhere. Cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon in our society, particularly as a basis for inequality. What is new is organized cultural diversity—identity politics and social movements that seek equality on the basis of multiculturalism (Susser and Patterson 2001). Members of ethnic groups cultivate a cultural identity on the basis of an ancestral heritage, but simultaneously they seek full rights and responsibilities as citizens in mass society (Buenker and Ratner 2005).

People always have relied on culture in adapting to environmental, economic, and political stresses. However, not all individuals, and certainly not all groups, have been conscious of this adaptive capacity. Today culture has become a key concept and a strategic resource, which validates, empowers, and mobilizes groups to claim their humanity. For example, urban, sedentary, middle-class Gypsies in Greece distinguish themselves from indigenous, nomadic, poor Gypsies by showing their politismo (civilization) and anthropia (humanity). This humanity is enhanced, they believe, by integration into the Greek mainstream. Markers of this status as Greeks include property, jobs, proficiency in spoken Greek, and participation in public education, the military, and the Greek Orthodox Church. Such indicators have earned these urban Gypsies prosperity and autonomy, both prerequisites for their ultimate goal—preserving their own social organization (Kozaitis 1997).
The emphasis on collective mobilization and action, and on culture as a basis of identity, is adaptive in the postmodern world, where psychosocial insecurity reigns and cultural integrity is threatened. Through the media and the increased representation of minorities in the American mainstream, masses of people have learned that culture counts. Multiculturalism is the organization and coexistence of a variety of cultural systems in a single nation-state. People actively imbue social statuses such as ethnicity, race, sex, age, and gender with meaning and value. This strategy has enhanced economic security and social and political legitimacy for millions of Americans.

In the 1960s and 1970s, American minority groups spoke of black, yellow, and red power. That emphasis on the physical (skin color) has shifted today to the cultural. African Americans expose their kids to the intellectual, artistic, and scientific contributions of their ancestors. Many families now celebrate Kwanzaa (observation of seven principles for building family, community, and culture) and Juneteenth, the National Negro Day, which represents the end of slavery and the continuing struggle for freedom. Native North Americans stress continuity with their cultural origins and traditional customs and values to enhance a sense of identity. Multiculturalism as a “political and philosophical disposition that accords serious consideration to minority groups based on culture, ethnicity, or religion” also invites “moral conflict” in those whose views contradict the multicultural imperative (Dimova-Cookson and Stirk 2010).

Although literacy rates are higher than ever and global communication prevails, we still hear people naively explain social phenomena as “that’s just the way things are.” Notions of inequality as natural and inevitable persist in our social institutions, including education, the economy, and government. Racism, classism, anti-Semitism, ageism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination continue. A conventional elite stresses tradition (e.g., traditional Anglo-Saxon, middle-class values) as right and good for all in social life. Yet, given the demographic profile, nature, and cultures of contemporary North America, we question both the justification and plausibility of any absolute code of cultural conduct.

Education is a dominant force in our multicultural society. Children are taught to recognize customs, places, and cultural markers (e.g., flags) of all kinds of people in the world. In many places the social studies curricula of primary and secondary schools resemble introductory college courses in cultural anthropology. Historical and cultural aspects of mainstream North America are compared and contrasted with those of other world areas. The annual Christmas play is replaced by a multicultural pageant of winter holidays. In many schools Halloween is no longer observed because it offends the religious sensibilities of some parents and school personnel.

Compared with a generation ago, higher education includes a larger and more culturally diverse faculty and student body. Women and African Americans have influenced educational and curricular content. Asian, Latino/a, and, more recently, gay and lesbian studies are now part of a liberal arts education. These influences challenge the historical underrepresentation of minorities in higher education. But old habits die hard. In one academic forum, participants discussed enrollment and graduation rates of their university. When a report indicated that the percentage of female students was slightly higher than that of males, several men in the room agreed “that’s a problem that needs to be resolved!” And when a perceptive administrator pointed out that the
The multicultural model, of increasing prominence in our schools, recognizes the multiplicity of American cultures. Multiculturalism recognizes that America includes people of differing community, ethnic, and cultural histories, as well as different points of view and degrees of empowerment. Such a perspective spurs studies of specific ethnic and other kinds of traditions.

“cultural life” of an urban university in the southern United States, whose Student Government Association consists predominantly of African Americans, should include more events that would appeal to rural white students, his peers silenced him with their silence.

Courses in social sciences and the humanities may teach as much about other cultures, traditions, and intellectual models as they do the canons associated with European history and scholarship. North American academic culture is being de-Europeanized. It has been multiculturalized to suit the needs, interests, and values of those who rule it, and consume it, today. Attention to difference, otherness, and equity creates an image of the Eurocentric perspective as just another other. A recent trend on college campuses known as “whiteness studies” illustrates this shift. The recognition of multiple core structures and cultures of power defines higher education in the 21st century. This shift reflects principally the interests of faculty, whose academic freedom protects their intellectual diversity and political pedagogy. However, legislators, parents, and industry increasingly question the value of an education that compels students to question neoliberal institutions and to appreciate “diversity.”
Affinity groups are organized according to lived experience, cognitive ties, and political interests. They rely on social constructions of human attributes (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) to construct identity groups. As we have argued in this book, culture is not fixed. It is fluid, dynamic, and mutable. Identity politicians may or may not know this. What they do know is the value of using culture as a basis for claiming human and civic rights. The benefit of this strategy is also its cost—reinforcement of essentialism and stereotypes that outsiders use to discriminate on the basis that “they can’t help it; it’s their culture.”

