become impatient if the responses aren't immediate, even when there is no apparent urgency.

In this context the "fast-food industry" is an excellent example of an American cultural product. McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, and other fast-food establishments prosper in a country where many people want to minimize the amount of time spent preparing and eating meals. The millions of Americans who take their meals at fast-food restaurants cannot be interested in lingering over their food while talking with friends, in the way millions of Europeans do. As McDonald's restaurants have spread around the world, they have come to symbolize American culture, bringing not just hamburgers but an emphasis on speed, efficiency, and shiny cleanliness. The typical American food, some observers argue, is fast food.

Also in this context, it will surprise many visitors from Europe or Japan to see that some of the newer electronic communications devices commonly used in their countries, such as wands to pay for purchases, are not widespread in the United States. Their admiration for technology and efficiency does not necessarily mean that U.S. Americans always have the most advanced technological devices at their disposal.

ACHIEVEMENT, ACTION, WORK, AND MATERIALISM

"He's a hard worker," one American might say in praise of another. Or, "She gets the job done." These expressions convey the typical U.S. American's admiration for a person who approaches a task conscientiously and persistently, seeing it through to a successful conclusion. More than that, these expressions convey an admiration for achievers, people whose lives center on accomplishing some physical, measurable task. Social psychologists use the term *achievement motivation* to describe people who place a high value on getting things done. Affiliation is another type of motivation, shown by people whose main intent is to establish and maintain relationships with other people. Obviously, the achievement motivation predominates in America.

Visitors from abroad commonly remark, "Americans work harder than I expected them to." (Perhaps these visitors have been excessively influenced

by American movies and television programs, which are less likely to show people working than driving around in fast cars or pursuing members of the opposite sex.) While the so-called "Protestant work ethic" may have lost some of its hold on Americans, there is still a strong belief that the ideal person is a hard worker. A hard worker is one who "gets right to work" on a task, works efficiently, and completes the task in a timely way that meets reasonably high standards of quality.

Hard workers are admired not just on the job but in other aspects of life as well. Housewives, students, and people volunteering their services to charitable organizations are praised as hard workers if they achieve something noteworthy.

More generally, Americans like *action*. They do indeed believe it is important to devote significant energy to their jobs or to other daily responsibilities. Beyond that, they tend to believe they should be *doing* something most of the time. They are usually not content, as people from many countries are, to sit for long periods and talk with other people. They get restless and impatient. If they are not doing something at the moment, they should at least be making plans and arrangements for doing something later.

People without the Americans' action orientation often see Americans as frenzied, always "on the go," never satisfied, compulsively active, and often impatient. Beyond that, they may evaluate Americans negatively for being unable to relax and enjoy life's pleasures. Even recreation, for Americans, is often a matter of acquiring lavish equipment, making elaborate plans, then going somewhere to do something.

U.S. Americans tend to define and assess people according to the jobs they have. ("Who is she?" "She's the vice president in charge of personal loans at the bank.") Family backgrounds, educational attainments, and other characteristics are considered less important in identifying people than the jobs they hold.

There is usually a close relationship between the job a person has and the level of the person's income. Americans tend to measure a person's success in life by referring to the amount of money he or she has acquired and to the title or position that person has achieved. Being a bank vice president is quite respectable, but being a bank president is more so. The president gets a higher salary and more prestige. The president can also buy more things

that reflect well on his or her status: a bigger house, a sports car, a boat, a vacation home, and so on.

For decades, three-quarters of incoming university students in the United States have told pollsters that earning "a lot of money" was a "very important" goal for them.

Regardless of income, Americans tend to spend money rather freely on material goods. Items that they once considered luxuries, such as personal electronic devices, large-screen television sets, cellular telephones, and electric garage-door openers are now considered necessities. Credit cards, which are widely available even to teenagers, encourage spending, and of course the scale and scope of the advertising industry is well known. Americans are often criticized for being so "materialistic," so concerned with acquiring possessions. For Americans, though, this materialistic bent is natural and proper. They have been taught that it is good to achieve, to work hard, and to acquire more material badges of their success and in the process ensure a better future for themselves and their families. And, like people elsewhere, they do what they are taught. No wonder that the high unemployment rate marking a financial recession causes a high incidence of mental health problems among Americans.

DIRECTNESS AND ASSERTIVENESS

Americans, as we've said before, generally consider themselves to be frank, open, and direct in their dealings with other people. "Let's lay our cards on the table," they say. Or, "Let's stop playing games and get to the point." These and many other common expressions convey the American's general idea that people should explicitly state what they think and what they want from other people.

Americans usually assume that conflicts or disagreements are best settled by means of forthright discussions among those involved. If I dislike something you are doing, I should tell you about it directly so you will know, clearly and from me personally, how I feel about it. Bringing in other people to mediate a dispute is commonly considered cowardly, the act of a person without enough courage to speak directly to someone else.