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# CULTURE & SOCIETY

# Learning Objectives

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- Know what culture consists of and recognize how it differs from society.
- Learn about the “cultural turn” and sociological perspectives on culture.  
Understand the processes that changed societies over time.
- Recognize the legacies of colonialism and the effects of globalization on your own life and the lives of people around the world.
- Understand the debate over the influence of biological and cultural factors on behavior. Learn how the Internet and global culture influence local cultures.

# Today's Class

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- **Basic Concepts**
  - Definitions of “culture” and “society”
- **Sociology of Culture**
  - Learn about sociological perspectives on culture
  - Understand the processes that changed societies over time
- **Research Today: Understanding the Modern World**
  - Recognize the legacies of colonialism in shaping our understanding of the modern world
- **Unanswered Questions**
  - Understand the debate over the influence of biological and cultural factors on behavior
  - How global culture influence local cultures

# Basic Concepts

# Why Is Culture Important?

- Culture determines how we see and interact with the world
- Some aspects of culture are universal
- Many aspects of culture are not universal
- How we view our culture in relation to others affects our interactions with others
- Culture changes over time and varies, even within larger cultures

# Culture and Society

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- **Culture:** The values, norms, and material goods characteristic of a given group.
- **Society:** A group of people who live in a particular territory, are subject to a common system of political authority, and are aware of having a distinct identity from other groups.
- **Cultural universals:** The values or modes of behavior shared by all human cultures.
- **Marriage:** A socially approved sexual relationship between two individuals.

# Society

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- Society
  - Group of people living in a given territory governed by a common political authority and guided by a common culture
  - A system of interrelationships that connects individuals (“the ties that bind people together”)
    - Formal bonds: social institutions such as government and religion
    - Informal bonds: friendship, family, etc.
  - Culture makes society possible

# Culture

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- Culture (varying and changing) is made up of
  - Values
    - Abstract ideals about right and wrong
  - Norms
    - Standards of behavior
  - Material goods
    - The objects and goods a society creates
  - Languages and symbols
    - Vehicles of communication and meaning in a society, representing objects and thoughts
    - Give identity to people; make cultural continuity possible



# Introduction to Culture

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- What is culture?
  - *Intangible* things like beliefs and thoughts, expectations
  - *Tangible* things like objects, buildings, infrastructure
- Material Culture
  - Objects or belongings of a group
  - Clothing, hairstyles, school buildings
- Non-Material Culture
  - Ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society
  - Often represent/ reflect material culture

# Nonmaterial Culture

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- **Nonmaterial culture:** Comprises the nonphysical components of culture, including values, norms, symbols, language, and speech and writing.
- **Values:** Ideas held by individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good, and bad.
- **Norms:** Rules of conduct that specify appropriate behavior in a given range of social situations.

# Values and Beliefs

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- Values: the standard for discerning goodness, justice
  - Deeply embedded, essential for transmitting and teaching cultural beliefs
  - Shape society by suggesting what's good/bad, sought/avoided, ugly/beautiful, etc.
  - Values portray an *ideal culture*, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to
  - *Real culture*, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists, differs from ideal
  - Rewards, sanctions (permission), and punishments enact values
  - Values are not static
- Beliefs: Tenets and convictions people hold

# Social Norms

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- Invisible rule for conduct, *norms* tell us how to behave according to what society tells us what is right, good, important
  - Most people follow them
- Formal norms: established, written rules agreed upon
- Informal norms: casual behaviors people generally conform to (much like behavioral scripts)
  - Breaching experiments reveal our discomfort when people don't follow these

# Symbols

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- **Symbol:** One item used to stand for or represent another.
- **Signifier:** Any vehicle of meaning and communication.
- **Semiotics:** The study of the ways in which nonlinguistic phenomena can generate meaning.
  - Semiotics opens a fascinating field for sociology because it allows us to contrast the ways in which different cultures are structured.

