

# Culture



# Culture is a social construction

SSSocC1

- Values, beliefs, behavior & material objects that together form a people's way of life.
- **Material** (tangible, stuff) **vs non-material** (intangible, ideas)
- “human nature” doesn't really exist! You're shaped by your *culture*.
- **Culture shock**: personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life
- Only humans rely on culture rather than instinct to ensure survival of their kind!



# Components of culture



- **Symbols:** anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture
- **Language:** systems of symbols that allows people to communicate. Key to culture.
- **Values:** culturally defined standards that determine desirability, goodness, & beauty, & serve as broad guidelines for living.
- **Beliefs:** specific statements that people hold to be true (more abstract)



# US values



1. Equal opportunity
2. Competition → success (“winners”)
3. Material success \$\$\$
4. Action over reflection (“Just do it!”)
5. Celebrate progress: “very latest” = “very best”
6. Scientific, rational
7. Practicality & efficiency
8. Democracy/free enterprise
9. Freedom
10. Racism/group superiority (male above female, white above color, European above others)

# Behavior

- **Norms:** rules & expectations by which society guides the behavior of it's members
- **Mores:** norms that are widely observed & have great moral significance (incest, molestation)
- **Folkways:** norms for routine or casual interaction (not wearing a tie at a formal dinner)
- **Social control:** attempts by society to regulate people's thoughts & behavior (shame, guilt, disapproval embarrassment, praise)

# Evolution of culture

*SSSocC2*

- **Cultural diversity:** various ethnicities, languages, religions, accents.
- US is most diverse country in the world, Japan the least.
- **Subculture:** cultural patterns that set apart some segment of society's population. (nerds, poets, surfers, skaters)
- **Multiculturalism:** educational attempt to recognize the US' cultural diversity & promote equality of all cultural traditions

- **Eurocentrism:** dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns
- **Afrocentrism:** dominance of African cultural patterns
- **Ethnocentrism:** practice of judging another culture by the standard's of one's own culture
- **Counterculture:** cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted in society (hippies/free love, religious militants)
- **Popular culture:** cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population
- **Folk culture:** a culture traditionally practiced by a small, homogeneous, rural group living in relative isolation from other groups









# Globalization

- English is becoming the preferred 2<sup>nd</sup> language worldwide (Chinese is 1<sup>st</sup>).
- Societies have more contact than ever before.  
Why?
  1. Global flow of goods
  2. Global communication
  3. Global migration
- Flow of above is uneven: can't afford, interpreted differently, more influence from West than others
- **Cultural universals:** traits that are part of every known culture (family, funerals, jokes)