The need for politically constructed essentialism and an image of homogeneity vis-à-vis outsiders doesn’t mean that the affinity group excludes heterogeneity and hierarchy. For example, Queer Nation includes gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons. The leaders of Queer Nation advance a sense of peoplehood, of solidarity and power in numbers. This ideology enhances internal cohesion and promotes political legitimacy. However, gay men and lesbians themselves are diverse in terms of class, age, ethnicity, and race. Further cultural divisions exist between, say, the gay leather community and the community of “pretty boys.” Lesbians share certain aesthetic, political, and intellectual interests that distinguish them from gay men. Yet among lesbians, too, there are cultural divisions, such as that between “butches” and “lipstick lesbians.” To be sure, internal differences breed prejudice and discrimination (e.g., the marginalization and subordination of “aging queens” by younger gay men).

Culture has always eased human adaptation. Today we see an emphasis on cultural content—particular patterned activities, knowledge, and beliefs—as the basis of a safe and gratifying collective identity and existence. A person with a disability gains protection and respect by joining a political group of people with disabilities. Homosexually identified persons find comfort as members of the gay community.

Multiculturalism is not an appendage of contemporary North American society. Rather, it is intrinsic to our society’s core. When formal institutions don’t meet their needs, citizens invent informal institutions, standards, and values to protect themselves and to create meaningful ways of life. The varied culture-based identities, statuses, and movements generate multiculturalism, a new ethos that characterizes North American social organization. It is now a key feature of our national character. To be an American today is to not only know and love a person who differs from you with respect to ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and sexuality, but to be affected directly and intimately by all culturally organized segments of the population as much in how you conduct your professional career as how you live your personal life (Moghaddam 2008).

**From Civil Rights to Human Rights**

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s sought to end segregation in public accommodations and facilities and to promote equal access to jobs, housing, and education. From the organized efforts for civil rights emerged a worldwide initiative to ensure human rights. Multiculturalism, the master movement of the 1980s and 1990s, advances the interests and needs of many and diverse groups, including people of color, women, and the poor, by emphasizing equal access to resources and cultural value. Contemporary Americans and Canadians live in the presence of cultural
diversity, multiple traits, customs, rituals, and beliefs. Multiculturalism, the development and organization of many culturally identified groups, constitutes a way of life and an ethos that supports and reinforces it.

Traditionally, state-building has been the project of economic, political, and intellectual elites, who have neglected minority rights. This process has been challenged by mobilizing agents of social movements seeking representation, integration, and self-determination. Increasingly evident human diversity has fueled identity politics and affinity-group formation. People assert their human rights within communities of identity. The human rights movement has spurred many cultural factions. For example, nativist sentiments (e.g., white supremacy) have emerged among some white Americans with no special allegiance to any particular ethnic group. All human rights movements, including the men’s movement and the white movement, are more expressions of affinity than of exclusion.

Like all social movements, identity politics is set against a macro economic and political context of disparities in income and power. Disfranchised groups seek protection from the state of which they are citizens, and autonomy to determine their own quality of life. Often the wish to belong is interpreted erroneously as a will to separate. Instead, identity politics expresses the voices of fragmented Americans seeking both security and psychological refuge, a home to call their own. Culture, in the form of solidarity movements, is the means by which this home is constructed.

In North America, the elites of minority groups have organized human rights movements to benefit their members. Leaders work to create a sense of peoplehood and cultural content that transcends internal divisions. For example, the Afrocentric movement is the product of the African-American intelligentsia. (Afrocentrism celebrates the cultural contributions of Africans and the peoples, such as African Americans and Afro-Brazilians, of the African diaspora.) The majority of African Americans know little about Afrocentrism and are much more preoccupied with jobs, housing, and education than with the roots of African-American culture or with developing a contesting voice.

Groups that now use culture to claim economic, political, and symbolic legitimacy are found in nation-states throughout the world. In Africa, the Americas, and Papua New Guinea, indigenous peoples struggle for cultural survival. In Europe, immigrants organize to combat new forms of racism. In North America, social movements by ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, and the elderly seek legal recognition and protection.

The new social movements express resistance to statist ideology and unequal treatment. Minorities have faced prejudice and discrimination in states with assimilationist agendas. Proponents of modernization and innovation have sometimes viewed traditional, or native, culture as a hindrance to progress and have subjugated ethnic minorities. Ethnocide is the process by which such groups are denied the opportunity to reproduce socially and culturally and to meet their own material, psychosocial, and spiritual needs. A review of UNESCO documents shows that cultural policies, including those concerned with education and language, tend to fit the interests of national and international entities rather than those of ethnic or subnational groups.
A group-based approach to social and economic security encourages minorities to claim resources, to practice native forms of social life, and to maintain a self-determined relation with the state. Regional and ethnic movements in Europe, Asia, and Africa have challenged the nation-state as the controlling body within a bordered territory. States increasingly acknowledge pressures by minorities seeking human rights and security. Cultural mobilization is aided by policies of certain contemporary states, which offer formal protection of linguistic, educational, and cultural diversity.

