

n. (2012). *World urbanization prospects 2012*. Geneva, Switzerland.

n. (2015). *Multi-country study on the impact of migration on the economy and domestic*. Geneva, Switzerland.

a. (2009, November). *What is a being, an entity, be*. Retrieved from the Internet: www.commonwealth.com

the factsheets 5.25/2009. Retrieved from the Internet: www.commonwealth.com

liberal people have been. Retrieved from the Internet: www.projectrace.com

up. Project Race.

www.projectrace.com

news-052809.php

relationships between

givers and their

parative Family Studies

2003, June 25). *Urban*

Los Angeles Times, A1.

K. (2010).

Historical and the modern

Almont, CA: Brown.

Culture and Society

The term *culture* is often used with respect to the macro social environmental (Kirst-Ashman, 2008). As we move from the topic of families in society in the previous chapter to the related topic of culture, the shift in focus represents a progression into a wider and more abstract social realm—from mezzo, or middle-level, considerations into the macro-level territory of sociology and anthropology. *Culture*, which we can define as the sum total of social patterns passed from generation to generation, is a topic that is vast and very abstract. "Cultural legacies," writes Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *Outliers: The Story of Success*, "are powerful forces. They have deep roots and long lives. They persist generation after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and social conditions that spawned them have vanished" (2008, p. 175). Sometimes later generations celebrate the symbols of the legacy, such as the Norwegian Americans participating in the town parade as shown in Figure 5.1.

Culture and community are intertwined. Many minority cultures, for example, exist within a given community or location; others maintain a sense of community that transcends geographical boundaries. Such communities may be set apart from mainstream society by customs and linguistic styles that are culturally distinct. There are many other types of communities, however, that are not culturally homogeneous, that are bonded in ways that have little bearing on culture. Culture and community, therefore, are not one and the same. Hence, we have separated these concepts into two chapters, focusing on culture in this chapter, whereas community is the subject of Chapter 6.

The study of culture is the study of a people's social heredity, or a way of thinking, feeling, and believing that sets one group apart from another. From the food we eat and how we eat it to our tastes in music to much of what people think of as personality, the individual's behavior is shaped by his or her culture in many deep and pervasive ways. Think of traits such as manners, humor, gender roles, pitch of voice, and use of hand gestures while speaking. These are just a few of the forms of human behavior that are seen as personality in the individual yet may be prescribed by culture.



Figure 5.1. Norwegian Americans celebrate their Viking heritage in this Cedar Falls, Iowa, summer parade. Photo by Robert van Wormer.

Following an introduction into the whys and wherefores of studying culture and of developing cultural sensitivity, this chapter delves into a discussion of cultural values from a systems perspective. What are the dominant American beliefs and values? Are the values reflected in behavior and social policy? These are among the questions considered against the backdrop of international perspectives. The nine cultural dimensions that have been filtered out from the literature provide the organizational scheme for the major portion of this chapter. The chapter concludes with a boxed reading on Appalachian folkways, inspired by the PBS special *Country Boys*.

We are all cultural beings; how much so is little noted until an encounter with other cultural traditions takes place. Only then do we begin to realize how large a role culture plays in who we are and what we do. Knowledge of culture and cultural history, as Saleebey (2001) suggests, provides important perspectives for understanding human behavior. A recent study of language brings home this point convincingly: Psychologists at the University of Texas, Austin, asked bilingual Mexican Americans a set of questions designed to assess personality (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martínez, Potter, & Pennebaker, 2006). Questions included “Are

you talkative?” and “Do you tend to be disorganized?” Many participants changed their answers when the questioners switched language. When participants spoke English, their responses emphasized assertiveness and achievement—responses that correspond with the individualist traits of U.S. culture. These findings, according to the authors, confirm the tendency for people have to change their interpretation of the world in response to cues in their environment, cues that trigger their internalized norms of behavior. Similarly, research on Chinese Canadians showed that Chinese-born students reported more collectively oriented statements in open-ended self-descriptions when writing in Chinese than did a randomly assigned group who answered in English (Chen, Xun, & Wilson, 2002). Ross et al. (2002) reported in the article that for Chinese participants, cultural cues such as a picture of the Great Wall of China brought forth an expression of Eastern values and attributes, whereas pictures of Superman or of an American flag evoked more self-centered statements.

Members of minority groups are not the ones who must navigate more than one culture. In our complex and diverse society, individuals who work with the public, such as health workers and mental health professionals,

regularly encounter diverse customs and cross-culturally, the dominant group who or her style of business is culturally might come across backgrounds.

Language is our Saleebey (2007) suggests we use reflect our values. The Inuit language rushes among different English language types of housing, apartment, bungalow, house, and condo. A times, the language to interpret life in specific not distinguish culture; masculine and are more prominent in others, and some cultural forms of address positions as we ethnic group often.



Figure 5.2. Peruvian basket weavers and their products that can be shared.

regularly encounter multiple cultures with diverse customs and value systems. In working cross-culturally, the social worker from the dominant group will need to recognize how her style of interacting and conducting business is culturally bound and how this style may come across to others from different backgrounds.

Language is our camera on the world, as Appleby (2007) suggests; the particular words we use reflect our worldview and living conditions. The Inuit language, for example, distinguishes among different types of snow, while the English language has multiple terms for different types of housing, among them—duplex, bungalow, shotgun house, ranch house, and condo. And as Appleby further indicates, the language we speak predisposes us to live our lives in specific ways. Some languages distinguish among past, present, and future, and masculine and feminine divisions are more prominent in some languages than in others, and some cultures have formal and informal forms of address that denote age and social positions as well. Variations within a linguistic group often designate differences in

social class; this is in terms of accent and/or grammar.

Language, as Mullaly (2002) suggests, does more than simply reflect social phenomena; it can also be used to construct and maintain oppression of a subordinate group. Efficient and straight-to-the-point means of gathering relevant information, for example, may be seen as officious and uncaring. The interviewer's body language may be taken as intrusive or cold and distant, depending on the ethnic norms of the people with whom he or she is communicating.

Most social workers can expect to deal with such differences on a daily basis. Today, even in many rural areas, America is a pluralistic, multicultural society. The influx of immigrants, mostly from Latin America, is not only changing the face of the United States but is forming sharp age and race divisions (Frey, 2001). Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau (2005) show that the Hispanic and Asian populations are growing at more than 10 times the pace of whites who are not Hispanic. By 2008 nearly one in six residents was Hispanic, while almost half of children under age 18 are minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). (See Figure 5.2 which



captures a Peruvian street band and Figure 5.3 of Mexican day laborers.) Because immigrants tend to be young and to arrive with several children, they are becoming a larger part of the nation's younger population. Interethnic and interracial marriage is becoming increasingly common as well (Lee & Edmonston, 2005).

Research on treatment effectiveness reveals that a culturally focused prevention approach is more effective in reaching the population at risk than are standardized approaches. One controlled study of inner-city minority adolescents, for example, indicates that participants given a culturally focused prevention approach currently used less alcohol and had lower intention to drink beer or wine than those in a generic skills group (Botvin, Schinke, Epstein, Diaz, & Botvin, 1995). Similarly, a study that compared a multicultural smoking curriculum for adolescents with a generic curriculum that lacked cultural references found that the multicultural curriculum proved more effective in preventing smoking initiation among Hispanic boys (Unger et al., 2004). A research design using focus groups to discuss health issues demonstrates that culturally sensitive and individualized health care education is vital for the delivery of health messages to residents in rural Appalachian regions (Denham, Meyer, Toborg,

& Mande, 2004). We can infer from these findings that shared cultural understandings and role expectations can enhance treatment effectiveness and lead to the adoption of desired behavioral changes.

Any serious attempts at formulating and practicing anti-oppressive social work must incorporate the concept of culture, which means being informed by research and literature from cultural studies (Mullaly, 2002). In working with persons from distinct cultures and backgrounds, knowledge of their group's culture and customs is essential. This includes knowledge of explanations for illness and folk remedies rooted in traditional culture, as well as familiarity with indigenous styles of communication and leadership roles within the family and community. Given the increasing exposure of social workers to situations involving interracial marriage, international adoption, and cross-cultural foster care arrangements, the task of multicultural social work practice is to consider the cultural milieu when designing treatment approaches. The task, as Fong (2001) suggests, is to shape assessments and interventions to be consistent with the beliefs and practices of the community and to acknowledge the multiethnic identities and differing environments of clients. Formal bureaucratic methods (as often required by



Figure 5.3. Immigrant day labor, Seattle. Photo by Rupert van Wormer.

third-party payers and a profession often anathema to Mullaly, 2002, and p. 95).

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the knowledge and skills necessary for effective work with diverse backgrounds. Mullaly (2005) indicates, "by integrating a relevant skills. Of at least three elements to understand as own beliefs and a and multicultural knowledge to multiculturalism (Mullaly, 2005). Cultures can open more.

The 2004 Spar series (a biography of Chevara), for example, weakening that of his motorcycle America, the narrative more than I thought not the same.

Cultural competence is society's prejudice, sexism, heterosexism, possession of appreciate cultural a must. Social influence of their on how they experience requires time knowledge norms, vocabulary to view the client as tangential functioning. This is how Fong (2001) effective from a multicultural perspective to acquiring

third-party payers for social services rendered) and a professional frame of reference are an anathema to the treatment mission (see Bailey, 2002, and his discussion of professionalism, p. 95).

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the social work term for the knowledge and skills that one needs for effective work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence, as Weaver (2005) indicates, goes beyond cultural sensitivity by integrating appreciation of difference with relevant skills. Cultural competence embodies at least three elements that require that we (1) understand and take responsibility for our own beliefs and attitudes, (2) learn about and expand multicultural experiences, and (3) use that knowledge to become proponents of multiculturalism (Marsh, 2004). Exposure to other cultures can open our eyes to realities not seen before.

The 2004 Spanish-language film *Motorcycle Diaries* (a biography of the early life of Che Guevara), for example, recounts the political awakening that can come with travel. Following his motorcycle journey all across South America, the narrator tells us: "It's changed me more than I thought. I am not me anymore, at least not the same me I was."

Cultural competence entails recognition of society's prejudices—ethnocentrism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and racism—and of our own possession of many of these traits. To fully appreciate cultural differences, self-awareness is a must. Social workers must recognize the influence of their own culture, family, and friends on how they think and act. Cultural competence requires continuous efforts to gain more knowledge about the client's culture—its norms, vocabulary, symbols, and strengths—and to view the client's value and belief systems not as tangential but as central to the client's functioning. This latter point is underscored by Yvona Fong (2001), who urges a shift in perspective from a mere awareness of cultural differences to acquiring a bifocal vision, or, as she

terms it, a "biculturalization or multiculturalization" of practice methods (p. 7). To be culturally competent, from Fong's perspective, is to learn the cultural values of the client system as a means of identifying resources for intervention. Strategies of helping must be chosen that are congruent with the customs and values of the cultural group in question.

McGoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto (2005) argue that discussing cultural generalizations is as important as discussing any other norms of behavior. Without some inkling of the norms of the cultural group we are dealing with, as they further suggest, we would have no compass for doing clinical work at all. Their edited book *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* contains 54 chapters, 53 of which each describe the norms and folkways of one specific ethnic group in U.S. society, written by a member of that group who is also a mental health practitioner. In their overview chapter, they discuss differences in communication styles as an illustration of the type of knowledge that can help prepare us for culturally competent family counseling:

The dominant assumption is that talk is good and can heal a person. . . . A high level of verbal interaction is expected in Jewish, Italian, and Greek families, whereas Anglo, Irish, and Scandinavian families have much less intense interaction and are more likely to deal with problems by distancing. (p. 29)

The colorblind and gender-blind notions of many European American social workers are a denial of a person's whole being. Through accepting that significant differences do exist between people of different ethnic backgrounds, professionals are recognizing a person's wholeness and individuality. To tell a lesbian or gay person to "just stay in the closet and you'll be all right" or "don't ask, don't tell" is to deny that person an important part of him- or herself. Multicultural social welfare education exposes people to divergent thinking as they are forced to examine formerly taken-for-granted assumptions. The University of Minnesota-Duluth has shaped an American Indian culturally specific program that relies on learning circles for

non-Indian students to help them serve the needs of American Indian clients (Jackson, 2003). Culture and language institutes are provided for American Indian students to address their different needs. Their M.S.W. program can be seen as a model of education for competence in one particular area.

Canda and Furman (2010) regard cultural competence as an essential quality of spiritual understanding. Their concept of a *transcultural approach* to spiritual diversity connects the social worker's particular spiritual and cultural experiences with those of the client and the helping process. Diversity and commonality are both embraced from this perspective, which goes beyond mere tolerance.

In working with diverse cultural groups, support and adoption of indigenous interventions is crucial. What we learn from effective indigenous customs and strategies, in fact, can be adopted and integrated within standard social work models. This has happened in New Zealand with family group conferencing learned from the Maori people and with restorative justice initiatives borrowed from Canadian aboriginal tribes (discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, respectively).

Cultural competence becomes more and more critical to effective social work practice as global interdependency increases. Professional developments in other countries are becoming especially relevant to those in the United States, as social problems become universal. Much as nations of the Global South have looked to nations of the Global North for models of social work education, truly reciprocal exchanges are becoming the focus today to prepare graduates for the increasingly global nature of social work practice—for example, with clients of diverse national ethnic, religious, social, and cultural backgrounds and with persons from other countries. Otherwise, instead of cultural sensitivity, ethnocentrism would prevail.

The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW; 1996) Code of Ethics includes a special section on cultural competence and social diversity (section 1.05):

- (a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human

behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures

- (b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provisions of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.
- (c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, and mental or physical disability.

Generally the preceding ethical mandate is interpreted to mean learning about cultures other than mainstream culture. Taken at face value, however, section 1.05 speaks of understanding of culture in general and of its function in human behavior and society. Such is the basic perspective of this chapter and this book. The study of culture, inasmuch as it affects social work practice, is far more than a familiarity with the customs, music, religious beliefs, and rituals of a people; it is the study of world view and ideology. Often the social worker must interpret the norms and beliefs of mainstream society to clients who have been brought up with different values and perhaps denied opportunities for personal achievement. Women from foreign countries, in particular, may see the need to take language classes or dance lessons because there was little stress on women's independence in their home countries. Within this context, it is critical that the social worker be able to approach these and other issues from a dual perspective, to be empathetic to the client's reality while seeking solutions within the wider system that are compatible with the client's wishes and needs.

From a macro ecosystems perspective, we need to examine our human service organizations. To be culturally competent, a human service organization must acknowledge the importance of culture throughout the organization and be vigilant in addressing and welcoming

cultural difference
and they are conge
water yet, ado
institutionalized th
in Rahim (2
M.S.W. standards a
our schools o
individual, in c
competence.
level, cultur
values valuing
a problem at
operational lea
amplifying
cultural competen
in the heartli
slowly dying
the global eco
migration (Ada
"diversity" me
man or Scandi
ethnic diffi
movements by the
and by
in these are

Ethnocentrism

the opposite of cu
ism, or the tal
one's culture,
senior to those of
culture is that as
own cultural be
learn to rep
Bailly (2002)
as a form of op
played out a
imperialism. I
the dominat
ance and cul
This injustice
by all oppo
applied to oppo
as deviant and
that they are
migration and
through cul

cultural differences. Services must be adapted so they are congruent with community norms rather yet, adopted from the community and institutionalized throughout the system.

Raheim (2006) correctly indicates, the standards as listed earlier and as endorsed by our schools of social work tend to focus on the individual, in contrast to organizational, cultural competence. At the systems or organizational level, cultural competence development means valuing diversity as an asset rather than a problem and regular self-assessment by organizational leaders to identify areas in need of strengthening or change. Both forms of cultural competence are essential today when we live in the heartland, in Iowa, rural areas that are slowly dying have come to be connected to the global economy through widespread immigration (Adams, 2009). When 20 years ago "diversity" meant your antecedents were African or Scandinavian, the much more significant ethnic differences today require major adjustments by the more homogeneous rural communities and by the human service organizations in these areas.

Ethnocentrism

The opposite of cultural competence is *ethnocentrism*, or the taken-for-granted assumption that one's culture, religion, and so forth are superior to those of other groups. The paradox of ethnocentrism is that as we humans learn to accept our own cultural beliefs and values, we unconsciously learn to reject those of other people.

Stallaly (2002) conceptualizes ethnocentrism as a form of oppression that, in its extreme form, is played out as *cultural imperialism*. Cultural imperialism, he suggests, comes about when the dominant group universalizes its language and culture and uses them as the standard. This injustice is experienced in varying degrees by all oppressed groups. The stereotypes applied to oppressed people, which brand them as deviant and inferior, are so pervasive in our society that they are seldom questioned.

Immigration and war are two activities that, through cultural clash, heighten the

sense of ethnocentrism in a community. Immigration provides an example of potential conflict as disparate value systems exist side by side. Boundaries between groups can become increasingly thick and exclusionary. Neighborhoods are affected by an influx of immigrants; the workplace is affected also as newcomers flock to accept jobs that locals would find undesirable.

The impact of war is infinitely much worse, as the enemy and all members of the enemy group come to be identified as "other." Feeling threatened, people in the society lash out. The psychological phenomenon of guilt comes into play as well—the more we inflict pain and suffering on the enemy, the more we are prone to attach blame to justify our actions. (The defense mechanism of dehumanization of the enemy was discussed in Chapter 2.)

Religion, like patriotism, can take on aspects of ethnocentrism. Karen Armstrong (1993), in her history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the God-based religions—explains:

One of the most characteristic new developments since the 1970s has been the rise of a type of religiosity that we usually call "fundamentalism" in most of the major world religions, including the three religions of god. A highly political spirituality, it is literal and intolerant in its vision. In the United States, which has always been prone to extremist and apocalyptic enthusiasm, Christian fundamentalism has attached itself to the New Right. . . . Jews, Christians, and Muslims who punctiliously attend divine services yet denigrate people who belong to different ethnic and ideological camps deny one of the basic truths of their religion. It is equally inappropriate for people who call themselves Jews, Christian, and Muslims to condone an inequitable social system. The God of historical monotheism demands mercy not sacrifice, compassion rather than decorous liturgy. (pp. 290, 292)

The war in Iraq epitomizes the kind of ethnocentrism that such conflict induces. The terrorism and suicide bombings have a decidedly

fanatical religious cast. Based on extensive interviews with jailed Islamist militants, Khosrokhavar (2005) explores the notion of sacred death in various Islamic countries. Significantly, in interviews the would-be suicide bombers spoke of a divine mission and of martyrdom rather than suicide.

The United States has participated in many wars as memorialized in Figure 5.4. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks several well publicized surveys of world opinion revealed shocking evidence that America indeed was not well liked, not even by average people in friendly countries (Davis & Silver, 2004). Since 2002, interviewers have polled over 175,000 people in 54 nations and the Palestinian territories to compare and contrast public opinion around the world on a large variety of subjects. The surveys have shown that under the Bush administration, the way America used its power—militarily and economically—to dominate the world was widely resented. In the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2005), for example, greed and violence figured prominently as purported American traits. The most positive assessments came from India and Eastern Europe, the lowest from the Muslim countries. Whereas the European respondents and many others in the sample saw Americans as too religious, Americans saw themselves as not religious enough. The negative results were thought by the pollsters to be correlated with opposition to the war in Iraq. With the election of President Barack Obama, U.S. favorability ratings soared throughout the western world, Asia, and Africa nations (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2009). Only in the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East were the ratings still low. Confidence that the United States would do the right thing in foreign policy declined in Israel and remain abysmally low in Pakistan under the Obama administration.

These contrasting mass media portrayals can be expected to reflect and also generate different attitudes about social welfare policies as well. Here, again, a great divide between American and much more liberal European attitudes concerning the role of the government in providing social benefits is apparent.



Figure 5.4. This statue in downtown Bowling Green, Kentucky, honors combat veterans from the American Civil War and recent wars who fought and died, as the plaque says, "for our freedom." Photo by Robert van Wormer.

These differences, of course, relate to history and cultural distinctions as well.

In an article originally published in *Germany in Berlin*, Schneider (2004) contrasts European and American viewpoints and makes the following points—American commentators warn about the new fundamentalism focusing on the Islamic variety of fundamentalism—militarism. This viewpoint, according to Schneider, was revealed in its most extreme terms by the U.S. President at that time, George W. Bush, who used such terms as "crusade" and "axis of evil" to define the mission. This approach, Schneider argues, reveals "the assumption that the religious mantle by a secular power, which Europe has become unthinkable" (p. 1).

Interestingly, Ruby and Smith (2007) in their analysis of public opinion surveys by the Pew Research Center, find striking similarities in the intensity of religious belief among Americans, white evangelicals and black evangelists. Within all three groups, large majorities

of Muslim Americans, 79% of white evangelicals and 85% of black Protestants) say religion is "very important" in their own lives. This is in contrast about one-half of Catholics and one-third of white mainline Protestants who state that religion is very important.

Social workers often work with clients who are evangelical in their personal beliefs or who are influenced by family members who adhere to a strict religious code. Interpersonal conflict often arises when young people wish to date or marry outside of their narrow religious circle or struggle over gender identity issues. Accordingly, practitioners need an awareness of the theological hold that fundamentalist indoctrination has over people and of the internalization of a sense of sin in those who were raised in strict religious households. The young people may experience serious conflict in being torn between the need to pursue his or her happiness and the desire to please family members. Sometimes the cultural clash is between values of an immigrant older generation and their offspring who have been assimilated into the wider society.