# Language

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- **Language:** The primary vehicle of meaning and communication in a society, language is a system of symbols that represent objects and abstract thoughts.
- Human behavior is oriented toward the symbols we use to represent “reality,” rather than toward the reality itself—and these symbols are determined within a particular culture.
- **Linguistic relativity hypothesis:** A hypothesis, based on the theories of Sapir and Whorf, that perceptions are relative to language.

# Symbols and Language

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- Symbols: gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand their world, convey recognizable meanings shared by societies
  - An object may represent an idea and convey important cultural meanings (wedding rings, trophies, stop signs, etc.)
- Language: symbolic system through which people communicate, culture is transmitted
  - Language is a common symbol to all cultures, no matter how it is conveyed (verbal, written, non-verbal)



(a)



(b)

# Speech and Writing

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- All societies use speech as a vehicle of language.
- Writing began as a means of storing information in the form of lists: Marks made on wood, clay, or stone served to keep records about significant events, objects, or people.
- A society that possesses writing can locate itself in time and space.



# Material Culture

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- **Material culture:** The physical objects that a society creates that influence the ways in which people live.
- Material culture is rapidly becoming globalized, largely through modern information technology such as the computer and the Internet.

# **The Sociological Study of Culture**

# Culture and Change: A “Cultural Turn” in Sociology?

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- **Cultural turn:** Sociology’s recent emphasis on the importance of understanding the role of culture in daily life.
- According to Ann Swindler, culture is a “tool kit” from which people select different understandings and behaviors.
- There is no single “reality” to social encounters. Multiple cultural scripts can play out in any situation.

# The Sociological Study of Culture

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## Culture as a “tool kit” (Swidler, 1987)

- To understand the role of culture in daily life
- Challenges the assumption that culture rigidly determines our values and behaviors
- Instead, people select different understandings and behaviors (cultural “scripts”) under various contexts
- To understand why people might have chosen some scripts over others

# Cultural Diamond

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- **Cultural diamond:** According to sociologist Wendy Griswold, there are four elements of any culture that constitute a complex cultural system.
  - Material and nonmaterial cultural objects
  - The creators or producers of cultural objects
  - The receivers of cultural objects who make meaning out of them
  - The larger social world, comprising the economic, political, social, and cultural patterns in a society

# Early Human Culture

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- **Hunting and gathering societies:** Societies whose mode of subsistence is gained from hunting animals, fishing, and gathering edible plants.
- **Pastoral societies:** Societies whose subsistence derives from the rearing of domesticated animals.
- **Agrarian societies:** Societies whose means of subsistence are based on agricultural production (crop growing).

# The Sociological Study of Culture

**Table 3.1**

**Types of Human Society**

TYPE	PERIOD OF EXISTENCE	CHARACTERISTICS
Hunting and gathering societies	50,000 B.C.E. to the present. Now on the verge of complete disappearance.	Consist of small numbers of people gaining their livelihood from hunting, fishing, and the gathering of edible plants. Few inequalities. Differences of rank limited by age and gender.
Agrarian societies	12,000 B.C.E. to the present. Most are now part of larger political entities and losing their distinct identity.	Based on small rural communities, without towns or cities. Livelihood gained through agriculture, often supplemented by hunting and gathering. Stronger inequalities than among hunters and gatherers. Ruled by chiefs.
Pastoral societies	12,000 B.C.E. to the present. Today mostly part of larger states; their traditional ways of life are being undermined.	Range from a few hundred people to many thousands. Depend on the tending of domesticated animals for their subsistence. Marked by distinct inequalities. Ruled by chiefs or warrior kings.
Traditional societies or civilizations	6000 B.C.E. to the nineteenth century. All traditional states have disappeared.	Very large in size, some numbering millions of people (though small compared with larger industrialized societies). Some cities exist, in which trade and manufacture are concentrated. Based largely on agriculture. Major inequalities exist among different classes. Distinct apparatus of government headed by a king or emperor.

