



## 2

# Culture and Culture Change

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

The second chapter introduces us to culture. What is culture exactly? For most sociologists, culture refers to the knowledge, traditions, values, practices, and beliefs held by members of an organization, community, or society. As Eric Weissman describes, culture is a social force that impacts our daily lives and the choices we make. It can be both material and immaterial and produces “webs of significance” that influence both individual identity and entire societies.

One distinction that you should take away from this chapter is that of culture versus structure. Structural elements of society are comprised of the enduring patterns of social relations and social institutions, whereas cultural elements are those that carry meanings. We interpret these meanings and attach them to certain values, ideas, and beliefs.

In terms of time and space, culture can cover a vast area of meaning. It can refer to one’s entire social reality, or a particular social or geographical location. Even within Canada, when one thinks of Canadian culture, a few images immediately come to mind—the maple leaf and the game of hockey, for example. Yet within this one nationally unified culture, there exists several different cultures. These can be divided up by province, ethnicity, age, and so on. In terms of time and space, the other important distinction you must remember when looking at culture is that the culture of any people or place rarely stays the same over time. Culture is a fluid object and is always changing.

Culture also influences the values and norms of a society. What is considered good or bad and why do we believe this? As Harriet Martineau found in her research, there is often a gap between what a society sees as its ideal culture and the real culture practised within the society itself. How are we supposed to behave and why do we act the way we act? Culture in all its forms influences us to be

this way. It is a powerful force that underlies the structure of all societies. Yet sociologists also recognize that subcultures and cultural diversity are equally powerful forces that can lead to significant societal changes.

Culture and the interactions of the different groups play a vital role in Erving Goffman's work and the dramaturgical perspective. For him, we are all actors in a play. The front stage and back stage allow us to interact in different ways. Culture in this case acts as the social order that constitutes how it is we act and interact with others. It goes without saying then that language, both written and spoken, become the most important facets in the transmission of culture across the world. In this age where globalization is prominent, culture and the exchange of such practices have become more prevalent. Fashion, music, and food reach all parts of the world faster than ever.

As we can see, culture is everywhere. Just stop for a moment and think about the music you listen to, the TV shows you watch, and people with whom you interact. You will quickly find how they influence you, and in turn how you project that back onto society.

## KEY TERMS

AGIL	Eugenics	Organic solidarity
Americanization	False consciousness	Patriarchal
Back-stage	Feminism	Queering
Base	Front-stage	Queer theory
Biologically determined	Governmentality	Real culture
Collective conscience	Heteronormative	Rites of passage
Communitas	Heterotopia	Roles
Compulsory heterosexuality	Ideal culture	Sapir–Whorf hypothesis
Conflict theory	Ideology	Self-help
Consensus	Immaterial elements	Semiotics
Consensus theory	Immanent transcendence	Socially constructed
Critical turn	LGBTQ(S)	Society
Culture-jamming	Liminal	Sociobiology
Cultural diversity	Ludic	Status
Cultural evolution	Mass media	Stigmatized
Cultural hegemony	Material elements	Subcultures
Cultural imperialism	Mechanical solidarity	Superstructure
Cultural universals	Mode of production	Tinguian of Austronesia
Culture	Mores	Values
Culture of dissent	Multiculturalism	Webs of significance
Defiant publics	Narrative inevitability	Work ethic
Discourses	Neo-liberalism	
Dramaturgical approach	Norms	

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the dramaturgical perspective? (p. 50)

2. What is the difference between individualistic and collectivist discourses? (p. 46)
3. What aspects of our lives can we categorize as “culture”? List four of them. (p. 41)
4. How can language be used to shape our social world? (pp. 42–44)
5. What is the “production of culture”? (p. 48)
6. How has culture been traditionally defined by sociologists? (pp. 38–39)
7. What are three or four examples of mass media? (p. 45)
8. Why was the “culture of poverty” approach seen as being negative and stigmatizing? (p. 45)
9. What is the difference between ideal culture and real culture? (p. 44)
10. What is the difference between material and nonmaterial culture? (p. 41)

## READINGS AND WEBSITES

**Berger, Peter and Luckmann, T. (1966).** *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor.

This book is the foundational work for understanding the role culture plays in the social construction of reality and what this construction means for doing sociology.

**Goffman, Erving (1959).** *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

This is sociologist Erving Goffman’s most famous book. In it, Goffman views people as actors playing a role on stage. Through a symbolic interactionist approach, Goffman argues how we all present ourselves in two different areas much like a play: on stage and off stage. He named this “dramaturgical analysis.” The book provides students who are new to sociology with the basic foundations of many aspects of the symbolic interactionist approach with concepts such as how we define ourselves, how we want others to see us, and how the definition of certain situations allows us to “perform” the way we want through the use of symbols.

**Porter, John. (1965).** *The Vertical Mosaic: An analysis of social class and power in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

John Porter’s book examines his concept of the Canadian sense of multiculturalism. The book analyzes how the policy behind the “vertical mosaic” ideology compares to another multicultural concept of the “melting pot” in the United States. Along with that, Porter analyzes how the vertical mosaic is applied to Canadians, and which groups tend to be favoured by its policies.

***Dignity Village.*** Retrieved from [www.dignityvillage.org](http://www.dignityvillage.org)

This website is the official site of Dignity Village, Oregon. It discusses the history of this community and the challenges it faces.

**The Webby Awards (2017).** *The Webby Awards.* Retrieved from <http://webbyawards.com>

This website examines and rates the top websites on the planet based on content, messages, and usage. It is an interesting resource for understanding how the Web is shaping our ideas through language, symbols, and discourse.

## Answers to Study Questions

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. **d** (p. 48)
2. **b** (p. 50)
3. **a** (p. 49)
4. **e** (p. 41)
5. **b** (p. 48)
6. **a** (p. 48)
7. **c** (p. 47)
8. **c** (p. 42)
9. **b** (p. 41)
10. **a** (p. 44)

### TRUE OR FALSE

1. **F** (p. 38)
2. **F** (p. 38)
3. **F** (p. 40)
4. **F** (p. 48)
5. **T** (p. 43)
6. **T** (p. 41)
7. **T** (p. 41)
8. **F** (p. 39)
9. **T** (p. 41)
10. **T** (p. 46)

### FILL IN THE BLANK

1. ideology (p. 48)
2. hegemony (p. 48)
3. subcultures (p. 46)
4. Languages (p. 42)
5. Discourse (p. 46)
6. economic (p. 48)
7. Globalization (p. 53)
8. Multiculturalism (p. 53)
9. cultural imperialism (p. 53)
10. Consumer (p. 51)

### SHORT ANSWER

1. See p. 50
2. See p. 46
3. See p. 41
4. See pp. 42–44
5. See p. 48
6. See p. 38–39
7. See p. 45
8. See p. 45
9. See p. 44
10. See p. 41

