2. Society and Culture: Patterns of Human Behavior

Society and culture are, together, that 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.

Visit this link to learn more about social classes.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_classes

One Big Family

“The average person watches three to four hours of television per day”

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 not 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.
Another popular theory--or rather a popular argument-- is the fight that many intellectuals have over "nature" versus "nurture."

Visit this link to learn more about “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

This link provides information on social classes in the United States.

http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Class_in_the_contemporary_United_States

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 specific to the United States:

**white collar**: managerial office workers in middle or upper classes

**pink collar**: workers who perform jobs in the service industry

**blue collar**: workers who perform skilled or unskilled labor (also called the 'working class')

**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.

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.

**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.
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. Some of the earliest records, in fact, suggest that early 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.

**Review Lesson 2**

*Directions: Complete the exercises below following the directions in each exercise. Use complete sentences and correct English writing rules in your responses.*

**Exercise 1**

Make a list of the ways in which you feel you are "inner-directed," and another list of the ways in which you feel you are "other-directed." Which do you feel controls your life more? Do you feel satisfied with this? What would you like to add or subtract?

**Exercise 2**

Make a list of the ways in which you feel you are the product of your nature--of your DNA or genetic code. List things like eye color, height, etc., and which parent and/or grandparent you may have received it from; also list personality traits you have that are similar to your parents', if you think these traits might have something to do with genetic coding passed from your parents to you.

Then make a similar list of the ways in which you feel you are the product of nurture: the ways in which your parents brought you up that made you what you are now, the ways your surroundings affect you to make you what you are now, and the ways in which you hope to have future surroundings and how you hope these future surroundings will change or affect you.

Compare the two lists. Which things from the two lists could possibly have to do with both nature and nurture?

Note: In a “compare and contrast” paper, it is customary to provide a minimum of three similarities and three differences.