# Industrialization

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- **Industrialization:** The process of the machine production of goods.
- Industrialization resulted from the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution in Britain, which affected people's means of gaining a livelihood through:
  - Invention of new machines
  - Mostly urban
  - Large organizations like corporations and government agencies
  - Harnessing of power resources for production
  - Use of science to improve production methods



# Industrial Societies

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- **Industrialized societies:** Strongly developed nation-states in which the majority of the population works in factories or offices rather than in agriculture, and most people live in urban areas.
- **Nation-states:** Particular types of states, characteristic of the modern world, in which governments have sovereign power within defined territorial areas, and populations are citizens who know themselves to be part of single nations.

# The Sociological Study of Culture

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## Industrialization and Sociology

- Sociology first emerged as a discipline under the background of industrialization and urbanization in Europe and North America.
- Marx, Weber and Durkheim all sought to explain the sweeping changes in culture and society
  - Durkheim: “organic solidarity”
  - Marx: Capitalism and class conflict
  - Weber: rationalization and the “iron cage”

# Intro to Theoretical Perspectives on Culture

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- *Functionalism* or structural functionalist perspective acknowledges that there are many parts of culture that work together as a system to fulfill society's needs and to promote stability
- *Conflict theory* focuses on populations that may be systematically disadvantaged while other groups are advantaged
  - Focus: Power and Inequality
- *Symbolic interactionism* is primarily interested in culture as experienced in the daily interactions between individuals and the symbols that have meaning in a culture

# **Research Today: Understanding the Modern World**

# Colonialism

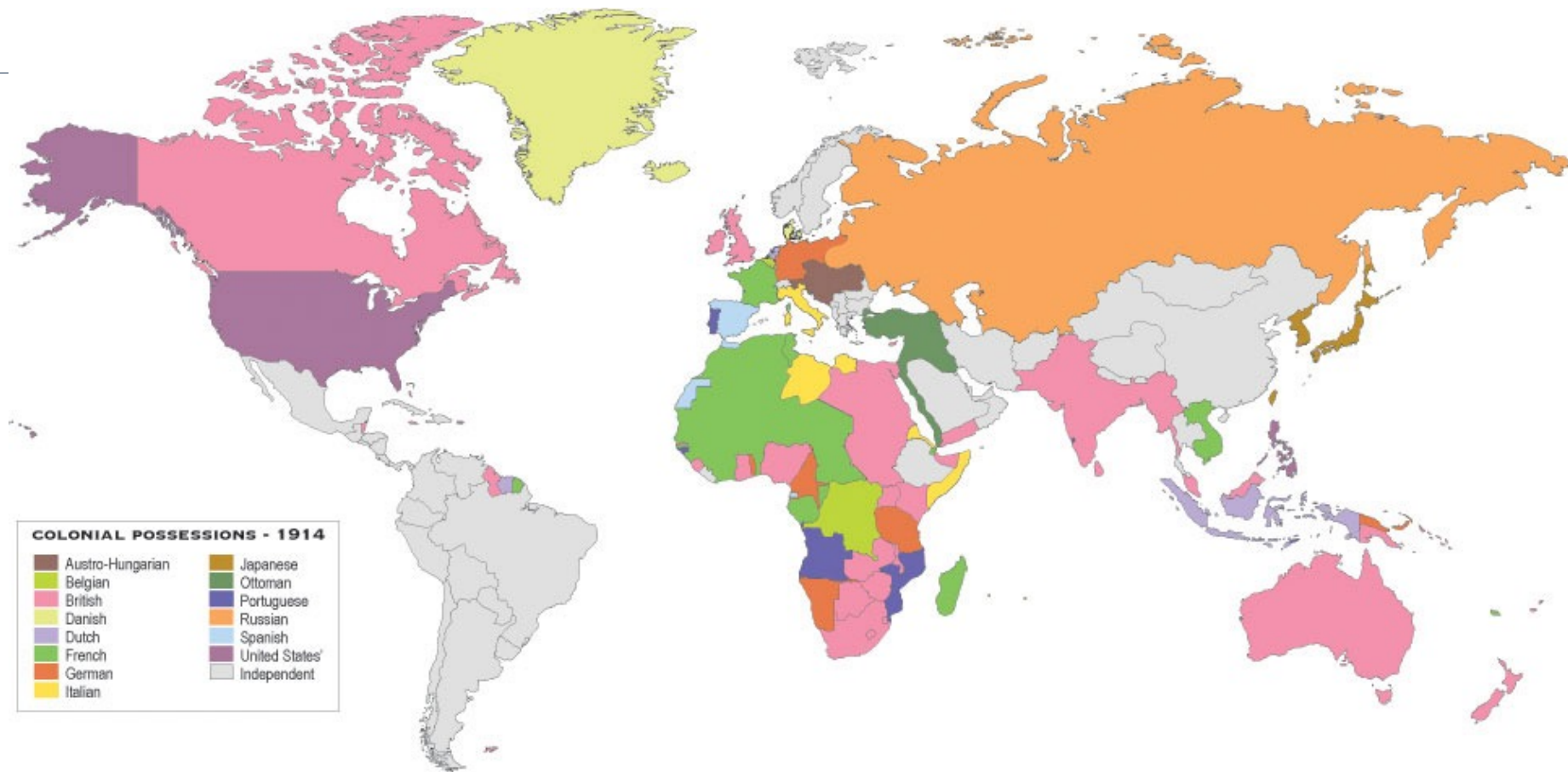
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- **Colonialism:** The process whereby Western nations established their rule in parts of the world away from their home territories.
- *Settler colonialism:* Colonialism that took the form of large-scale European settlement. Settler colonialism shaped societies in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, and rapidly industrialized.
- Other regions in Asia, Africa, and South America saw a form of colonialism where local populations remained in the majority and were governed by colonial powers. These societies saw slower levels of industrialization.