Breaking of negative aspects of American mainstream culture, Saleebey (2001) issues a cautionary note: All cultural groups, he argues, are subsumed under a dominating steamroller of an overriding culture: advanced capitalism and the marketplace and spread through "mass media" (p. 56). Critical analysis of the cultural ethos, in short, is a vital aspect of social education. As an introduction to the discussion on American values, the values "on which this nation was built," let us apply the systems model to the notion of culture.

Culture as Macro System

Margaret Mead (1972), in her autobiography *Unlabeled Memories*, provided us with instructions for unraveling the intricacies of a new culture. The approach Mead took was to view individual cultural traits within the context of the whole. Our goal must be to "understand a range of acts, words, glances, and silences as they are integrated into a pattern one had no

way of working out as yet, and finally, to 'get' the structure of the whole culture" (p. 275).

Margaret Mead's daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson (1984), uses the metaphor of finding four-leaf clovers to describe the anthropological task. "A four-leaf clover," writes Bateson, "is a break in pattern, a light dissonance, that can only be seen against an awareness of the orderly configuration in the grass" (pp. 202-203). Approaching an unfamiliar culture, one seeks regularity in behavior. Over time, the details that seem so chaotic at first do hang together. "Often a dissonance," says Bateson, "the interruption in one pattern you have learned to expect, is the key to a larger pattern" (p. 204).

The view of culture as an integrated whole borrows a concept from the biological sciences in which the organs of the body complement each other in remarkable ways to make up a functioning system. Like an organism, culture has form and pattern. There is a degree of order and a system that is greater than the sum of its parts. To the anthropologist, the related patterns of the environment, the resources, the people's beliefs about what they do, and the relationships between the larger group and themselves are all part of the system out of which individuals structure their behaviors (Esber, 1989).

The critical analysis of culture as a system requires a consideration of issues of power, including belief systems that produce or allow for structural inequalities and the social class hierarchy. Because every individual is a part of two systems, the larger societal system and the smaller world of the immediate social environment, the social worker must rely on a dual perspective to be aware of both worlds simultaneously. A dual perspective provides an alternative lens to the social worker so that he or she can work in the immediate environment while grasping the reality of the structural barriers in the dominant system erected against people that belong to a certain group. Such barriers are more often cultural than physical, keeping oppressed classes of people from tapping into their collective power. Women's socialization, for example, often leads to a sense of inadequacy and discouragement that precludes organizing for collective sharing of experience (Weick, 2001).

Cultural Values

Common social heritage passed from generation to generation is what makes for cohesion and solidarity that helps ensure the continuity of group life. This same heritage provides for each new generation a value system and a sense of what is right and what is wrong. In our study of any item of behavior or belief, following Margaret Mead, our view is that such a behavior or belief can be evaluated correctly only in the light of its meaning to the people who practice it or subscribe to it, its relation to other elements of the culture, and the part it plays in the adaptation of the person in the environment.

Every society has a system of values or set of interrelated beliefs that their members hold dear and on which their social structure is built. Mostly the values are not spelled out, and they are so obvious to members of the society as to not even be realized.

The study of cultural values explains a lot about human behavior at both the individual and societal levels. When people move from one culture to another, they tend to adopt the perspectives of the new culture in which they are immersed. The psychologist Richard Nisbett (2004), author of *The Geography of Thought*, has measured perceptual changes in people who switch between Western and Eastern cultures. From the Eastern perspective influenced by Confucianism, there could be no self in isolation, so self-control was paramount in order to suppress one's selfish desires. To a Westerner, relations are different, including relations with nature and the universe; nature was viewed, in the Greek tradition, as separate from humans—"man versus nature." Keep in mind such contrasts in worldview as we explore the dominant U.S. cultural orientation.

Building on the most widely quoted commentary on early U.S. society—Alexis de Tocqueville's (1835/1951) observations of nineteenth-century American social life—and on sociologist Robin Williams's (1979) widely cited array of crucial American values (work ethic, equality, individualism, democracy, etc.), van Wormer (2006) delineated nine value dimensions of

most direct relevance to social work. These value dimensions are as follows:

- Work versus leisure
- Equal opportunity versus equality
- Mobility versus stability
- Competition versus cooperation
- Individualism versus collectivism
- Independence versus interconnectedness
- Materialism versus spirituality
- Nuclear family versus extended family
- Moralism versus compassion

If you view this set of value dimensions in two columns, the items in the left-hand column are closely interrelated; they represent the essence of American values, values closely tied in with capitalism and industrialization. These value dimensions must be understood not in terms of voiced ideals and proclamations but in terms of actions and policies. Any American you would ask, in all probability, would claim that he or she held the values in the right column—leisure and equality, for example. People in other nations, including many industrialized nations and minority groups within the United States, in contrast, might show in their actions, priorities that one would consider less individualistic and less moralistic. Keep in mind, however, as you study the various cultural characteristics that, in reality, there are no pure forms of such phenomena but only degrees of one thing or another.

When we speak of American values, we are speaking of something tangible and unique. Alexis de Tocqueville observed in his contrast between the New World and the old aristocratic societies. And yet, for every value or characteristic that can be spelled out, there is evidence of its opposite. Along with tolerance, there is intolerance; with raw optimism, despair; and with warm generosity, greed. The inherent contradictions many of which appeared before the nation was a nation, are with us still. As in any society there is always the conflict between the ideal and the practice, between ideology and reality, and between how a people describe themselves and how others see them. In the United States the contradiction can be seen in the espoused beliefs that, as discussed later, conflict with the example, individualism and family values.

materialism and the stress on religion. We are, according to political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset (1997) "the most religious, optimistic, patriotic, future-oriented, and individualistic" country in the world (p. 26). At the same time, however, we are also, as a nation, the "wealthiest in real terms, the most productive as reflected in per worker output, the highest in proportions of people who graduate from or enroll in higher education but the least egalitarian among developed nations with respect to income distribution" (p. 26).

Let us look at some of these value dimensions more closely.

Work Versus Leisure

A central point of American culture is work and devotion for work. Through one's occupation or profession, an individual gains status and a sense of self-importance. A huge wage and salary gap exists between the higher and lower echelons of a company, as well as in society as a whole. Equality of incomes from work would be considered undesirable because of the feared deleterious effects on educational and work incentives. New ideas, as Wagner (1994) indicates, dominate Western political and social discourse such as the idealized work ethic—"the view that all who are able-bodied and of working age have a moral obligation to work and that those who are slothful or pathological if they do not" (p. 718). Indeed, the work ethic is one of the oldest and most enduring (if not endearing) of the American cultural attributes. The value placed on hard work is closely tied to moral values. The notion of the work ethic encompasses the traits that the typical employer desires: punctuality, efficiency, and productivity. Workers deficient in these qualities will be eliminated. Today, as a result of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, all able-bodied welfare recipients, especially mothers with young children who previously were eligible for welfare, are being forced to leave the welfare rolls once they have completed job training and to take a full-time job. Welfare reimbursement has been severely limited.

One way to gauge the strength of the work ethic is to analyze data on leisure time pursuits.

As far as leisure is concerned, a right embodied in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights but not recognized in the U.S. Constitution, Americans have the fewest number of paid vacation days per year in the industrialized world. According to government statistics from a variety of sources, German and Spanish workers get 30 days, the British and Australians get 25 days, the Japanese 18, Chinese 15, and Americans 10 (Snapshot of America, 2004). Compared to other industrialized nations, U.S. workers generally work longer hours and have no guaranteed vacations. Germans work 1,436 hours, Norwegians, 1,400 hours, while the United States and Japan clock up over 1,800 hours (Fleck, 2009). Norway, the country in which people work the fewest hours of any industrialized democracy, has seen a significant increase in the purchase of vacation homes and boats (Thomas, 2009). The sick leave policies are among the world's most generous.

So how is it that Americans believe so religiously in the value of work? The word *religiously* provides a clue. The American emphasis on work is derived from a Puritan heritage that valued work for its own sake (Johnson & Rhodes, 2009). Work for economic gain was considered the key to success, and success was viewed as important from the very beginning. Renowned German sociologist Max Weber (1958/1905), in his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, compared work productivity levels in Protestant and Catholic regions of Germany and elsewhere as evidence for his theory correlating Protestantism and capitalism. Protestantism emphasized the autonomy of the individual and repudiated dependence on the Church, priesthood, and ritual, according to Weber. The qualities of self-discipline, hard work, and communal service were viewed as a likely sign of salvation. Martin Luther's belief in work as a "calling" gave Protestantism a singularly practical bent. Taking Luther's argument one step further, John Calvin, who was Luther's counterpart in France and later Switzerland, introduced the notion of predestination into the Protestant vocabulary.

Predestination is the doctrine of God's election or choice of souls to salvation or damnation. The interpretation of predestination carried

by way of England and Scotland (through the preaching of John Knox) to America was that those predestined to salvation could be identified in this life through the evidence of their wealth. Although one's fate was sealed, in a sense, Calvinist philosophy posited that indications of this fate could be detected on earth. Using this line of reasoning, the wealthy could justify not only their wealth but also their exploitation of workers to accumulate it (Day, 2008). The belief system also legitimated forcing people to work for their own good. Max Weber described Calvinism as that which was not leisure and enjoyment but activity that served to increase the glory of God. Waste of time thus was perceived as a deadly sin. And condemnation of the sinner was justified. With its emphasis on individual achievement, frugality, and opportunity, the creed of Calvinism has very much affected the American character, even long after the direct religious connection has been lost. In this vein, the eighteenth-century inventor and acknowledged atheist Benjamin Franklin espoused the principles of the Protestant work ethic in his often quoted sayings, such as "early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," "the early bird catches the worm," "time is money," and "a penny saved is a penny earned."

The Protestant work ethic, according to Zimbardo (2008), generated a new hardworking class of entrepreneurs. Even today, he asserts, the gross national product of predominantly Protestant nations is greater than that of Catholic nations. As well, the Jewish tradition, because of an emphasis on scholarship, and education, is associated with a work ethic rooted in an orientation toward the future and future planning.

How about a "Catholic ethic?" John Tropman (2002), author of *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Community*, draws on social surveys, opinion polls, and insights from sociology to contrast the Protestant esteem for individualism and a reluctance to provide social welfare with Catholic cultural values. Religion and culture he sees as inextricably linked. Tropman perceives the Protestant ethic as achievement oriented and the Catholic ethic as helping oriented, as stressing "salvation through work" as opposed to "salvation through works" (p. 42). It is not

that Catholics don't value work, as Tropman suggests, but that work is not ritualized as it is in the Protestant tradition, and how one earns a living is not necessary to social acceptance. Even the concept of time differs between the religious belief in that Catholic culture is built on a here-and-now orientation, in other words, for the moment. In his presentation of the "ideal type" of a Catholic belief system, Tropman acknowledges there are strong ethnic differences, and related to his generalization of Protestantism, he indicates that there are significant differences among the various denominations, and that African Americans have a helping ethic borne out of their life experiences.

