**Culture and Society Defined**

**Culture** consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions. This latter term **institution** refers to clusters of rules and cultural meanings associated with specific social activities. Common institutions are the family, education, religion, work, and health care.

Popularly speaking, being **cultured** means being well‐educated, knowledgeable of the arts, stylish, and well‐mannered. **High culture**—generally pursued by the upper class—refers to classical music, theater, fine arts, and other sophisticated pursuits. Members of the upper class can pursue high art because they have **cultural capital**, which means the professional credentials, education, knowledge, and verbal and social skills necessary to attain the “property, power, and prestige” to “get ahead” socially. **Low culture**, or **popular culture**—generally pursued by the working and middle classes—refers to sports, movies, television sitcoms and soaps, and rock music. Remember that sociologists define *culture* differently than they do *cultured, high culture, low culture*, and *popular culture*.

Sociologists define **society** as the people who interact in such a way as to share a common culture. The **cultural bond** may be ethnic or racial, based on gender, or due to shared beliefs, values, and activities. The term *society* can also have a *geographic* meaning and refer to people who share a common culture in a particular location. For example, people living in arctic climates developed different cultures from those living in desert cultures. In time, a large variety of human cultures arose around the world.

Culture and society are intricately related. A culture consists of the “objects” of a society, whereas a society consists of the people who share a common culture. When the terms *culture* and *society* first acquired their current meanings, most people in the world worked and lived in small groups in the same locale. In today's world of 6 billion people, these terms have lost some of their usefulness because increasing numbers of people interact and share resources globally. Still, people tend to use *culture* and *society* in a more traditional sense: for example, being a part of a “racial culture” within the larger “U.S. society.”

## Difference between Culture and Society

**Culture vs Society**  
Culture is changing constantly. Certain products of culture are governments, languages, buildings and man made things. It is a powerful tool for the survival of mankind. Cultural patterns of ancient people are reflected in their artifacts and are studied by archaeologists to understand their way of life. Culture is an important part of a society for the very existence of society. Culture also plays an important role to establish discipline in a society. According to the behavior patterns and perceptions, there are three levels of culture.

First one is the body of cultural traditions that makes you to differentiate a society from others. When people speak German, Japanese or Italian, then they are referred as the language, beliefs and traditions shared by each set of people that is different from others. Second one is the subculture in which different societies from different parts of the world preserve their original culture. Such people are the part of a subculture in the new society. For example, subcultures in United States consist of ethnic groups like Mexican Americans, African Americans and Vietnamese Americans. The members of each subculture share a common language, identity, food tradition and other traits through a common ancestral upbringing. The third level is the cultural universals that consist of behavior patterns shared by the humanity as a whole. Some examples of such behavior patterns are communicating with a verbal language, use of age and gender to classify people, differentiation based on marriage and relationships.

Society is referred to as a group of people who share common area, culture and behavior patterns. Society is united and referred as a distinct entity. Society consists of a government, health care, education system and several occupations of people. In a society each and every individual is important because each individual can contribute something to the society. Also you can find smaller groups of people with a certain goal which include groups of students, government agencies or groups that raise money for a specific cause in a society. Many different cultures can be found within a society. You can find several differences within a country or town.

In a broad sense, the society is made of varied multitude of individuals with social, economic or industrial infrastructure. One of the major benefits of a society is that it serves the individuals in the time of crisis. Societies are also organized depending up on their political structure such as State, bands, chiefdoms and tribes. The degrees of political power vary according to the cultural, historical and geographical environments. Certain societies give certain status to an individual or group of people when an individual or group performs a favorable action for the society.

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**2. Society and Culture:  
Patterns of Human Behavior**

Society and culture are, together, the sea of people and institutions all around us that we sometimes call our "community." The society and culture of our local community might be made up of all the ways of small-town or suburban life, or perhaps all the ways of city life, or even the society and culture of a local neighborhood in which we live.

In a wider sense, our whole country is one big community.