Globally, the collective human rights movement has mobilized and legitimized diversity. It also has gained the attention of regional and international agencies, such as UNESCO, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the European Union, and the European Court of Human Rights. All those entities address ethnic rights in their particular fields and regions. In response to pressures from historically underrepresented groups, state ideologies and the policies of formal institutions (e.g., academia) are increasingly directed at the formal education and cultural survival of subaltern groups. The political underpinnings of cultural identity in today’s world are remarkable.

**Human Agency as a Prime Mover of Social Reform**

For more than a century, anthropologists have written about the collective human ability to invent rules, create standards, and establish norms. Unfortunately, the knowledge of the human experiences, struggles, and accomplishments on which social science is based remains chiefly the property of an academic elite. Social researchers must do more to share their findings and insights with the public.

Students too often are oblivious to the cultural and social critiques that the arts, humanities, and sciences have contributed over the centuries. Today’s students are frustrated when they can’t understand a reading assignment because it is filled with jargon. Students complain, often justifiably, that readings are boring or irrelevant. If students are alienated by inaccessible knowledge that social research produces, how can we expect them to become informed, critical, and responsible citizens? Content that is necessary to understand and improve the human condition, as Margaret Mead reminded us in her many works, must be especially accessible if we hope to narrow the gap between knowledge and action.

The initiative to create, or resist, culture depends on knowing that all humans possess the capacity of agency—the ability to make and remake culture. Elites have always known about human agency. Access by a few to this knowledge, and to the resources, strategies, and connections needed to construct social reality or truth, has distinguished and stratified human groups throughout history. Today more and more people are learning that agency is an equal opportunity good and are acting on this knowledge. Consequently, the quality of life for individuals and groups improves. The cultural web of a large, complex society, like our own, changes to embrace and validate more, and different, ways of life.

Contemporary humans face the perennial challenge of managing the relation between individual interests and the collective good. The dilemma is complicated
further when it involves managing the relation between diverse group interests and societal harmony. Such is the predicament of North Americans today. Anthropology, the study of humanity across time and space, teaches us that the key to this dilemma is the creative capacity of humans, by manipulating culture, to adapt to change. Since our origins as hunters and gatherers, through farming, herding, trade, industrialization, and the Information Age, humans have adapted culturally in order to survive and reproduce socially. What are the mechanisms of social and cultural change?

Changes in subsistence strategies—people’s means of meeting basic needs and obtaining other necessities—always affect the structure and quality of life. Also critical to social change is the role of government. Forms of social control, from gossip and leveling mechanisms to centralized power, contribute significantly to societal organization. The limits that formal institutions, such as government and religion, set on the productivity, creativity, and destiny of individuals continue to influence social and cultural life.

As we discussed in Chapter 2, throughout history humans have relied on varied mechanisms of change, including innovation, diffusion, acculturation, and modernization. Local cultural change has also resulted from the slave trade, colonialism—foreign political control of a country or territory and its people—and imperialism—political subordination in which a dominant society exploits subjugated populations to extract economic and political advantages. In addition, several wars, and labor migration and immigration have altered our society, and remain today key reasons for demographically diverse and multicultural societies.
To understand social organization and change in North America, we must certainly consider all these mechanisms of social transformations. But what of human consciousness and action? Our analysis shows human agency to be a prime mover of social reform. To be sure, human consciousness and goal-oriented action are not new. Historically, social construction (the making and framing of society) has been the property and privilege of political and economic elites. More recently, as we have discussed, new cultural elites, descendants of historically underrepresented populations, have been competing successfully with traditional economic and political elites in building our society.

Of course, as Eric Wolf (1982) shows in his influential book *Europe and the People without History*, all kinds of people participate in the making of societies and cultures, whether or not they know it, consent consciously, or are given credit for it. Agency is intrinsic to being human. It needs only to be activated and expressed. This book has emphasized the role of new elite agency in transforming our own society culturally and politically, especially in the last 40 years. Led by minority elites, the Civil Rights movement spawned many human rights movements, which have liberated millions of people to claim their human nature and human rights to culturally meaningful ways of life.

What about popular agency? To what extent will ordinary people take charge of social and cultural construction and contribute to their own and the general well-being? We think that the master movement of multiculturalism is poised to accommodate not just elites but also masses of people eager to improve the quality of human life. Among environmentalists, for example, are thousands of parents, teachers, and children who recycle, car pool, and clean up neighborhoods and creeks. Feminists include men and women who raise their kids to appreciate sexual differences but also to honor gender similarities. Classroom moms, Cub Scout dads, and professional peers come from a variety of ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds. They share and transmit customs, ideas, and beliefs that we integrate into our own ways of life. From daily cultural exchange with others, we learn to be more aware, thoughtful, and appreciative of human diversity and unity.

