

## networks

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- CHART** Theoretical Perspectives: Views on Culture
- GRAPHIC ORGANIZER** Society and Human Behavior
- IMAGE** DNA
- SELF-CHECK QUIZ**



## LESSON 1

# The Basis of Culture

Reading **HELPDESK**



### Academic Vocabulary

- culture
- evolution

### Content Vocabulary

- society
- instincts
- reflex
- drive
- sociobiology

### TAKING NOTES:

#### Key Ideas and Details

**QUESTIONING** As you read about the ways culture influences society and human behavior, use a graphic organizer like the one below to list three questions you would like to have answered. Then write the answers as you find them in the text.

Question 1	_____
Answer	_____
Question 2	_____
Answer	_____
Question 3	_____
Answer	_____

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** • How does culture influence society?

## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Culture defines how people in a society behave in relation to others and to physical objects. Although most behavior among animals is instinctual, human behavior is learned. Even reflexes and drives do not completely determine how humans will behave, because people are heavily influenced by culture.

## Culture and Society

**GUIDING QUESTION** How does culture explain human behavior?

The term **culture** refers to the knowledge, language, values, customs, and physical objects that are passed from generation to generation among members of a group. It is a human creation. On the *material* side, the culture of the United States includes such physical objects as skyscrapers, computers, cell phones, and cars. On the *nonmaterial* side, American culture includes beliefs, rules, customs, family systems, and a capitalist economy.

What is the importance of culture? One role of culture is to help explain human social behavior. What people do and don't do, what they like and dislike, what they believe and don't believe, and what they value and discount are all based on culture. Another role of culture is to provide the blueprint that people in a society use to guide their relationships with others. It is because of culture that teenage girls are encouraged to compete for a position on the women's basketball team. It is from culture that teenage boys come to believe that "pumping iron" is a gateway to masculinity.

Culture and society are tightly interwoven. One cannot exist without the other, but they are not identical. A **society** is a group of people who live in a defined territory and participate in a common culture. All the different elements of culture—knowledge, language, values, customs, and physical objects—form a whole culture that defines that society's total way of life.

Human behavior, then, is based on culture. Since people are not born knowing their culture, human cultural behavior must be learned. People develop schemas, or mental outlines based on their experience or memory. In this lesson we will examine the influence of biology on behavior.

### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Making Connections** What are some ways in which people learn culture?

# Culture and Heredity

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How does heredity affect human behavior?*

**Instincts** are genetically inherited patterns of behavior. Nonhuman animals, especially insects, are highly dependent on instincts for survival. Human infants, in contrast, cannot go very far on instincts alone. Instincts are not enough to solve the problems that humans face.

## Culture Versus Instinct

Most social scientists view the role of instincts in human behavior as quite limited. Cognitive psychologists—those who study how the mind works—might point out, for instance, that language would not be possible if humans did not have some predisposition—some instinct—to learn certain things. They would argue that the underlying mental rules for language are present at birth. They would not, however, argue that people have an innate ability for a specific language. People learn specific languages in a cultural context.

If humans were controlled by instincts alone, they would all behave in the same way with respect to those instincts. If, for example, women had an instinct for mothering, then all women would want children, and all women would love and protect their children. In fact, some women do not want to have children, and some women who give birth abuse or abandon their children.

Without instincts to dictate the type of shelter to build, the kind of food to eat, the time of year to have children, or when to mate, humans are forced to create and learn their own ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Even for meeting basic needs such as those involving reproduction, food, and survival, humans rely on the culture they have created.

## Heredity Affects Behavior

Of course, culture is not the only influence on human behavior. Genetic inheritance plays a role too. Evidence from a variety of studies suggests that genetic factors play a role in general intelligence and in personality traits.