**One Big Family**

In fact, some sociologists say that since the advent of television in the 1950's, our country really has become one great community with many shared experiences--the same programs, clothes, cars, beliefs, feelings, and hopes and doubts as expressed on the same television programming from coast to coast and from Alaska to Mexico. This makes sense, if we consider that the average person watches three to four hours of television per day: we in this country have become one big community--one big society and one culture--much more so than we used to be when all people had was radio and magazines.

"Society" is the sum of all the different social groups, social rules, and social interactions we experience in living, working, and playing with our fellow humans, whether we want to or not. The "culture" of a society is its own particular stage or level of refinement, especially in intellectual and artistic pursuits.

A society or group that is highly cultured will have a highly refined--thought out and experienced--level of intellectual and artistic sensitivity. An example of a more highly cultured society is what you find on a college campus. Here people purposely are pursuing more intellectual and artistic thoughts and sensitivities.

A society or group that is hardly cultured at all will have very little thought about abstract ideas, nor will it have very much sensitivity to the arts. An example of a society with a very low level of culture would be a group of cavemen and cavewomen at the beginning of human history, or perhaps tribal people in modern-day countries where almost every minute of the day is taken up in the pursuit to find, make, and eat enough food to survive.

In fact, this constant pursuit of food and of shelter-- constant work--is one thing about which many intellectuals complain in our own society. These intellectuals say that we often must spend so much time working at our jobs that we have little time to experience intellectual or artistic stimulation in our lives. And one time-honored remedy for this, however small, is to require a humanities course in college so that we can at least learn how to pursue the intellectual and the artistic a little better on our own.

**Loners and Socializers**

One popular theory of society and culture is that we can be divided, in general, into two groups of people: those who are "inner-directed" and those who are "other- directed."

This theory was first developed by a sociologist named David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*, and other sociologists have further developed the idea. Basically, inner-directed people can be said to be those among us who keep our own counsel, work independently, go our own way, and consider our individuality very important. Those of us who are other-directed can be said to seek the counsel of others first, work best with others, travel in groups, and consider our ability to be part of a group very important.

There are obvious strengths and weaknesses to both inner-directed and other-directed ways of living. The great majority of us is neither entirely one way nor the other, but rather has traits of both in us.

**Biology versus Society**

Another popular theory--or rather a popular argument-- is the fight that many intellectuals have over "nature" versus "nurture."

The "nature" people often are in the "hard sciences" such as biology, neurology (the study of the nervous system), and medicine. They believe that the genetic code we are naturally born with usually determines what we will become. They say that even the smallest details of our personalities, whom we marry, what jobs we choose, or whether we get grumpy at breakfast when we read the newspaper headlines, all may be determined by our DNA--by what genes we have in our cells at birth.

One powerful proof of the "nature" argument is research done on identical twins who have not known each other since birth. These twins have the exact same sets of genes. When studied, these twins usually have extremely similar patterns in their lives, marrying, having children, dying, and even choosing spouses and jobs at similar times in similar ways, as if they were preprogrammed to do so.

This research on twins, and other research, suggests that individuals, groups, and even whole societies are deeply and thoroughly tied to our genetic codes.

The "nurture" people, on the other hand, often are more "soft science" or theory-oriented people in the social sciences: sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. They believe that our personalities, social institutions and cultural patterns are determined by the way we are "nurtured"--the way we are brought up as children--and by what we learn all around us as we continue to grow as adults.

Those who believe in the nurture theory argue that we are somewhat blank at birth, like clean blackboards, and our experiences mold us as we grow up. The most powerful argument in their favor is, perhaps, that it is obvious to all of us that we can be deeply affected--and deeply changed--by the kinds of jobs, money, friends, lovers, relatives, successes, disasters, and accidental events we experience. Therefore, according to the nurture theory, society is free to choose much of its rules and also the cultural level it will have.

Are society and culture more controlled by rigid genes from birth on? Or are society and culture essentially free to choose what they will become?