# Research Today: Understanding the Modern World

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- Colonialism (17C to mid 20C)
  - Expansion of one nation's territory and power by formally ruling other regions using force
  - A set of unequal, exploitative relationships between the colonial power and the colony.
  - Some types of colonialism
    - Settler colonies
    - Dependency (relations of economic extraction)



World Map of 1914

# Research Today: Understanding the Modern World

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## Models of Colonial Power

### Dependency theory

- In understanding how development happens, critiquing modernization theory
- Focus on uneven and unequal way in which these nation-states are produced

### Neocolonialism

- Abstract, semi-indirect forms of economic control whose linchpin is the close alliance between foreign capital and indigenous elites

### How is power concentrated in the current world?

- E.g. High levels of poverty in the Global South – Why?



# Research Today: Understanding the Modern World

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Related concepts:

- Imperialism
  - A nation's expansion of power by extending direct or indirect control or influence over other regions
- Post-colonialism
  - How colonialism continues to structure our thoughts in contemporary world

# Cultural Capital

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- **Cultural capital:** The accumulated cultural knowledge within a society that confers power and status.
- French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who introduced this concept, maintained there were three types of cultural capital:
  - What a person embodies in their very person
  - What is reflected in the material objects one possesses
  - What is socially determined by larger institutions

# The Global South

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- Most countries in the global south—South Asia, Africa, and South America—are areas that underwent colonial rule or countries influenced by such colonial relationships.
- Many have become independent states only since World War II, often following bloody anticolonial struggles.
- **Emerging economies:** Developing countries, such as India and Singapore, that over the past two or three decades have begun to develop a strong industrial base.

# Cultural Conformity

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- One of the challenges for all cultures is to instill in people a willingness to conform.
- Encouraging conformity is accomplished in two ways:
  - Members learn the norms of their culture starting from childhood.
  - Social control comes into play when a person fails to conform adequately to a culture's norms.
- Cultures differ in how much they value conformity.

# Cultural Appropriation

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- **Cultural appropriation:** When members of one cultural group borrow elements of another group's culture.
- Sociologist George Lipsitz has argued that when a majority or dominant culture appropriates elements of a minority culture, particularly one that has historically suffered oppression at the hands of the majority, it is especially important that those doing the appropriation be extremely sensitive to the historical meaning and contemporary significance of the cultural forms being appropriated.

# Cultural Appropriation at Yale

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- In October 2015, the campus of Yale University broke out in controversy over a series of emails written by administrators about Halloween.
- An instructor was fired after students felt her email was dismissive of the power of harmful stereotypes against marginalized groups.



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