The elites and other participants in the various human rights movements have taught us that choosing a cause, a scale, a forum, and a strategy can and does make a difference. Moreover, the master movement works for goals that accord with the findings of anthropological research. Most anthropologists would agree that key ingredients of a congenial, gratifying way of human life include community, identity, ritual, meaning, autonomy, reciprocity, responsibility, and participation. In a way, today’s mobilizing agents are engaged in organized efforts to reconstitute the small-scale society.

As the world contracts, and the North American mainstream expands, the importance of paying attention to local life becomes greater. A multicultural society favors small-scale sociocultural organization and encourages popular agency. As global economics and politics challenge human lives and lifestyles, the greater the need, and apparently the inclination, to ennoble the local. The cultural construction of locally defined political causes, communities of experience, soul groups, fictive kinship, and cognitive ties reflects the eternal search by humans for meaning, solidarity, and belonging.
Multiculturalism, as a master movement, is increasingly transforming this need into social reality. A multicultural society fosters democracy, empowers people to design meaningful ways of life, and encourages popular agency. Human potential may be maximized not for the profit it generates for the few, but for the quality of life it ensures for the many. As students and teachers of the human condition, our responsibility is to reinforce this social current. As citizens of a multicultural society, our duty is to set the example of a more enlightened and liberating humanity. Organizers of the master movement have prepared the groundwork for the rest of us.

**Key Terms**

- adaptive agency (299)
- ethnic minorities (303)
- laissez-faire culturalism (298)
- multidirectional cultural imperialism (298)
- multiterritorialization of culture (298)
- orientalism (297)
acculturation: The exchange of cultural features that results when groups come into continuous firsthand contact; the original cultural patterns of either or both groups may be altered, but the groups remain distinct.

achieved status: Social status that comes through talents, actions, efforts, activities, and accomplishments rather than ascription.

adaptive agency: People’s ability and will to reinterpret and tailor global cultural influences to maximize resourceful, safe, and meaningful ways of life at the local level.

affinity groups: Common-interest groups, including families, kin networks, neighborhoods, local communities, political parties, religious affiliations, professional organizations, and groups organized by common culture and cognitive ties.

Afrocentric: Orientation of many African Americans, emphasizing Africa as a cultural center.

agape: Humanitarianism, or love for humanity; as contrasted with eros and philia.

age grades: In the individual’s life cycle, the various age phases or categories, such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, the college years, young adulthood, middle age, and old age.

age sets: Groups uniting all men or women (usually men) born during a certain time span; these groups control property and often have political and military functions.

ageism: Prejudice and discrimination against the elderly.

agency: The active role of individuals in making and remaking culture.

androgyne: Similarities (e.g., in dress, adornment, or body features) between males and females.

antimodernism: The rejection of the modern in favor of what is perceived as an earlier, purer, and better way of life.

antiracists: Those who reject ideas and practices based on presumed innate superiority and inferiority of groups; antiracist strategies include refusal to behave according to one’s prescribed racial category and participation in activities to combat racism.

ascribed status: Social status (e.g., race or gender) that people have little or no choice about occupying.

asexuality: Indifference toward, or lack of attraction to, either sex.

assimilation: The merging of groups and their traditions within a society that endorses a single common culture. The process of change that a minority group may experience when it moves to a country where another culture dominates; the minority is incorporated into the dominant culture to the point that it no longer exists as a separate cultural unit.

attitudinal discrimination: Discrimination against members of a group because of prejudice toward that group.

berdaches: Among the Crow Indians, members of a third gender, for whom certain ritual duties were reserved.

biological determinism: Viewing human behavior and social organization as biologically determined.

bisexuality: A person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and sexual activities with, persons of both sexes.

Black English Vernacular (BEV): The rule-governed dialect spoken by American black youths, especially in inner-city areas; also spoken in rural areas and used in the
casual, intimate speech of many adults; also known as ebonics.

**body mass index:** The ratio of weight (in kilograms) divided by height (in meters squared).

**bourgeoisie:** One of Marx’s opposed classes; owners of the means of production (factories, mines, large farms, and other sources of subsistence).

**capital:** Wealth or resources invested in business, with the intent of producing a profit.

**Carnival:** A pre-Lenten festival comparable to Mardi Gras in Louisiana, popular in Brazil and in certain Mediterranean and Caribbean societies; features costumed anonymity and a ritual structure of reversal.

**civil society:** Voluntary collective action around shared interests, goals, and values.

**class consciousness:** Recognition of collective interests and personal identification with one’s economic group, particularly the proletariat; basic to Marx’s view of class.

**cognitive ties:** Social links based on common knowledge and perceptions of reality, on what people know, or on what they think they know.

**colonialism:** The political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended time.

**communitas:** Intense community spirit, a feeling of great social solidarity, equality, and togetherness; characteristic of people experiencing liminality together.

**complex societies:** Nations that are large and populous, with social stratification and central governments.

**consecutive (aka serial) monogamy:** Divorce and remarriage, rather than being married to multiple spouses at the same time (*polygamy*).