In locating the roots of the American work ethic, we need to take into account geography as well as ideology. As settlers arrived on the bountiful American landscape, there was no limit to the possibilities for work that needed to be done. So the work ethic was constantly rewarded at every turn; in the American colonies, unemployment was unknown. Just as intransigent was the religious-economic ideology is seen in its ability to outlast its religious roots and to influence welfare policy to this very day.

Are there any other places on earth where the work ethic is as strong? Yes; in South Korea and Japan, in fact, the work ethic goes beyond anything we could imagine. In a visit to Japan, van Wormer was impressed and somewhat appalled to learn of a land so competitive that children rarely play and are tutored during most waking hours until their education culminates in rigorous university entrance exams. In late adolescence, students return home for crash courses at midnight, only to be awakened at the wee hours of the next morning (van Wormer, 2006). And Chinese children, according to a report by the Asia Society, spend twice as many hours doing homework as do their U.S. counterparts (Powell, 2009). The Chinese educational system, however, stresses rote memorization although change is underway. The Japanese work ethic, according to all reports, is similar. Like Americans, many Japanese citizens "live to work." So serious is this problem that the Japanese

government is writing new rules to force workers to take their vacations. (Over 90 percent of American workers use only part of their vacation days [Hall, 2009].) The new rules will apply to companies whose employees fail to take their annual leave. The goal is to stimulate the economy and generate jobs. The suicide rate, which is highest in the countries of the former Soviet Union, is still quite high in Japan and South Korea, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009). In these Asian countries, suicide tends to be linked to personal failure and a sense of shame.

Opportunity Versus Equality

The state slogan of Iowa, which visitors see when they arrive on the Mississippi River bridge, is "Welcome to Iowa: Fields of Opportunities." The slogan, which recently was selected following a much publicized statewide contest, succinctly sums up the value that Americans place on the possibility, the possibility that is born out of each generation of the fulfillment of the American dream.

Consistent with the ethos of opportunity, the United States, Canada, and, for the most part, Australia are the three nations in the world with the most relatively open and supportive immigration policies. The United States prides itself on being a "nation of immigrants," and Canada exults in its multicultural mosaic pattern of appreciation of differences. This is not to say that the treatment of immigrants does not have much to be desired, only that opportunity for asylum seekers and those in special immigration categories is better in the less traditional countries with strong traditions of immigration. (Europe's policy is geared toward temporary asylum rather than assimilation of immigrants.)

Consistent with the North American opportunity ethos are early education programs such as Head Start, job training, and higher education "opportunity-enhancing programs" to help disadvantaged individuals compete on an even footing with more privileged youths. Such opportunity-enhancing programs, unlike affirmative action or preferential initiatives, are less likely to be perceived as challenging the values of

individualism and the work ethic. In their comprehensive opinion survey, Page and Jacobs (2009) found that most Americans strongly favor government actions that greatly increase such opportunities, as, for example, college scholarships and early childhood education programming. Such government-sponsored overtures, in themselves, provide substance to the widely held belief that the road to upward mobility is open to those who "play by the rules."

Opportunity is the counterpart not of equality but of inequality. The more freedom there is, theoretically, the more opportunity exists for the rich to get richer, as they invest their earnings and profits. The lower the taxes, the higher the economic incentives for individuals to invest in business and buy up the property and resources; income and wealth disparities increase. Opportunity thus opens up the possibility for some to achieve enormous success and others to fail miserably.

But how about people within modern society who have lost faith in the system and do not perceive that there is an opportunity to advance according to the norms of society? Some, as we know, place their energy in the criminal underground; they achieve material success at least for a period of time. Still other groups of people opt out of the competition altogether, crushed by personal failure early in life or by the failure of preceding generations. The hope of becoming a part of the affluent society around them ceases to be a reality; it becomes a taunt. This is what Michael Harrington (1962) said in his classic work on poverty, *The Other America*. People who no longer believe that they have a stake in the system, such as the long-term unemployed, can sink into passivity and rely on deceit and manipulation of the system as a way of surviving in a competitive society. Their anti-achievement values may be imparted to their children and their children's children. Such cultural traits exist in regions of the country that are economically backward, where the goals of achieving social and economic equality appear elusive at best.

Equality basically means sharing the wealth between the haves and the have-nots. There is less opportunity to get rich and superrich in a nation with a strong social welfare system.

Equality is used here in the European sense of equalizing social benefits and living standards "from the cradle to the grave."

Americans have a formal commitment to equality before the law, as Johnson and Rhodes (2009) indicate. The focus on equality is consistent with the American system of mass education, the informality in language and dress, absence of aristocracy or titles, fairly standard speech patterns except by region (in contrast to British class distinctions in accent), and admiration for the "self-made man," for persons who manage to go "from rags to riches."

Among the advanced industrialized nations of the world, the United States leads in the proportion of income going to the wealthiest fifth (Boshara, 2003). As the federal minimum wage has remained flat for years, the disparity between rich and poor continues to grow. According to a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2006), the incomes of the poorest 20 percent of families nationally grew by an average of 19 percent over the past 20 years, whereas the incomes of the richest fifth of families grew by almost 60 percent (figures were based on U.S. Census data). Looking at overall wealth rather than income, the discrepancy is even greater. In the United States, the richest 1 percent of households own a third of the nation's wealth, whereas the bottom 80 percent have just 16 percent. This gap has been growing for at least two decades (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2005). The racial gap is startling. About 31 percent of black households have zero or negative net wealth, whereas just over 13 percent of white households do. Consisting of savings, real estate, stocks and bonds, and related property, assets, can be liquidated during periods of adversity, thus offering the owner a buffer against poverty (Karger & Stoesz, 2009). They also appreciate in value, thus generating additional wealth. The tax structure, moreover, is set up to tax dividends related to wealth at lower rates than earned income. Similarly, earned income by persons on fixed salaries, such as teachers, are taxed at rates higher than incomes of those, such as lawyers and realtors, who engage in private practice. The latter rely on deductions that keep the amount of taxes paid down. In all

these ways, the rich tend to get richer over the life span.

An important distinction needs to be made between values of equality of opportunity (the North American value orientation) and equality of living standards (the Nordic model; Nelson & Shavitt, 2002). Often the move toward equality means differential treatment of unlike people to equalize the result. In Finland, for example, as in other Scandinavian countries, the fines for speeding are imposed based on a person's earnings and net wealth, data that can be retrieved readily due to the thoroughness of government records (British Broadcasting Company, 2002; "Norway: Rich Man Fined \$10,000 for Drunk Driving," [2009]). The purpose of this approach is to ensure that the penalty will be as much whether you are rich or poor.

Societies that pride themselves on egalitarianism take an *institutional* approach to welfare provision. At the opposite end of the continuum is the *residual*, or so-called safety net, approach characteristic of what we have in the United States. In the residually oriented society, of which the United States and Canada are prime examples, a stigma is attached to receiving welfare aid. The causes of welfare clients' difficulties are often seen as rooted in their own malfunctioning—the persons themselves are blamed for problems perceived as stemming from their own inadequacy (Zastrow, 2010). The values that underpin residual thinking are capitalism, independence, and belief in opportunity.

An *institutional*, or social insurance, approach to public welfare would provide a very different scenario with regard to aid. The institutional approach is preventive rather than curative, universal rather than means-tested. (Means-tested programs, which are only available to persons below a certain income level, tend to be stigmatized and to lose popular support over time.) David Wagner (2000) contrasts the U.S. system of "charity, therapy, and correction" (p. 178) with the model of most European nations that provide all their citizens with health care, subsidized child care, extended paid vacations, and automatic pensions.

In the United States, Social Security and public education are two of the nation's

Equality Versus

Similar related
need," to mov
different proport
only mobile, as
over 5 years. Cl
found in seven
estimate. The A
and in prog
with the corpor
estimate if neces
persons receiving
get training a
assistance. Becau
and of unparallel

social programs. Both these programs are regarded as rights or entitlements for all the people. As a result, they are willingly funded. Programs associated with the poor, in contrast, are abolished in the next political campaign. Economic globalization makes a much better fit with the value of equal opportunity than with equality, as is discussed later. Under the economic pressures of globalization, there is a tendency of convergence in regard to social welfare provisions. Alber and Gilbert (2010) note that under the new European Union (EU) constitution the postcommunist countries, which are more to the United States than to western Europe for their social and political models, have led to the adoption of market economy concepts, including the restructuring of the social security systems and an emphasis on privatization. Drawing on earlier European income data, Fritzell (2001) determined that in the United Kingdom income inequality has increased; this gap between the rich and the poor is evidenced in mounting rates of poverty. In the Scandinavian countries, however, despite a rise in levels of unemployment, income inequality remains relatively low. To such a great extent is equality a Nordic and particularly a Norwegian value, that even up to the pressures of the global economy, as it is with higher unemployment, the Nordic countries still manage to maintain a high level of equality in the distribution of income (Thomas, 2009).

Equality Versus Stability

One value related to work is the desire to "get ahead" to move upward and onward. A significant proportion of Americans are geographically mobile, as well, moving their households every 5 years. Children will often have attended school in several school systems before they graduate. The American ideology promotes a constant state of change. Workers are expected to climb the corporate ladder and to be willing to relocate if necessary for career advancement. Young people receiving government aid are expected to get training and to quickly gain their independence. Because the United States has been a land of unparalleled resources and opportunity,

people who are downwardly mobile or who remain at the bottom are often held responsible for their lowly status.

From the middle teen years, Americans often get jobs so that they can buy their first automobiles for personal freedom and mobility, as the word *automobile* implies. The United States is unique among industrialized nations in not providing adequate mass transportation; in the 1950s and 1960s, public spending on streetcars was greatly reduced, and money was put into highways instead; those who could afford it moved to the suburbs, leaving the urban poor behind (Johnson & Rhodes, 2009).

We use the term *mobility* here to describe more than social and geographical mobility and to get at the kind of restlessness that often has been said to typify the American character. Thus, from the French commentator de Tocqueville (1835/1951), we hear, "America is a land of wonders, in which everything is in constant motion and every change seems an improvement. The idea of novelty there is indissolubly connected with the idea of amelioration" (p. 18).

Europeans tend to view Americans and Australians as "brash and risk-taking," as Hartmann (1997) suggests. Consider the types of people who would have fled the Old World to take a dangerous journey across the Atlantic. These adventurers presumably would have carried with them the genetic material that might have caused their descendants to crave mobility over a more routine lifestyle and competition over cooperation.

The urge to move, which has so dominated American society, has been a cultural attribute in times of economic recession as well as in economic booms. There are two threats today to these mass migrations ("Labour Mobility: The Road Not Taken," 2009). The first is the housing bust. Housing prices have collapsed, so homeowners with mortgages are unable or unwilling to sell their homes and thus stay put. The second factor is the high unemployment; youths who are seeking employment and eager to move out into their own homes are often forced to stay where they are. These observations are borne out in a report from the Census Bureau that found that the number of people

who changed residences in 2007 to 2008 was the lowest since 1962, when the nation had a much smaller population (Roberts, 2009).

