

SOCI 101
INTRODUCTION TO
SOCIOLOGY

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 > **SOCI 101**

C. What is Culture?

Sociology is largely the study of *the process of society*, which is *culture*.

Culture refers to the symbols, values, behavior and material objects (artifacts) that together form a people's way of life.

1. "Culture is to people like water is to fish."
In other words, we take our cultural knowledge and behavior for granted; it remains hidden in plain sight, not a part of our conscious experience. It seems natural to us – but it is not.
Culture ≠ Nature
 Culture ↔ Nature

Key concepts:
Ethnocentrism: centered on one's own ethnicity (or culture), to the point where you cannot judge another culture on their own terms.
Culture Shock: the disorientation experienced when confronted with a new set of norms and values
Subculture: a smaller cultural group within a larger culture

C. What is Culture?

2. How can we better understand the idea of *culture*? **Culture is BOTH:**

a. Material culture – physical cultural artifacts.
 Example: *paper* money

b. Non-material culture – intangible, mental cultural meanings.
 Example: *value* of a "dollar"

ACTION



THOUGHT

It is through **CULTURE** that thought and action come together.

C. What is Culture?

3. Elements of Culture

There are four main elements to culture:

- a. Symbols
- b. Language
- c. Values, Beliefs and Norms
- d. Artifacts

C. What is Culture?

a. Symbols

A symbol is **anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture.**

Each of our social institutions is populated with a vast number of symbols which hold specific meaning to us.

Examples: economic institutions = \$ € £ ¥

religious institutions = ☪ ✨ ☪ ☪

political institutions = 

language = W Ω 9

people = 
Prince 

C. Components of Culture

b. Language and Communication

A system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another.

- i. **Non-verbal communication: signals**
- ii. **Writing origins: 3500 BC, the Near East civilizations (Sumeria)**
Written language developed with civilization. The origins of spoken language are unknown.
- iii. **Purpose: cultural transmission**
Language passes on cultural ideas. How? Through "mediation."
SELF ← language → SOCIETY
- iv. **Language Changes**
Evolutionary linguistics is the scientific study of the psychosocial development and cultural evolution of languages. A sub-branch of this is the field of *memetics*.

C. Components of Culture

c. Values and Norms

i. Values are culturally defined standards of desirability, goodness, and beauty, which serve as guidelines for social living. In an open society, values are always being debated. Variation exists in the meaning of values; these differences can lead to "Culture Wars". For example, contemporary arguments over Freedom vs. Security. Is a fear of foreigners threatening our American value of freedom?

ii. Norms = IDEALS for social behavior; formal or informal

"Folkways": informal everyday conventions (saying "good afternoon")

"Mores": deeper ideals (virtue, justice – more strictly enforced)

Central Sociological Concepts Social Norms

When people interact, social norms develop. Norms are shared IDEALS for behavior.

A norm is a prescription for collective action, an agreed upon way of behaving; a social consensus.

IDEA = THOUGHT

Norms occur in the "conscience collective" of society
(Source: Emile Durkheim, early French sociologist).

Question:

- Describe some basic social norms.
- Are all norms "good"? Give an example of a norm that leads to social problems.

C. Components of Culture

d. Artifacts are:

the wide range of material human creations that reflect underlying cultural values.



We place MEANING into artifacts (all material artifacts are also symbolic and hold immaterial value).



Cultural communication transmits meaning between significant others through more or less successful units of cultural information, or memes.



"I like it, but I'm looking for more of a status symbol. Any way you can double the price?"

Non-material cultural values are reflected in the material culture we create, value, and possess.

C. Globalization of Culture

4. Is there a developing "global culture?"

A **global culture** may be developing in *three* ways:



a. The flow of goods

- Material product trading has never been as important



b. The flow of information

- There are few, if any, places left on earth where worldwide communication is not possible



c. The flow of people

- Flow of information means people learn about places on earth where they feel life may be better