**constructionism:** Cultural and malleable creations of social categories and institutions.

**copula deletion:** Absence of the verb *to be*; featured in BEV and in diverse languages, including Hebrew and Russian.

**core values:** Key, basic, or central values that integrate a culture and help distinguish it from others.

**cultural anthropology:** Or *sociocultural anthropology,* the field that describes, interprets, and explains similarities and differences among societies and cultures.

**cultural colonialism:** Internal domination by one group and its culture/ideology over others, such as Russian domination in the former Soviet Union.

**cultural determinism:** Viewing human behavior and social organization as determined mainly by cultural and environmental factors. Cultural determinists focus on variation rather than universals and stress learning and the role of culture in human adaptation.

**cultural relativism:** The position that the values and standards of cultures differ and deserve respect. Extreme relativism argues that cultures should be judged solely by their own standards.

**cultural rights:** Certain rights that are vested not in individuals but in identifiable groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous societies.

**culture:** Traditions and customs that govern behavior and beliefs; distinctly human; transmitted through learning.

**culture pattern:** A coherent set of interrelated culture traits; customs and beliefs that are connected, so that if one changes, the others also change.

**culture shock:** Disturbed feelings that often arise when one has contact with an unfamiliar culture—either in North America or, more usually, abroad. It is a feeling of alienation, of being without some of the most ordinary and basic cues of one’s culture of origin.

**culture trait:** An individual item in a culture, such as a particular belief, tool, or practice.

**culturelets:** In a multicultural society, multiple centers, each based on specialized cultural identity, pride, and knowledge, within the nation-state.

**cyberspace:** The nonphysical universe created by computer systems—the world of the Internet and online participation.

**deaf communities:** Self-constructed groups of deaf people and their families,
friends, and interpreters who communicate by sign language as an act of identity.

defaf culture: A group of deaf people organized around shared norms, values, needs, interests, and activities.

Deaf President Now: An event that launched a national campaign for the human rights of deaf people.

descent: A rule assigning social identity on the basis of some aspect of one’s ancestry.

diaspora: The offspring of an area who have spread to many lands.

differential access: Unequal access to resources; a basic attribute of chiefdoms and states. Superordinates have favored access to such resources, while the access of subordinates is limited by superordinates.

diffusion: Borrowing between cultures either directly or through intermediaries.

diglossia: The existence of high (formal) and low (familial) dialects of a single language, such as German.

discourse: Talk, speeches, gestures, and actions.

discrimination: Policies and practices that harm a group and its members.

domestic: Within or pertaining to the home.

domestic–public dichotomy: The contrast between women’s role in the home and men’s role in public life, with a corresponding social devaluation of women’s work and worth.

ebonics: Another name for Black English Vernacular; derived from ebony and phonics.

ecocide: Destruction of local ecosystems.

education: The acquisition of formal knowledge, normally in a place called a school; tends to be found in nation-states; exposes certain, not all, people in a society to a body of formal knowledge or lore (as contrasted with enculturation, which applies to everyone).

enculturation: The social process by which culture is learned and transmitted across the generations.

environmental racism: The systematic use of institutionally based power by a majority group to make policy decisions that create disproportionate environmental hazards in minority communities.

environmentalists: See nurturists.

eros: Sexual love; the most critical gauge of sexual orientation is one’s erotic experiences.

essentialism: Belief in natural and fixed characteristics of human groups.

ethnic expulsion: A policy aimed at removing groups who are culturally different from a country.

ethnic group: A group distinguished by cultural similarities (shared among members of that group) and differences (between that group and others); ethnic group members share beliefs, values, habits, customs, and norms, and a common language, religion, history, geography, kinship, or race.

ethnic minorities: Indigenous peoples who have moved to urban areas.

ethnicity: Identification with, and feeling part of, an ethnic group, and exclusion from certain other groups because of this affiliation.

ethnocentrism: The tendency to view one’s own culture as best and to judge the behavior and beliefs of culturally different people by one’s own standards.

ethnocide: Destruction by a dominant group of the cultures of an ethnic group.

ethnography: The firsthand, field-based study of a particular culture; usually entails spending a year or more in the field, living with natives and learning about their customs.

Etoro: A Papua New Guinea culture in which males are culturally trained to prefer homosexuality.

explanatory approach: The approach to human biological diversity that strives to discover the causes of specific human biological differences.

extradomestic: Outside the home; within or pertaining to the public domain.

family of affiliation: Refers to psychological ties with people one loves and can count on for emotional, social, and material support; especially useful when an individual’s natural family isn’t available or adequate in meeting his or her needs.

family of orientation: The nuclear family in which one is born and grows up.

family of procreation: A nuclear family established when one marries and has children.
**fictive kinship:** Reciprocal provision of goods and services, including affection, companionship, and shared values, between nonbiologically, nonlegally, but socially related individuals; often with the fiction of kinship ties, for example, honorary aunts and uncles.

**First World:** The democratic West—traditionally conceived in opposition to Second World, ruled by Communism.

**forced assimilation:** Use of force by a dominant group to compel a minority to adopt the dominant culture—for example, penalizing or banning the language and customs of an ethnic group.