**culture** knowledge, values, customs, and physical objects that are shared by the members of a society.

**society** a group of people who inhabit a specific territory and share a common culture

**instincts** innate (unlearned) patterns of behavior

# Theoretical Perspectives

## EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF CULTURE

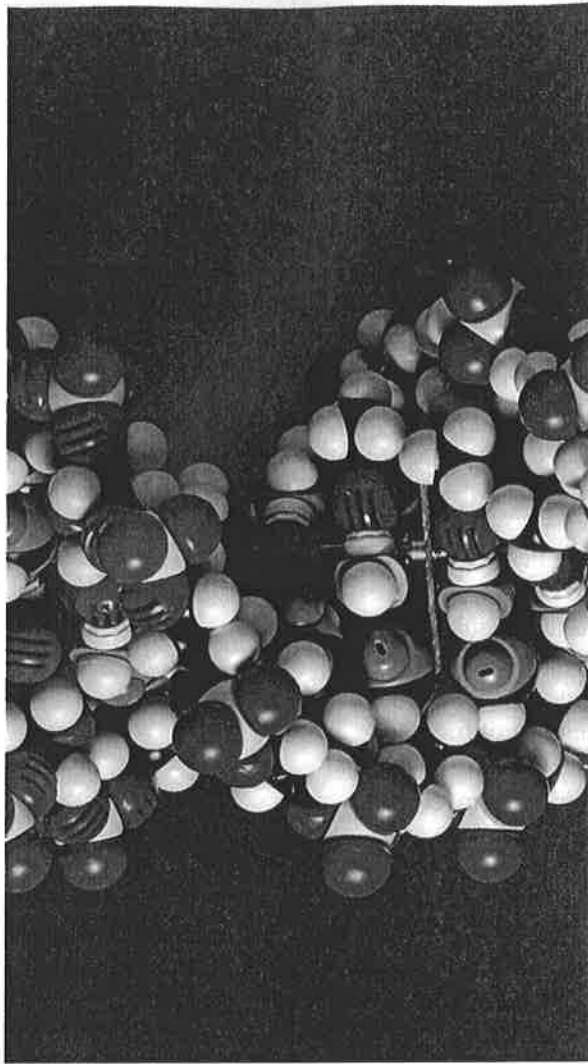
Functionalism and conflict theory examine culture on the societal—or macro—level. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the group—or micro—level. Each perspective provides different insights into how culture affects human behavior and society. This table explores some of the differences.

Theoretical Perspective	Culture Concepts	Examples
Functionalism	Values	Culture is a system for meeting basic needs. Values influence how these needs are met. For example, the Amish value hard work. They use horses to plow fields. Mainstream American culture values efficiency. Most American farmers use machines and modern technology to save time and labor.
Conflict Theory	Dominant ideology	Culture helps maintain the privileges and positions of powerful groups in society by reinforcing the dominant ideology—the cultural beliefs and practices of those in power.
Symbolic Interactionism	Social interactions	Culture is transmitted and perpetuated through social interaction. This social interaction continuously defines and redefines the culture's values.

### CRITICAL THINKING

**1. Contrasting** How do functionalists and conflict theorists differ in the way they view the role of culture?

**2. Evaluating** Which perspective would be most useful in determining how culture affects behaviors in small groups? Why?



Our DNA, or genetic code, determines our reflexes and drives.

► **CRITICAL THINKING**

1. **Identifying Central Issues** How can our drives form the basis for cultural interaction?
2. **Differentiating** How is a twin study based on identical twins different from one based on fraternal twins?

**reflex** automatic reaction to physical stimuli

**drive** impulse to reduce discomfort

**sociobiology** the study of how biology influences human behavior

For example, genetic factors have been linked to traits such as kindness, aggressiveness, sociability, drug and alcohol use, thrill seeking, depression, and anxiousness. This does not mean that individuals inherit specific personality traits and patterns of behavior. Rather, heredity sets broad parameters for the development of some behaviors and traits. People's actual behaviors and traits are formed by the interplay between genetic and environmental factors. The debate over the relative balance of these factors is sometimes referred to as the "nature versus nurture" argument.