It seems likely, at this point in time, that both sides of this argument have a large piece of the truth: we are much more deeply affected by our genetic coding than we perhaps realize; but we still are deeply affected, too, by the way we were brought up and what we continue to experience. We as individuals and as a society are, to put it in another (more philosophical) way, profoundly fated and profoundly free at the same time.

**Class Structures**

There are many theories about culture, too. One such theory that combines ideas about both culture and society is that our society is divided into various socio-economic groupings:

**Upper classes  
Middle classes  
Lower classes**

These three groupings sometimes are further subdivided in ways such as this:

**Upper**: upper-upper class (extremely wealthy) middle-upper class (fairly wealthy) lower-upper class (somewhat wealthy)

**Middle**: upper-middle class (very comfortable) middle-middle class (comfortable) lower-middle class (barely comfortable)

**Lower**: upper-lower class (struggling) middle-lower class (poor but independent) lower-lower class (poor and dependent)

And there are other class labels:

**White collar**: managerial office workers in middle or upper classes.

**Pink collar**: female secretarial and managerial office workers in middle and lower classes.

**Professional classes**: people with salaries (rather than hourly wages) and, usually, jobs requiring little or no physical labor.

**Creative classes**: professional artists, administrators, and teachers of the arts and crafts; those whose living is directly related to such activities; and those who choose geographic locations and jobs because of the presence of the arts and crafts.

**Working classes**: lower to middle-lower classes doing semiskilled and skilled non-office labor.

It is hard to assign income levels to the three groups, especially because of widely varying differences between city and country, differences between states and areas, and also a constant rate of inflation. But in 2002, the year this chapter was most recently revised, the approximate income, education, and artistic/ intellectual levels might run something like this for an average family of two adults and one child in a small to average American city or average suburb:

**Upper**: Rs 100,0000-Rs.200,0000+; 4+ years of college education; cultural activities may include attendance at or support of symphonies, dance (modern, ballet, etc.); hardbound books and more expensive magazines, more costly restaurants, dinner parties, nightclubs, and/or the personal computers and the Internet. More likely to be a middle-age couple with grown children.

**Middle**: Rs30,0000 - $500,000; 1+ yrs. of post-high school ed.; cultural activities may include movies, videos, clubs, dancing, paperback books, inexpensive restaurants, travel by camping or by discounted air flight, popular magazines, churches or nightclubs, and/or personal computers.  More likely to be a couple with children at home or a single in a well paid profession.

**Lower**: Rs.80000 – Rs.30,0000; 2-4 years of high school education; cultural activities may include TV and videos, fast-food restaurants, churches or bars, relatives, street scenes, parks, and/or free or low-cost computer services.  (Note: This category includes poor families, most of whom are eligible for a minimum of eight thousand dollars or more per year of financial, health, and food support.)  More likely to be a single parent with two or more children, an elderly adult living alone, or a member of an economically disenfranchised group such as a minority, disabled person, or recent immigrant.

**Who Belongs To What Class?**

We can determine people's class levels by a number of factors, as suggested above. However, keep in mind that it is not only money, education, and cultural activities that suggest class. We can look at people's style of living, type of work, and even their personality types, interests, and feelings in understanding their class affiliations.  There will, in short, be many crossovers in the three categories above; in addition, it is a time-honored tradition in American culture for young people to make their own way in the world, no matter from what class they come, such that they experience having much less income when they are young adults than when they did as children growing up.

Indeed, deciding what class any one person belongs to can be very difficult.  This can be true not only when that person is a young adult and/or single, but also when he or she is part of a marriage in which there are no children to support.  Additional complications occur when--as is happening in present-day United States--both individuals in a marriage or permanent pairing have a professional income.  Other hard-to- label people are poorly paid political or educational workers, whose pay often is quite low but whose style of life places them in a "higher" class designation; artists, whose cultural tastes and activities may be like those of the upper class but whose income places them among the poorest; labor managers who have risen out of the labor force to become upper-middle or even upper class in income, but whose activities and interests remain working class; and many others.  The United States (and other modern countries) certainly are not free of class differences; however, there is a great degree of mixing of classes, class traits, and upward and downward mobility.