**fundamentalism:** Antimodernist movements in various religions.

**gay:** Or *lesbian*: stands for *a way of life* by persons who desire, and have sex with, persons of the same sex (men in this case); as contrasted with *homosexual*.

**gender roles:** The tasks and activities that a culture assigns to each sex.

**gender stereotypes:** Oversimplified but strongly held ideas about the characteristics of males and females.

**gender stratification:** Unequal distribution of rewards (socially valued resources, power, prestige, and personal freedom) between men and women, reflecting their different positions in a social hierarchy.

**generalities:** Culture patterns or traits that exist in some but not all societies.

**genocide:** The deliberate elimination of a group, for example, through mass murder, warfare, or introduced diseases.

**gentrification:** The purchase and revitalization of abandoned or low-value homes and neighborhoods by middle- and upper-class people.

**geriatrics:** The medical specialty focusing on diseases and disabilities associated with aging and on treatment of the elderly.

**gerontology:** The study of aging and especially of older people.

**globalization:** The accelerating interdependence of nations in a world system linked economically and through mass media and modern transportation systems.

**hegemonic reading (of a “text”):** The reading or meaning that the creators intended, or the one the elites consider to be the intended or correct meaning.

**hegemony:** As used by Antonio Gramsci, a stratified social order in which subordinates comply with domination by internalizing its values and accepting its naturalness.

**heterogeneity:** Biological, social, and cultural differences of groups.

**heteromorphic:** Varied in shape or appearance.

**heteronormative:** The cultural assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal and proper form of sexuality.

**heterosexuality:** A person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and sexual activities with, persons of the opposite sex.

**hidden transcript:** As used by James Scott, the critique of power by the oppressed that goes on offstage (in private) where the power holders can’t see it.

**hijras:** In India, a third gender composed of biological males who have undergone an operation to have their genitals removed; they exaggerate female dress codes and decorum, have certain ritual duties, and work as prostitutes.

**holistic:** Interested in the whole of the human condition: past, present, and future; biology, society, language, and culture; holism is a key attribute of anthropology.

**homogeneity:** Biological, social, and cultural similarities of groups.

**homonyms:** Words that sound the same but have different meanings, for example, *bare* and *bear*.

**homosexual:** A term used to describe sexual desire and activity between persons of the same sex.

**homosexuality:** A person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and sexual activities with, persons of the same sex.

**human rights:** A doctrine that invokes a realm of justice and morality beyond and superior to particular countries, cultures, and religions. Human rights, usually seen as vested in individuals, would include the right
to speak freely, to hold religious beliefs without persecution, and not to be enslaved.

**humanities:** The fields that study art, narratives, music, dance, and other forms of creative expression.

**hypervitaminosis D:** A nutritional disorder caused by too much vitamin D; calcium deposits build up in the body’s soft tissues and the kidneys may eventually fail.

**hypodescent:** A rule that automatically places the children of a union or mating between members of different socioeconomic groups in the less-privileged group.

**ideal culture:** What people say they should do and what they say they do; contrasted with real culture.

**ideational solidarity:** Social integration through relations, bonds, and loyalties based on common knowledge.

**identity:** A psychosocial and political orientation that individuals internalize and that is shared by people united by a common status or experience.

**identity politics:** Sociopolitical identities based on the perception of sharing a common culture, language, religion, or race, rather than citizenship in a nation-state, which may contain diverse social groups.

**income:** Earnings from wages and salaries.

**independent invention:** The process by which humans innovate, creatively finding solutions to old and new problems; an important mechanism of cultural change.

**indigenized:** Modified to fit the local culture.

**Industrial Revolution:** The historical transformation (in Europe, after 1750) of traditional into modern societies through industrialization of the economy.

**institutional discrimination:** Programs, policies, and arrangements that deny equal rights and opportunities to, or differentially harm, members of particular groups.

**intellectual property rights (IPR):** A society’s cultural base—its core beliefs and principles. IPR is claimed as a group right—a cultural right, allowing indigenous groups to control who may know and use their collective knowledge and its applications.

**international culture:** Cultural traditions that extend beyond national boundaries.

**intersex:** Describing a group of conditions involving a discrepancy between the external genitals (penis, vagina, etc.) and the internal genitals (the testes and ovaries).

**Iroquois:** A confederacy of indigenous societies in New York State; matrilineal, with communal longhouses and a prominent political, religious, and economic role for women.

**!Kung:** A group of San (“Bushmen”) foragers of southern Africa; the exclamation point indicates a click sound in the San language.

**laissez-faire culturalism:** The autonomy that citizens of multicultural societies have to construct cultural identities and lifestyles that foster the well-being of identity groups and their members without interference or regulation by the state.

**lesbian:** Or gay; stands for a way of life by persons who desire, and have sex with, persons of the same sex (women in this case); as contrasted with homosexual.

**leveling mechanisms:** Customs and social actions that operate to reduce differences in wealth and thus to bring standouts in line with community norms.