Competition Versus Cooperation

One need not search far in the American popular press for evidence of competition. (Just glance through the advertisements.) Typically, in any given week stories celebrate personal and team victories in events ranging from sports to spelling bees; the win-or-lose outcomes of courtroom battles; TV reality shows that feature survival exploits or intense dating competitions; and intense pressure among youth to gain entrance into certain elite colleges. In other words, sharp competition is everywhere in a society that prides itself on being the world's superpower. (This ethos is captured in the bike race shown in Figure 5.5)

Achievement may be more the goal than competition, but in order to win, Americans from childhood are taught to compete (Gladwell, 2008). Writing on the U.S. system of education, Ediger (2000) likens the emphasis on pupil competition as a spur to learning to the beliefs of the marketplace economy. "The free enterprise system in education," as Ediger notes, "has always stated that the United States became

great due to competition in the market place where goods and services are bought and sold" (p. 14). Proposals for a voucher system in schooling, for example, pits charter schools against regular public schools in attracting students. Many services in these new schools are privatized to reduce costs. Free technological equipment may be provided, along with programs containing advertising, which students then watch in class.

Mass testing programs compare individual children, schools, and whole school systems on the basis of standardized measures of achievement. Ediger (2000) compares this approach with one of cooperation. Advocates of cooperation favor helping students individually proceed at their own pace to learn what they need to learn and want to learn.

Often the competition, as enshrined in the courtroom's adversary system, is played out as "winner take all." Contrast this attitude with the following Arabic principle, as described by Moore (2004) in his study of words from different cultures that are untranslatable: The *taarradhin* is a happy concept related to compromise but that means "I win, you win." This way of resolving a problem, as Moore notes without losing face. Anthropologists Gardner and Kosmitzki (2005) bring our attention to



Figure 5.5. Competitors in a city bike race. Photo by Rupert van Wormer.

that the Chinese have no equivalent word for personality. The American absorption with personality is unknown in most Asian cultures.

Another value system is found in Norway and other Scandinavian countries, where the cultural ethos can be summed up in the word *egalitarianism*. In daily life, Scandinavians live in the staunch egalitarian value that no one is either better or worse than anyone else. Even while acknowledging, for example, that one other person coincidentally may have more money or lower status (Erickson, 2005), the competition-to-cooperation continuum, the Norwegians are far toward the cooperation end. This value (*samarbeid*, literally "to work together") is instilled in the family in early childhood and reinforced throughout school. It permeates every aspect of culture. The school anti-bullying programs that are now being instituted across the globe originated in Norway, perhaps because bullying on the school playground was rare and out of sync with the Norwegian values of caretaking (van der Werf, 2006).

Nelson and Shavitt (2002) provide the kind of empirical verification of cross-cultural differences concerning individual achievement that is missing in the literature. The comparison between American and Danish students, as the authors indicate, share a similar language and culture with Swedes and Norwegians. All three groups look down on conspicuous success and bragging. Denmark and Norway additionally share a ubiquitous, unwritten social modesty code; this code is reflected in interpersonal norms, as well as in benevolent social welfare policies toward the least fortunate in society. Nelson and Shavitt (2002) call this code "horizontal" as opposed to "vertical" values. The social structure in the United States, in contrast, is vertically oriented, a phenomenon, as the authors note, that is likely a function of the frontier spirit of exploration, in conjunction with the Protestant work ethic. The American notion of equality is actually equal opportunity. This notion is reflected in the tax system and resource allocation, as Nelson and Shavitt (2002) further suggest.

In their research findings based on in-depth interviews with a small sample of Americans

and Danes, Nelson and Shavitt (2002) found that, whereas a majority of Americans mentioned achievement in relation to happiness, none of the Danes did. The Danes' first priority was family; second was work. Single American men almost unanimously mentioned work goals alone. These findings from the interviews were confirmed in the second portion of this study (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002), which compared answers to 60 items related to achievement. Questionnaires were administered to 82 communications students in Denmark and to 152 comparable students in the United States. Results confirmed that Danes scored much higher on values related to protecting the environment, social justice, equality, and peace than did their U.S. counterparts. Americans were oriented toward success, ambition, and gaining influence.

Bishop (2002) conceptualizes competition in the collective sense, especially in regard to which group is the most oppressed:

We are fighting over who has more value, who has less, instead of asking why we must be valued as more or less. . . . How can we take back our world and reorganize it to benefit everyone if we cannot even talk about our different forms of oppression without getting tangled up in the net of competition? (p. 19)

This brings us to an appreciation of the sense that "we are all in this together," the need to think collectively.

Individualism Versus Collectivism

A value dimension closely related to competition is individualism or self-reliance, a trait for which Americans are noted today and one that de Tocqueville found a risk to the national interest. A legacy of the Protestant Revolution, this ethos was carried across the Atlantic by the Puritans, who believed that their "City on the Hill" in Massachusetts was divinely inspired and would serve as a model of religious faith (Baldwin, 2005). During the first century or so of the Puritan settlement, loyalty was to the group and community, but later the belief in the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness

took over. The writings of this later period hailed individual freedom and private experience as the virtues to be cherished.

Individualism, probably the most sacrosanct of the America philosophical beliefs, is related to and revealed in capitalism and a reliance on charity to provide help to the poor. This is not to say that a collective spirit has not prevailed at various key periods in American history. Kaplan and Kaplan (1993) provide careful documentation to show that public opinion in the post-World War II era favored strong government intervention; surveys of that time reveal that a substantial portion of the population thought in collectivist terms. The contradiction in values between a focus on building character—the ability to stand up to the group—and conformity to the corporation and the peer group captivated the mass media during the 1950s and early 1960s. Out of this fear of conformity were born heroes such as the Lone Ranger and characters played by Alan Ladd in *Shane*, Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, and James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause*. And then for a short period in the mid-1960s and 1970s, the national fervor for social and economic equity was pervasive.

At the same time, within homogenous contexts, such as in high school and the military, conformity to group norms is the standard and has been for some time. In social psychological experiments, as has been discussed (see Chapter 2), Americans generally emerge as conformists, though less so than the Norwegians or Japanese.

Collectivist ideology accords prime importance to collective forms of association in which people share resources and decision making (Midgley, 2000). If you hold a collectivist orientation, you are more likely to put aside your individual goals for the well-being of the group (Seiler & Beall, 2008). As a European manifestation, collectivists believe that the state is jointly owned by its citizens and that the state is the most effective agent for meeting social needs. Among indigenous populations, such as certain African tribes, collectivism takes the form of traditional ways of knowing and a sense of intrinsic unity between individuals and communities (Kreitzer, 2002). Wright (2001) describes value themes carried from Africa that

are still in evidence among African Americans today. Among the themes singled out by Wright are oneness with nature and spirituality, mutual aid aimed at survival of the group, a power orientation and a spiral concept of time, and intergenerational bonding.

Anthropologist Alvin Wolfe (2002) contrasts the collective spirit of progressive periods in U.S. history with the social climate surrounding the welfare reform movement of today. Wolfe believes that each person shapes his or her destiny, denial of structural causes of poverty, blaming of victims, and acclaim of the wealthy as heroes are all a part of this cultural ethos. This ethos sums up the cultural climate of the United States, this sense of "I" rather than "we." The focus on self at the personal level is matched on the political level by unilateral foreign policy and a refusal to join the nation to the International Criminal Court or to abide by the decisions of international law.

The implications of these cultural differences are seen in social welfare policy in various nations. On this side of the Atlantic, welfare programs are geared to specific individuals or groups who are functioning poorly. In Europe, the focus is more on the population as a whole. In the United States, social welfare programs that focus on changing the internal person rather than the external system have been favored.

The collective spirit in Norway contrasts with a moral belief in preserving the nation's wealth for future generations has brought dividends in helping this nation withstand the economic collapse that has impacted the United States and the United Kingdom (Thomas, 2002). Instead of spending its oil riches lavishly, Norway set up a wealth fund to guard against market losses. Meanwhile, tight public oversight of bank lending practices has protected the nation from high-risk investments. There has been no real estate crash in Norway, accordingly.

Weiss's (2005) discussion of cultural differences among social workers in various countries is enlightening. The profession in the United States places a strong emphasis on self-determination, in contrast to Danish social work, which stresses integration. In Africa, the contrast is even greater, with

among African Americans, viewing self-determination as problems singled out by "Whites." Van Wormer, during her sojourn in the United States, was struck by the strident group solidarity of the group, a product of the overriding sense of "we-ness" (van Wormer, 2006). The fortitude of this value is

illustrated in a recent news report that the Norwegian court has decided that it is a punishable offense to prevent a spouse from being integrated into Norwegian society (No Abuse, 2006). The case involved a middle-aged immigrant who had been brought to Norway by her husband and who was forced to dress in traditional Algerian attire and was not allowed to mix with other classmates at the end of her school day. The child welfare department had ordered the woman to take a language course (Norwegian). Although the prosecutor asked for a sentence of 1½ years for the husband, charged with abuse, the court doubled the sentence to 3 years, a long sentence by Norwegian standards.

In their study of South Asian immigrant families in Canada, Maiter and George (2003) note the strength of the collectivist culture in which the children are raised. The internalization of group norms, such as respect for elders and for their parents, and transmitting a sense of belonging to the cultural group were emphasized. Hirayama (2003) similarly draws a sharp contrast between the American emphasis on fostering a competitive spirit in the child and encouraging self-reliance from an early age with the Japanese emphasis on a sense of group identity and loyalty. Social structure is hierarchical, and loyalty to family and the wider culture are prioritized. Self-control, piety, avoidance of shame, and emphasis on consensus are key cultural values (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005).

Japanese society is generally understood to be highly consensual: "The fondness for group harmony means most Japanese travel in groups, and that is said to date back centuries to the time when they flocked from temple to temple to hear Buddhist teachers" ("Consensus and Tradition," 2002, p. 8). In Japan, as the article notes, foreigners are tolerated more than in the United States and often held responsible for the crime rate. In the absence of sizable minorities, Japan is culturally homogeneous

and devoid of much social disruption—a largely egalitarian society of which the unifying principle is termed *wa*.

From a global perspective, American individualism comes across as rather extreme, even offensive. The use of the word *I* is commonly heard throughout any conversation in which North Americans participate (Seiler & Beall, 2008). Sikeena Karmali (2003), who was born in Africa to Indian parents but who was educated in Canada, describes the East-West divide. As she observes:

The self is the orienting principle of the West, perhaps even of modernity as a whole. All things—community, the nation, religion, spirituality, even God—are subordinated to the individual, which is the highest form of good. If we take a cursory glance at contemporary Western media, we find that the self is the supreme subject of conversation—my mind, my body, my home, my fashion, my spirit. There seems to be an earnest endeavor—in talk shows like *Oprah* and sitcoms like *Friends*, in the proliferation of lifestyle coaches, personal trainers, nutritionists, and shrinks—to perfect the individual. . . .