A new type of class has been discussed in detail recently.  Richard Florida of Carnegie Mellon University calls it the "creative class" in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (http://www.creativeclass.org), and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ calls this group of people "cultural creatives" in his book by the same name.  Both authors argue that this group of people composes up to 30% of the population of the United States.  The core people in this group make their living as artists and craftspersons of all kinds; a larger, secondary number service the arts and crafts as administrators, teachers, and suppliers; a third and largest group participate in artistic, craft, and related cultural events to such a degree that they choose where they live and work--and often with whom--according to the the extent and diversity of arts, crafts, and cultural events found in these places, jobs, and people.

In spite of such difficulties in labeling some people, the class system of understanding society and culture can lead to a number of interesting observations about societal groups and individuals, their habits, and their ways.  However, it also remains important to remember that many beliefs and feelings in a given society are cross-cultural: they continue through the strata of several or all classes at once, and may be of no particular class origin or significance.

**Are New Societies Always Better?**

Socio-economic division of society by classes is only one theory about culture and society. Another theory is one popularly assumed by many historians and anthropologists. It is the theory, or assumption, that societies at the beginning of human history had a low level of culture, and human history has shown a gradual progress of culture throughout the ages.

There are a few problems with this assumption, though. One is obvious--we have had times in history, and may have more such times, when war, famine, disease, or other causes have set cultural levels back to primitive levels. Periods of time in the middle ages are good examples, times when the Plague swept through countries, destroying a third of European society, or times such as World War II when the plague of racism called The Holocaust destroyed almost 90% of the Jewish race in Europe--a race with one of the strongest records of intellect and artistic achievement since almost the beginning of recorded human history.

Clearly, it is possible for culture to be set back. Often, the cultural level of a country is dependent upon the length of time it has been at peace, and the relative wealth it has, allowing people time to think and to be artistic about things other than mere day-to-day survival.

Another problem with the theory that culture has gradually been improving throughout the history of humankind is that some societies were at their highest level of culture before written records even were being kept. We imagine that humanity started with half-human apes gradually learning to think and draw; however, the truth is that there is a great gap of time between the ape- human who was our ancestor, and the earliest known histories of human endeavor. Some of the earliest records, in fact, suggest even earlier races of human beings that had complex cultures, evolved philosophies of thought, religion, and politics, and subtle and rich arts. Ancient Egypt, early Vedic India, and possibly some of the earliest Indians in South or Central America all may have been much more evolved civilizations than we understand or are able to study or know, simply because ancient records of them do not adequately exist.

If such cultured nations did exist five or even ten thousand years ago, it might suggest that we do not need to have a highly developed mechanical or technological civilization in order to have a highly developed society or culture: our machines and inventions may not be necessary for us to have high levels of thought and artistic feeling. Perhaps the flower of our being human--the ability to reflect about life and experience artistic representations of life--is something that can happen outside of technological advancement.

If such is the case, then we might find that society and culture are helped by technology only because technology makes a safer, better living possible for a wider number of people--and thus most of us can have more time to develop our thought and feeling.

In any case, the important thing for us to realize now is that in this country, at least, we are a society with the time and money to pursue higher levels of culture. We may not have a lot of time; but we actually do so without thinking about whenever we talk over ideas with friends, see a better movie or appreciate music that makes us feel more deeply. We are a society that in some ways takes a developed culture for granted. We enjoy our culture, our ideas and theories about life, our arguments, our appreciation of music and dancing and the arts. And we would feel lost as a society without these.

Some philosophers argue, in fact, that what makes our society and our civilization so special is that culture is available to almost all of us universally. We are a nation and a civilization of thinkers and feelers who ponder truth and take great pleasure in our arts. And this brings us far more joy and meaning than those who struggle from day to day just to survive can have. It is something for which we can all be thankful.