**libido:** The sex drive.

**liminality:** The critically important marginal or in-between phase of a rite of passage.

**linguistic relativism:** The notion that all languages and dialects are equally effective as systems of communication.

**majority groups:** Superordinate, dominant, or controlling groups in a social/political hierarchy.

**matriarchy:** A society ruled by women; unknown to ethnography.

**matrifocal:** Mother-centered; often refers to a household with no resident husband-father.

**matrilineal descent:** A unilineal descent rule in which people join the mother’s group automatically at birth and stay members throughout life.

**matrilocality:** Customary residence with the wife’s relatives after marriage, so that children grow up in their mother’s community.
matrons: Senior women, as among the Iroquois.

melanin: A chemical substance manufactured in cells in the epidermis, or outer skin layer; the melanin cells of darker-skinned people produce more and larger granules of melanin than do those of lighter-skinned people.

minority groups: Subordinate groups in a social/political hierarchy, with inferior power and less secure access to resources than majority groups have.

mobilizing agents: Politically active individuals and community organizers, including elite members of minority groups, who are often artists and intellectuals with access to major social institutions, especially education and the media.

monogamous: Having only one sexual partner or mate at a time.

multicultural paradox: Principles and practices of homogeneity and heterogeneity, essentialism and constructivism by nationalists to deny human rights to some groups and by multiculturalists to claim them.

multicultural society: The coexistence of culturally-defined groups within a nation-state.

multiculturalism: The view of cultural diversity in a country as something good and desirable; a multicultural society socializes individuals not only into the dominant (national) culture but also into an ethnic culture.

multidirectional cultural imperialism: The reciprocal extension of economic, political, and cultural influence between and across all societies and cultures.

multiterritorialization of culture: The expression in new and diverse places of activities, rituals, ceremonies, and ideas associated with a particular geographic location of invention or origin.

nation: Once a synonym for ethnic group, designating a single culture sharing a language, religion, history, territory, ancestry, and kinship; now usually a synonym for state or nation-state.

nation-state: An autonomous political entity; a country, such as the United States or Canada.

national culture: Cultural experiences, beliefs, learned behavior patterns, and values shared by citizens of the same nation.

nationalities: Ethnic groups that once had, or wish to have or regain, autonomous political status (their own countries).

native anthropologist: An anthropologist who studies his or her own culture, such as an American working in the United States or a Canadian in Canada.

natural selection: The process by which nature selects the forms most fit to survive and reproduce in a given environment, such as the tropics.

naturists: Those who argue that human behavior and social organization are biologically determined.

négritude: African identity; developed by African intellectuals in Francophone (French-speaking) western Africa.

neoliberalism: Encompasses a set of assumptions and economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 to 30 years and that are being implemented in capitalist and developing countries, including postsocialist societies.

neolocality: A postmarital residence rule or custom by which a married couple chooses a new place to live rather than residing with or near the parents of either spouse.

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs): Organized interest or affinity groups with local (e.g., a bowling league), state (e.g., a Michigan lawyers’ group), regional (e.g., Sons of Dixie), national (e.g., Young Americans for Freedom), or international (e.g., Save the Children) memberships.

nuclear family: Kinship group consisting of parents and children.

nurturists: Those who link behavior and social organization to environmental factors. Nurturists focus on variation rather than universals and stress learning and the role of culture in human adaptation.

orientalism: A Western system of scholarship, thought, and politics that consists of racist and ethnocentric generalizations about the nature and culture of societies and nations in Asia and the Middle East.
Glossary

**pantribal sodalities**: Nonkin-based groups that exist throughout a tribe, spanning several villages.

**particularities**: Distinctive or unique culture traits, patterns, or integrations.

**patriarchy**: A political system ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights.

**patrilineal descent**: A unilineal descent rule by which people join the father’s group automatically at birth and stay members throughout life.

**patrilineal-patrilocal complex**: An interrelated constellation of patrilineality, patrilocality, warfare, and male supremacy.

**patrilocality**: Customary residence with the husband’s relatives after marriage.

**phenotype**: An organism’s evident traits; its manifest biology—anatomy and physiology.

**philia**: Friendship, the most enduring form of love; born out of higher faculties, as contrasted with *eros* and *agape*.

**plural society**: According to Fredrik Barth, a society that features ethnic contrasts, ecological specialization of its ethnic groups, and the economic interdependence of those groups.

**pluralism**: The view that ethnic and racial difference should be allowed to thrive, so long as such diversity does not threaten dominant values and norms.

**Polynesia**: A triangle of South Pacific islands formed by Hawaii to the north, Easter Island to the east, and New Zealand to the southwest.

**postmodern**: In its most general sense, describes the blurring and breakdown of established canons (rules, standards), categories, distinctions, and boundaries.

**postmodernism**: A style and movement in architecture that succeeded modernism. Compared with modernism, postmodernism is less geometric, less functional, less austere, more playful, and more willing to include elements from diverse times and cultures; *postmodern* now describes comparable developments in music, literature, and visual art.

**postmodernity**: The condition of a world in flux, with people on the move, in which established groups, boundaries, identities, contrasts, and standards are reaching out and breaking down.