The East, with its heavy hand of tradition, functions through consensus. Loyalties and duties are ascribed by birth. Community, and not self, is the orienting principle. (p. 2)

Karmali's hope is that East and West will come together as soul mates and that she herself, as a product of both worlds, somehow will be able to "integrate these values where they are needed" (p. 2).

Independence Versus Interconnectedness

Independence is closely related to individualism in the same way that interconnectedness is related to collectivism. Within the family, as well as in society, Americans strive to be fiercely independent. The word *codependency*, which signifies a too-close emotional dependence, accordingly has taken on extremely negative connotations. Parents train their children to be independent and to one day leave the "nest."

The myth of independence suggests that each individual is singularly in control of his or her own destiny, according to Tropman (1989). As people age, they fight to hang on to their independence for as long as possible. The value of independence has important implications for social welfare. Prolonged dependence on government help is actively discouraged, and many Americans refuse to accept benefits because of personal pride. "The Lord helps those who help themselves" is a commonly heard refrain.

At the international level, the United States has a strong propensity to lead or to "go it alone," but rarely to collaborate in international decision making. This propensity also figures in the governmental refusal to sign international accords on behalf of human rights or conventions banning chemical and biological weapons or land mines. In comparison with the United States, the nations of Europe, for example, appear to be far more interdependent in their dealings with each other. If we agree with Midgley (2000) that globalization can serve to provide sustainable development and enhance people's welfare, then we need to advocate for a perspective more in keeping with the demands of this global age.

The sense of interconnectedness is a staple of traditional indigenous culture. The First Nations peoples in North America rely on the metaphor of the Medicine Wheel, which exemplifies the wholeness of all life. The Medicine Wheel teaches about the cycle of life, a cycle that encompasses infancy through old age, the seasons, and four directions of human growth—the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. This is not a linear system, and all the parts are interconnected. American Indian teachings are traditionally presented as narratives and shared within a talking circle. Don Coyhis (2000), the director of White Bison, a substance abuse treatment center, incorporates the wisdom of the Medicine Wheel in his treatment programming. In Indian country, the heart of the sobriety movement, as explained by Coyhis, revolves around a return to cultural values and folkways. Among these values are a strong emphasis on *being*, not doing, and on cooperation over competition; group emphasis; working only to meet one's needs; nonmaterialism; right-brain

orientation; and living in harmony with nature. The theme of these values is social interconnectedness. This is one of the many insights offered by Coyhis:

The elders have shared with us the understanding that all things are related and connected. There is a level in the unseen world where we are all connected to one another. . . . For example, one of the teachings of the Medicine Wheel was that the Honor of One is the Honor of All. And if that is true, then the Pain of One is the Pain of All. (pp. 90–91)

Materialism Versus Spirituality

America is viewed with disdain in many parts of the world for its perceived embrace of greed and value-free materialism and for its exploitation of the same on the rest of the world, putting profits ahead of people (Davis & Foran, 2004). In fact, materialism should not, strictly speaking, be considered a value, because the term is laden with undesirable connotations. But the United States is clearly a capitalist nation, and status is accorded to those with high income and power or, in upper-upper class settings, to those who have access to inherited wealth. Americans may be accused on occasion of flaunting their wealth. The number of toys many American children have would be considered in some circles to be almost obscene. And at the macro level, American capitalism is a cause of both resentment and emulation in every part of the globe.

Throughout her writings, bell hooks captures the essence of the search for meaning that sadly has caused so many to worship at the throne of money. In *Salvation: Black People as Love*, hooks (2001) describes how the focus on material gain has affected the black church. "Like the culture as a whole, masses of black people now look to material success as the primary measure of value and meaning in life. Getting access to material privilege will never satisfy the needs of the spirit. Those hungers persist and haunt us" (p. 15).

In an article entitled "Through New Eyes," Ron Marks (2003), the dean of the Theological

University School of Social Work, describes how a group of American social work students adapted to the special rhythm of a Tibetan community in India. He writes:

Whether witnessing a cremation or interacting with a person with leprosy, we discovered a spiritual richness among the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala, despite the material poverty. We, in turn, learned to measure modernity in a more humble way. (pp. 36–37)

Alexander (2005) describes his amazement in discovering the good life in the South Indian state of Kerala. Much has been written of this part of India, where poverty does not mean high infant mortality or short life spans or lack of education for girls and women. Aware of these facts, Alexander traveled to Kerala to live several years among the people and uncover the secret of their success. What he found was a modest level of consumption, sustainability of available resources, and a high level of well-being. Women's leadership in the society and values of simplicity, as opposed to consumerism, were characteristics of this culture from which Americans have much to learn.

Value conflict between old (tribal) and new values are commonplace across the globe. Social work educators from the University of Guam (Lewab & Dames, 2006), for example, write of a cultural clash on their small Pacific island of Guam. The Chamorro, an indigenous people believed to be of Mayo-Polynesian descent, are the preservers of the ancient Guam culture, a culture that was historically matrilineal and matriarchal. During the Spanish occupation, the culture was preserved by the women, women whose influence was ignored by the Spaniards. Today, accordingly, many of the traditions remain—the belief that the land and its products belong to everyone, a powerful concern for mutuality rather than individualism, spirituality rather than material values, and reverence for elders (Government of Guam, 2004). Increasing military presence, however, threatens to overwhelm the native cultural ethos.

The United States as a nation has a strong religious character. In a Gallup poll survey on religious beliefs, more than 85 percent said that

religion was important in their lives (Newport, 2004). About two-thirds reported membership in a specific church or synagogue. About one-third attend every week. African Americans and women are the subgroups for whom religion is most important. Evangelical Christianity has made a strong comeback before and during the Bush administration, and plans for funding of faith-based initiatives for social services gained wide acceptance. The national thrust toward religiosity is confirmed in a worldwide survey undertaken by the Pew Research Center (2005a) in which three-fourths of the respondents said that religion was a very important part of their lives. An earlier worldwide survey in 2002 found that among wealthy nations such as Britain, Germany, Italy, and Korea, the United States is the only one in which a majority of the people say that religion plays an important role in their lives (Pew Research Center, 2005b)). A recent survey shows that young people are less religiously active than previous generations, but that their beliefs are fairly traditional. Pew Research Center (2010) surveys show, for instance, that young adults' beliefs about life after death and the existence of heaven, hell and miracles closely resemble the beliefs of older people today. The key factor may be aging rather than difference across the decades.

Organized religion is often much more visible in the United States than is spirituality. Spirituality, as described by Canda and Furman (2010), "orients the person and groups toward meaning, purpose, connectedness, and transcendence. This spiritual aspect is fundamental to human nature and infuses the other biopsychosocial aspects" (p. 87). Spirituality, in short, relates to a universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human. Relevant to the family, the rituals and ceremonies associated with spirituality and religion mark important transitions and unite the generations in shared worship and reinforce feelings of gratitude and caring. (See Chapter 9 for a discussion of social work's rekindled focus on spirituality.)

Nuclear Family Versus Extended Family

"The Incredible Shrinking Family" is the title of a chapter in Robert Reich's (2000) *The Future*

of Success. Although Reich's concern is the impact of the new working arrangements in the postindustrial society, the result is fewer children and longer working hours for both partners. Geographical mobility to "where the jobs are" leaves the older generation and aunts and uncles behind. In terms of economic support, the vulnerable members of the family, such as the elderly and the disabled, are more likely to be supported through social welfare provisions than by their kinfolk.

Throughout the nonindustrialized world, kinship arrangements are very different. Marriage may be viewed as a union between families rather than individuals. Residences may be shared intergenerationally. In India, for example, the social institution that is key to Hindu life is the joint family (Nimmagadda & Cowger, 1999). Social workers who provide counseling to troubled family members, such as to those in an alcoholic family, often find, according to Nimmagadda and Cowger, that acceptance of one's fate and fierce loyalty by wife to husband may prevent the alcoholic from changing but also may provide a strong support system. Although trained in Western models of individualism, social workers routinely adapt these foreign models to the norms of the local culture. For a compelling description of a Bedouin-Arab social worker's role as conflict mediator in a complicated marital situation, see Al-Krenawi and Graham (2001). The emphasis in the intervention, consistent with Arab cultural norms, was on the good of the family rather than the good of the individual.

Elizabeth Kenny (personal communication, June 2002) compares concepts of time in Mexico and the United States and the impact of the time dimension on family life:

The Mexican mother of a friend of mine has told me that Americans greatly value time. She pointed out that this especially affects family values. Whereas in Mexico, the family has a long dinner together every night no matter what, here in the U.S. everyone is rushing to the next event. In Mexico, each person is more a member of a family than an individual.

Moralism Versus Compassion

A carryover from Puritanism, moralism is one of the singular features of American society. As described by political scientist Seymour Lipset (1997), "America is the most moralistic country in the developed world. That moralism flows in large part from the country's strong Protestant sectarian and ideological commitments" (p. 26). Of all the U.S. value dimensions, this one, in our view, is primary. Tropman (1989) defined *moralism* as the tendency to be judgmental about affairs and events. This trait, to Americans, according to Tropman, is sufficiently pervasive that poverty becomes a moral issue and money becomes the focus of moral judgment. Johnson and Rhodes (2009) contrasted a narrow Puritanism that seeks reasons for disapproval of others leads to viewing the dependent state of the chronically poor as unsuccessful as immoral rather than as unfortunate. Time and again, concerns of personal responsibility and fault have dominated the discourse on issues such as social welfare needs, including affordable housing, and, of course, problems with drug misuse and addiction. To please the people, politicians often come down on the side of harsh treatment and punishment rather than compassion.

So entrenched is moralism in American culture that, as an article from the conservative British magazine *The Economist* ("Living with Superpower," 2003) argues, domestic and even technical matters such as stem-cell research and gun control, become moral questions. There may also be a link between moralism and militarism, as the article speculates. Data to support the article's contention that Americans and Europeans view the world differently come from the Pew Research Center's (2008) international poll on national attitudes across in Europe and the United States. Consider the contrast, as well, in the longstanding reluctance to accept gays and lesbians in the military compared to policies in European countries and the reluctance of Americans to outlaw all forms of corporal punishment used with children (see Chapter 4, *HBSE*, micro level.) (For international comparisons on a number of issues, see <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.)