Psychologists have used twin studies to try to determine the relative effects of genetics and environment on human behavior. Identical twins are formed when a single fertilized egg splits. Consequently, identical twins share almost 100 percent of their genes. Fraternal twins are formed from two different fertilized eggs. Thus, fraternal twins share about 50 percent of their genes—the same amount shared by siblings who are not twins. Some of the most comprehensive twin studies have focused on identical twins raised together and apart and fraternal twins raised together and apart. By including all four groups, researchers were better able to determine the influence of genetics versus environment. These studies found that about 40–50 percent of people's personality traits are influenced by genetics.

In addition, humans have **reflexes**—simple, biologically inherited, automatic reactions to physical stimuli. A human baby, for example, cries when pinched; the pupils of the eyes contract in bright light. We also have biologically inherited **drives**, or impulses, to reduce discomfort. We want to eat, drink, sleep, and associate with others.

You should remember, however, that genetically inherited personality traits, reflexes, and drives do not control human social behavior. Culture *channels* the expression of these biological characteristics. Genetics and environmental factors work together to influence behavior in a number of ways. For example, genes influence intelligence. Highly intelligent parents, however, often provide an intellectually stimulating environment for their children. This environment helps their children excel academically. Similarly, genetic factors can influence a child's tendency for antisocial behavior. Children who exhibit antisocial behavior at home or in school often meet with criticism and punishment. These responses can increase antisocial behavior.

✓ **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Explaining** What effect does culture have on biological characteristics such as personality traits, reflexes, and drives?

## Sociobiology

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How do sociobiologists view human behavior?*

**Sociobiology** is the systematic study of how biology influences human behavior. It combines Darwin's theory of natural selection with modern genetics. Applying evolutionary theory to human behavior, however, is controversial and sociobiology has many critics.

## How Sociobiologists View Human Behavior

According to Darwin's theory of **evolution**, organisms evolve through natural selection. Through the process of natural selection, plants and animals best suited to an environment survive and reproduce while the rest perish.

Sociobiologists apply the principle of natural selection to the evolution of social behavior. They assume that the behaviors that best help people are biologically based and transmitted in the genetic code over the course of human evolution. Behaviors that would contribute to the survival of the human species include parental affection and care, friendship, sexual reproduction, and the education of children.

Sociobiologists do not draw a sharp line between human and nonhuman animals. They claim that nonhuman animals also act on knowledge—as when baboons use long sticks to pull ants from an anthill for a meal. Many nonhuman animals, claim sociobiologists, show intelligence of a kind formerly thought to be unique to humans, such as the ability to use language.

## Criticisms of Sociobiology

The major criticism of sociobiology is that the importance placed on genetics could be used as a justification to label specific races as superior or inferior. Critics of sociobiology also point out that there is too much variation in societies around the world for human behavior to be explained on strictly biological grounds. They believe that the capacity for using language is uniquely human and that humans have created a social life that goes far beyond what heredity alone could accomplish.

## The Search for a Middle Ground

Some common ground has emerged in this debate. A growing body of sociologists believe that genes work with culture in a complex way to shape and limit human nature and social life. They would like this relationship to be further examined.

A 1998 study found that women look for one set of characteristics in men they marry while men value a different set of characteristics in women. The researchers believe this behavior is programmed into the genetic code. Studies have also determined that stepfathers are more likely than biological fathers to abuse the children in their families. Is this because men are more protective of their own biological offspring? Because of the speed of discoveries in the field of biology, the relationships among heredity, culture, and behavior are of growing interest to sociobiologists.

### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Theorizing** How might a sociobiologist explain why people make great sacrifices for their family and friends?

**evolution** a process of change from one point of development to another

## LESSON 1 REVIEW



### Reviewing Vocabulary

**1. Identifying** How is society different from culture?

### Using Your Notes

**2. Explaining** Use the questions in your graphic organizer to write a brief explanation of how culture influences society and human behavior.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

**3. Finding the Main Idea** How does culture explain human behavior?

**4. Analyzing** How does heredity affect human behavior?

**5. Identifying Central Issues** How do sociobiologists view human behavior?

### Writing Activity

**6. Argument** Do you think human behavior is more a result of culture or heredity? Give reasons to support your answer.