**power**: The ability to exercise one’s will over others—to do what one wants; the basis of political status.

**prejudice**: Devaluing (looking down on) a group because of its assumed behavior, values, capabilities, or attributes.

**prestige**: Esteem, respect, or approval for acts, deeds, or qualities considered exemplary.

**proletariat**: See *working class*.

**public transcript**: As used by James Scott, the open, public interactions between dominators and oppressed; the outer shell of power relations.

**race**: An ethnic group assumed to have a biological basis.

**racial classification**: A now-rejected approach to the study of human biological diversity, which seeks to assign human beings to categories based on assumed common ancestry.

**racism**: Discrimination against an ethnic group assumed to have a biological basis.

**real culture**: Actual behavior as observed by the anthropologist; contrasted with *ideal culture*.

**refugees**: People who have been forced (involuntary refugees) or who have chosen (voluntary refugees) to flee a country to escape persecution or war.

**religion**: Belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces.

**rickets**: A nutritional disorder caused by a shortage of vitamin D, so that calcium is imperfectly absorbed in the intestines; causes softening and deformation of the bones.

**rites of passage**: Culturally defined activities associated with the transition from one place or stage of life to another.

**rituals**: Behaviors that are formal, stylized, repetitive, and stereotyped, performed earnestly as social acts; rituals are held at set times and places and have liturgical orders.
role: A set of expected (culturally proper) behaviors, attitudes, rights, and obligations attached to a particular status.

science: A systematic field of study that aims, through experiment, observation, and deduction, to produce reliable explanations of phenomena with reference to the material and physical world.

Second World: The Warsaw Pact nations, including the former Soviet Union and the Socialist and once-Socialist countries of eastern Europe and Asia.

secret societies: Sodalities, usually all-male or all-female, with secret initiation ceremonies.

serial monogamy: Marriage of a given individual to several spouses, but not at the same time.

sexual dimorphism: Marked differences in male and female biology besides the contrasts in breasts and genitals.

sexual fit: Combines physical traits with psychosocial sensibilities; this fit, that is, a particular set of characteristics that activates one’s libido, reappears in different potential partners during one’s life span.

sexual orientation: The patterned way in which a person views and expresses the sexual component of his or her personality; a person’s habitual sexual attraction to, and activities with, persons of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality), or both sexes (bisexuality). Asexuality refers to indifference toward, or lack of attraction to, either sex.

social races: Groups assumed to have a biological basis but actually perceived and defined in a social context, by a particular culture rather than by scientific criteria.

society: In social science terminology, organized life in groups. In the United States, society has acquired an additional and more restrictive meaning: the “proper” organization of individuals and groups, with people in assigned stations, or places, in the social order.

sociocultural anthropology: Or simply cultural anthropology; the field that describes, interprets, and explains similarities and differences among societies and cultures.

sociolinguistics: The study of relationships between social and linguistic variation; the study of language (performance) in its social context.

sodalities: See pantribal sodalities.

speech communities: Self-constructed groups whose members communicate verbally and regularly as an act of identity.

state (nation-state): A complex sociopolitical system that administers a territory and populace with substantial contrasts in occupation, wealth, prestige, and power. An independent, centrally organized political unit; a government.

status: Any position that determines where someone fits in society; may be ascribed or achieved.

stereotypes: Fixed ideas, often unfavorable, about what members of a group are like.

strategic resources: Things necessary for life, such as food and shelter.

stratification: A characteristic of a system with socioeconomic strata; see stratum.

stratified: Class-structured; stratified societies have marked differences in wealth, prestige, and power between social classes.

stratum: One of two or more groups that contrast in regard to social status and access to strategic resources. Each stratum includes people of both sexes and all ages.

style shifts: Variations in speech in different contexts.

subaltern: Lower in rank; subordinate; traditionally lacking an influential role in decision making.

subcultures: The diverse cultural patterns and traditions associated with different groups in the same nation; subcultures (a problematic term) may originate in ethnicity, class, region, or religion.

subordinate: The lower, or underprivileged, group in a stratified system.

superordinate: The upper, or privileged, group in a stratified system.

symbol: Something, verbal or nonverbal, that arbitrarily and by convention stands for something else, with which it has no necessary or natural connection.
text: Something that is creatively “read,” interpreted, and assigned meaning by each person who receives it; includes any mediaborne image, such as Carnival.

Third World: The less-developed countries (LDCs).

transgender: Describing a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups that contradict normative gender roles that society assigns to males and females at birth.

transgenderism: A political movement to secure human rights for self-defined transgender persons.

tropics: A geographic zone extending some 23 degrees north and south of the equator, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.

underclass: The abjectly poor, in North America and throughout the world; people who lack jobs, adequate food, medical care, even shelter.

uni-versals: Traits that exist in every culture.

urban anthropology: The anthropological study of cities.

urbanization: The transformation of rural or agrarian social organization to organized life in cities.

variables: Attributes (e.g., sex, age, height, weight) that differ from one person or case to the next.

vernacular: Ordinary, casual speech.

wealth: All a person’s material assets, including income, land, and other types of property; the basis of economic status.

working class: Or proletariat; those who must sell their labor to survive; the antithesis of the bourgeoisie in Marx’s class analysis.

world view: Ways in which a people makes sense of its place in the context of the world.
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