...iveness is a cardinal American value ... difficult for U.S. citizens to explain to out- ... (Figure 5.6). The death penalty, harsh ... laws for drug users and dealers, ... of inmates to violence in prison— ... just a few examples that come to mind. ... rather than rehabilitation is still a ... focus in the sentencing laws although ... progressive programming is being intro- ... across the states. Over the past decade ... seen the construction of new jails and ... expand exponentially; the war on drugs ... the war on welfare have accompanied the ... growth. A record-breaking two million ... people are in U.S. jails and prisons, one ... of whom are incarcerated for violations ... to drug use (Bureau of Justice Statistics ... 2005). Although minorities are dispropor- ... serving time in prison, a shift in the ... choice from crack cocaine to metham- ... has resulted in more whites receiv- ... sentences and a decline in the ... of black inmates (BJS, 2009). Imprison- ... and the prison industrial complex, ... means jobs for construction workers and ... officers and more federal and state ... to the community due to the popula- ... growth of inmates, ensures that the prison

network is now deeply ingrained in American life (Daniels, 2004). There is always the hope that, with the steady decline in the crime rate, political sentiment will shift and that, as Grimrud and Zehr (2002) envision, present-day alternatives to retributive criminal justice will emerge that reflect the general thrust of compassionate justice. Such initiatives, which are at the compassionate end of the continuum, include victim-offender reconciliation programs and healing circles, which are discussed later in Chapter 6.

Is this pervasive moralism unique to American society? Indeed not. Remember the reaction in Japan to the Japanese hostages who were captured in Iraq and later released? Because their travel to Iraq had been in defiance of the Japanese government, which had discouraged such travel, they were greeted at the airport with abuse. The government condemned the former hostages and billed them for the airfare. According to an article by Onishi (2004), their sin was to defy *okami*, literally, "what is higher." Treated as criminals by the population and publicly rebuked by government officials for their irresponsible and selfish behavior, they were forced to go into hiding. Their families were the recipients of hate mail.

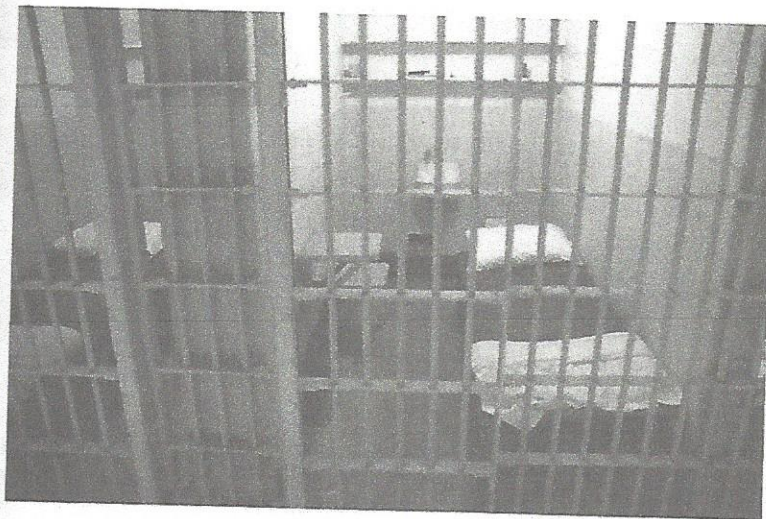


Figure 5.6. The United States incarcerates the highest percentage of prisoners in the world; life in the maximum security prison is especially harsh. Photo by Rupert van Wormer.

This incident reveals a moralism that relates the norm of obedience to higher authority, to sanctions against sticking out in the crowd, and to victim blaming in the extreme.

In summary, there is much that is unique about American society and, despite an amalgam of cultural characteristics in a heterogeneous nation, we have laid out some of the most obvious value dimensions, foremost among them moralism, individualism, and the work ethic. Keep these themes in mind during the discussion of community and community development in the chapter that follows.



The Political Manipulation of Cultural Values

A paradox that few have been able to explain is why, in the poorest counties in America, the voters consistently vote against their own economic and political interests for the political party of big business. Formerly, this phenomenon was explained as a consequence of racism—poor whites afraid of job loss to blacks and angry over policies of affirmative action. Thomas Frank (2004) updated this argument in his book *What's the Matter With Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. The paradox of which Frank writes is that of the working class voting for people who, as Frank dramatically puts it, “may talk Christ, but they walk corporate” (p. 6). Frank explains this phenomenon in terms of what he calls the Great Backlash. The primary contradiction of the backlash he sees is that it is a working-class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to working-class people. While the backlash leaders downplay economics and tout traditional values, Frank further asserts, what they will actually deliver will be an economic regimen of low wages and lax regulations for industry.

Similarly, political scientist Peter Starke (2008) looks at what he calls “radical welfare state retrenchment” in global context. The recent health care debate in Congress provided a rare look into the inner workings of Congress and of forces that progressive politicians had to overcome. These forces were both economic

and cultural. Extensive lobbying by insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies effectively stymied passage of a health care bill that contained a public option to compete with private corporations. Culturally, as T. J. Slevin, the author of *The Healing of America: A Great Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care* (2009), indicates, countries with universal government-run health care differ from the United States in a striking way—there health care is seen as a right and that one who does not have it should be available for all. The moral imperative to guarantee health care is seemingly not enough to overcome the power of the major corporations. Resistance to change undoubtedly is another major factor that came into play. Health care reform efforts consistently were scaled back in order to get the needed majority of Congressional votes. Meanwhile, use of political tactics by conservative politicians were not effective in reducing what public support there might have been for a real overhaul of the health care system. Chapter 7 analyzes the decision-making process involved in the passage of the 2010 health care reform act in more detail.

Economics affects cultural values, and cultural values have a strong bearing on economic behavior. What we are talking about here is a belief system that arises in a time and place of prosperity, that feeds confidence in the future and that is also associated with general economic failure, out migration, and endemic poverty. Box 5.1, “Appalachia: A Study in Contrasts,”

Box 5.1 Appalachia: A Study in Contrasts

Katherine van Wormer

The past is not dead; it's not even past.
—William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

Appalachia, which extends across the southern mountain region of the United States, held a great fascination for sociologists and journalists in the middle of the last century. Much of the focus was on the history and culture of the region. The region was the subject of some of the popular books of the day produced by the predominant sentiment that there was much

about this region: *Night Comes to the Hills: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Harrison, 1962); *Yesterday's People* (Weller, 1965); *Appalachian America* (Harrington, 1962). These were books that spoke of strengths or resilience in the region's history. Caudill referred to these people as victims of the failures. The War on Poverty created by Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s was inspired in part by Harrison's book and focused on the poor of the United States. The government sent volunteers through the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, which was likened to the Peace Corps in the kind of community work that was done and funded.

When the national interest in the region faded, the federal subsidies subsided. Perhaps it was the war in Vietnam that drew attention away or the rise of the "culture of poverty" theories that were considered examples of victim blaming and stereotyping. In any case, the focus went away from the region, and the idiosyncrasies of the region were forgotten by the media and general public. In the 1970s I lived in southern West Virginia and worked in sociology at Bluefield State. What impressed me about the culture was the people's easy-going humor, combined with cynicism, that made them a delight; their distrust of authority; and their natural sympathy for the underdog. One does not find the usual kind of victim blaming that is associated with a belief in a just world. In my experience, using struggle against a corrupt and inefficient academic bureaucracy, the commiseration of the poor was wonderfully comforting. On the other side, I remember that cheating on exams was extremely common, a fact I learned the hard way through my own experiences, as described to me by students. These were highly emotional, characterized by extremely vivid images of the devil and hell, and were absorbing to children. Earlier, before I ever came to Appalachia, I had taught school for several years in Northern Ireland, so the impact of extreme sectarianism on children was familiar to me. That was the only connection here; the roots of the Appalachian people (the so-called Scotch Irish) are in Northern Ireland.

The American term *Scotch-Irish*, or, more correctly, *Scots-Irish*, refers to the zealous Protestants who migrated first from Britain to Northern Ireland and then from Northern Ireland to Appalachia (Gladwell, 2008). This was in the 1700s.

Because these emigrants did not fit in with Tidewater Virginia society, they migrated westward to till the land nobody wanted and otherwise eked out a living in the "hills" of Kentucky and West Virginia.

According to Northern Ireland native Morris Taggart (2005), the customs and values that defined life for the Scots-Irish still persist across a vast region of Appalachia today. Even long after the challenges and hardships that directed attitudes and behavior had vanished, the cultural legacies persist. This is how Gladwell explains the form of violence that is characteristic of Harlan, Kentucky, violence that is not related to economic gain but to attacks on one's honor. The unique cultural ethos that Gladwell found in Harlan, Kentucky, is what it is because of where the original inhabitants of the region came from.

Sociologist Harry Caudill (1962), himself a descendant of the mountain people, graphically describes the early settlers as "a population born of embittered rejects and outcasts from the shores of Europe—as cynical, hardened and bitter a lot as can be imagined outside prison walls" (p. 13). Despite his harsh words, however, Caudill very much sees these people as the victims of history, especially related to the exploitation of the land and of its people by the coal companies. The operators of these companies preferred to keep the workers ignorant and dependent on them for their livelihood and in a state of near serfdom in terms of what they could buy and even in their community life. Then, once the land was depleted of resources, the companies moved on, leaving the people with a despoiled landscape and without a livelihood. This continuing experience with the power elites, many of whom came from the outside, has left the native inhabitants dejected and demoralized.

My fascination with the culture of this unique region of the United States was rekindled recently, as was that of much of the nation, with the airing on PBS of David Sutherland's gripping and disturbing documentary, *Country Boys* (PBS, 2006). This three-part documentary concerned the growing pains of two teenage boys, Chris and Cody, both of whom attend a high school for behaviorally disturbed kids in Floyd County in eastern Kentucky. Cameras follow the boys everywhere and record intimate details of their lives over a 3-year period. Chris's family lives in "the hollers" in a run-down trailer with his rough-spoken mother and chronically drunken father. Chris, who narrates much of the story in a

melodious, almost theatrical voice, encounters defeat after defeat, a fact that he attributes to his own self-destructiveness. Despite the personal attention he gets from school counselors and the principal, he cheats the system with excuses and sham mental health problems that qualify him for disability payments that his mother needs to live on. Although he finally manages to graduate and makes a powerful graduation speech, the epilogue indicates that he has gotten nowhere in his life and is mired in poverty and a minimum-wage job.

Cody is rebellious in another way. His house is clean and attractive; his stepmother's well-spoken mother is his caretaker. Cody sees himself as one of the "haves" as opposed to "have nots." His background is clouded, however. His mother committed suicide, and his father later killed his stepmother and then himself. The tragedy of his early childhood hangs over him, but in the end, the unconditional love of his step-grandmother sustains him, and he makes plans to go to college.

The story of *Country Boys* is the story of resilience in the one case and defeat in the other. It is also the story of a culture and way of life in an area of grinding poverty. Does culture come into play in holding adolescents such as Chris back, and if so, is it, as defined by Harrington (1962) and Sarnoff (2003), the culture of poverty? To the extent that the culture of poverty is defined as the cause rather than the effect of poverty, this explanation is fallacious. Sarnoff's focus on the systemic nature of poverty is appropriate, however, because it puts the responsibility for ending the poverty where it belongs, with the social structure that must provide opportunities for people before the people can develop aspirations and confidence that their actions will make a difference.

Because the culture-of-poverty theory is so often misused or misunderstood, I use the term *culturally based theory* to cover the same ground. Culturally based theory can serve to explain many of the problems that oppressed people have in abiding by the norms of society, especially regarding achievement and self-sufficiency. Such a theoretical perspective locates the source of oppression within the values, norms, and attitudes of the oppressed group, but only as a legacy of earlier mistreatment, for example, conquest or enslavement. Like individual history, the history cannot be neglected. People who have been socially excluded

and whose ancestors have been subjected to social exclusion over long periods of time develop survival mechanisms that may no longer be functional.

Illustrative of this approach is Cattell-Gordon's (1990) analysis of the traumatic effects of the loss and absence of work over generations in southern Appalachia. Utilizing the concept of culturally transmitted traumatic stress syndrome to describe the character of the mountain people, Cattell-Gordon, a native of Bluefield, West Virginia, records the history of economic exploitation and governmental abandonment over the years. Such mistreatment leave a land and its people broken and bruised. According to Cattell-Gordon, "These particular cultural traits—an enduring sense of resignation, deep depression, disrupted relationships and various forms of dependency—appear, again and again, in the culture as each new generation faces unemployment" (p. 43). This is the legacy of economic oppression. If we accept that economic oppression is the cause of certain attitudes, then the solution, too, must be economic—not handouts, mass community organization efforts to establish programs, an investment in communities, as well as people. This is our responsibility to the Code of Ethics of the world, to invest in them with our commitment so that they can see that they and their children will have a future. Grassroots power and self-help are as important as well. Read about the work supporting grassroots leadership efforts against economic injustice of the Highlander Research and Education Center at <http://www.highlandercenter.org>.

Social worker Ed Miner (in personal correspondence of March 2007) responded to Cattell-Gordon's observations from the vantage point of having worked with impoverished Appalachian and African American populations in Columbus, Ohio:

The long history of suffering and oppression among Appalachian people causes a grinding down of the people that becomes ingrained in daily life. People who have been oppressed develop a sense of resignation, deep depression and other symptoms that lead to dysfunction. I witness the evidence of this everyday, with many families who, during their medical health history, tell about legal, economic and psychological struggles that go back generations. Most of them have families who were coal miners. They relate stories of death from

long disease, companies that did not care for employee health, and acceptance of disasters such as mine accidents. I see the sense of resignation in an interesting phenomenon in one mostly Appalachian neighborhood called "the Bottoms." Several of my families move all the time, sometimes two or three times a year. However, they never move out of the Bottoms. They will live in the same two or three mile square area for years never even considering going anywhere else. This is different from a broader "culture of poverty" idea in that it recognizes that the psychology and values of a particular population have unique causes.

Appalachians and African Americans in the inner city of Columbus seem, on the surface, to have similar problems related to poverty. But they are not as monolithic as the "culture of poverty" idea would indicate. I see subtle differences all of the time. These are generalizations but seem to hold true over my experience. My African American clients are more likely to value education and less likely to have truancy problems. My Appalachian clients are generally more willing to work with a psychiatrist and are less suspicious of mental health services. Appalachian clients are also more likely to have extended family connections in the city as they often move to the city "together." My African American clients tend to be transplants from other inner-city locations; Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago are the most common. But this is to say that I agree that "culture of poverty" thinking can cause us to be blind to subtle differences in the situations of our people. These subtle differences need to be recognized in the way we work with families.

References

- Gordon, D. (1990). The Appalachian experience: A culturally transmitted traumatic stress syndrome? *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 1*, 41-57.
- Katell, H. (1962). *Night comes to the Cumberlands: Geography of a depressed area*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Kennedy, W. (1951). *Requiem for a nun*. New York: Random House.
- McGraw-Hill, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.
- Warrington, M. (1962). *The other America: Poverty in the United States*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Public Broadcasting Service. (2006, January 9-11). Country boys. David Sutherland, producer. *Frontline*. Retrieved May 2006, from <http://www.pbs.org/countryboys>
- Sarnoff, S. (2003). Central Appalachia: Still the other America. *Journal of Poverty, 7*(1/2), 123-140.
- Taggart, M. (2005). Scots-Irish families. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & N. Garcia-Preto (Eds.), *Ethnicity and family therapy* (3rd ed., pp. 654-663). New York: Guilford Press.

Practice Implications

In 1996, the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics was revised to include a global mandate. Social workers are now enjoined to "promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels" (section 6.01). In light of the current globalization of the economy and the high rate of immigration over the past decade, social workers inevitably will be working with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. An awareness of aspects of North American cultural norms and values that might seem odd or uncaring to an outsider is essential. Once we learn about our own cultural values, we can come to have an awareness and appreciation of values of representatives of diverse populations.

Realistically speaking, cultural competence is something to strive for but not something that is ever completely achieved (Weaver, 2005). Every client experiences his or her culture differently, and factors of age, degree of acculturation, education, and class always must be factored in. Preparation for intervention in a system in which mixed racial and ethnic identity issues are potentially volatile is imperative (Daly, 2001). A basic technique for crossing the cultural barrier recommended by Daly (2001) is the communication skill of active listening, in which the listener repeats what he or she has heard and what his or her perceptions are of circumstances, decisions, and so on. In this way, any misunderstandings can be cleared up. In paying close attention to the client's definition of the situation, social workers, moreover, show a willingness to listen and learn.

An essential ingredient of multicultural social work is empowerment. Empowerment may be manifested at the community level through the inclusion of the community group in the change effort and in the development of macro-level interventions. Above all, empowerment practice requires taking identity issues and a group's cultural identities into account, because these are integral to the group member's sense of worth.

Attention to the social and cultural context of clients' lives must be included in culturally competent service provision for optimal results. Research from public health work in the area of substance abuse prevention bears this out (Botvin et al., 1995; Unger et al., 2004). For work with refugee communities such as Cambodian or Bosnian residents as well, service offerings need to be readily accessible, equipped with language translators and practitioners who are sensitive to their unique histories (such as conflict among rival ethnic groups) and cultural rituals (see Fong & Furuto, 2001). In striving toward the goal of cultural competence, we need to recognize how various behavior patterns that may seem dysfunctional within a safe and secure setting might have been functional for survival in a hostile social environment. Social workers working with refugees from war-torn areas, for example, should have a working knowledge of the history of a people and how they survived in the midst of mass violence and ethnic conflict. Attendance at professional workshops on the dynamics and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder can be helpful. Finally, ethnic-specific treatment modalities must be adapted for work with the various population groups.

Above all, an emphasis on empowerment—personal and cultural—is important. Daly, Jennings, Beckett, and Leashore (1996) recommend that social workers be cognizant of African American cultural perspectives and approach these from a nondeficit model of empowerment. Evidence indicates, for example, that African American women coping with domestic violence are apt to be particularly sensitive to the influence of family and support systems. It has been found, as Daly et al. (1996) indicate, that social supports from the extended family, in fact, serve to decrease spouse assaults

in African American homes. Increasingly, social workers trained in a strengths perspective view the wider family as a major resource and recognize the importance of honoring all the different kinds of family forms; for example, those that are blended with children from previous marriages, nonkin families, and same-sex parented families. Kinship care, as described in Chapter 4, is preferred over adoption by African family members by the National Association of Black Social Workers for children in need of care (Suppes & Wells, 2008). This traditional informal arrangement has become a model for all families in need of care. Child welfare workers increasingly rely on kinship care arrangements in cases of parental absence or neglect.

F

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of cultural norms and expectations as relevant for macro-level generalist practice. Culture has a significant influence on an individual's and a group's values, beliefs, worldview, and child-rearing practices. Filtered through the literature of international social work and anthropology, nine value dimensions emerged with relevance to cultural values. These are work versus leisure, equal opportunity versus equality, mobility versus stability, competition versus cooperation, individualism versus collectivism, independence versus interdependence, materialism versus spirituality, nuclear family versus extended family, and mercy versus compassion. Comparative analysis shows that, except for the family construct that is associated with modern industrialization and globalization, the attributes on the left side of the continua are characteristically American, whereas some of those characteristics on the right side—equality, cooperation, and collectivism—are representative of advanced welfare states such as those found in the Nordic countries. The message here is at the macro level—social service provisions can be improved to prevent poverty and disease and meet the needs of all the people. Other cultural orientations on the right side of the continua that have a bearing

the personal level of social work—interconnectedness, spirituality, and extended family relations—are characteristic of traditional cultures and have implications for how social work services will be received by such minority populations. This discussion of cultural values and cultural sensitivities to difference provides a backdrop for the following chapter on community and community development.

Thought Questions

- Discuss some ways that culture and community are intertwined.
- "We are all cultural beings." Discuss.
- How can knowing another culture give us awareness about our own?
- Review NASW's Code of Ethics, section 1.05, and what it says about culture.
- Consider ways that religion can take on aspects of ethnocentrism.
- Discuss the metaphor of finding four-leaf clovers with regard to the study of a new culture.
- Which of the values listed in the nine value dimensions, in your opinion, best encapsulates the "American way of life"?
- Trace the historical roots of the work ethic. What was Max Weber's theory?
- Relate the teachings of Calvinism and Benjamin Franklin to any personal teachings in your family or educational background.
- Today we are a secular nation. To what extent do you think the Protestant work ethic applies or does not apply at this time?
- Discuss the value put on work in several different countries.
- Differentiate equal opportunity from equality.
- To destroy a social welfare program, make it means tested. Discuss this claim.
- Consider recent changes in Medicare.
- Argue that mobility is a key characteristic of U.S. society.
- Describe a society in which the social climate is cooperation-based rather than competition-based.
- Contrast the concept of the Indian Medicine Wheel with the mainstream U.S. focus on independence.
- Relate the force of moralism to punitiveness in American society.
- Discuss the underlying thesis of the book *What's the Matter With Kansas?* What is its contemporary relevance?
- How can social workers be better prepared to work with people from diverse backgrounds? Relate the discussion to recent presidential elections.
- Using culturally based theory, account for the persistent poverty in parts of Appalachia.

References

- Adams, P. (2009, April 11). Immigrants in the American heartland. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8339249.stm>
- Alber, J., & Gilbert, N. (2010). Introduction. In J. Alber & N. Gilbert (Eds.), *United in diversity? Comparing social models in Europe and America* (pp. 3–18). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, W. M. (2005, May). Simplicity, poverty, and gender in the Indian state of Kerala. *Friends Journal*, 51(4), 14–17.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (2001). The cultural mediator: Bridging the gap between a non-western community and professional social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31, 665–685.
- Appleby, G. (2007). Culture, social class, and social identity development. In G. A. Appleby, E. Colon, & J. Hamilton (Eds.), *Diversity, oppression, and social functioning* (pp. 16–35). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Armstrong, K. (1993). *A history of God: The 4,000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Baldwin, N. (2005). *The American revelation: Ten ideals that shaped our country from the Puritans to the cold war*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bateson, M. C. (1984). *With a daughter's eye: A memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Bishop, A. (2002). *Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression in people* (2nd ed.). Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood Press.