**ReSource**: <https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/culture_1.htm>

Author: Dennis O’ Neil

***What is Culture?***

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| photo of Edward. B. Tylor |
| Edward B. Tylor   (1832-1917) |

The word culture has many different meanings.  For some it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art, and food.  For a biologist, it is likely to be a colony of bacteria or other microorganisms growing in a nutrient medium in a laboratory Petri dish.  However, for anthropologists and other behavioral scientists, **culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns**.  The term was first used in this way by the pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture,* published in 1871.  Tylor said that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."  Of course, it is not limited to men.  Women possess and create it as well. Since Tylor's time, the concept of culture has become the central focus of anthropology.

Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon.  It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds.  Our written languages, governments, buildings, and other man-made things are merely the products of culture.  They are not culture in themselves.  For this reason, [archaeologists](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#archaeology) cannot dig up culture directly in their excavations.  The broken pots and other artifacts of ancient people that they uncover are only material remains that reflect cultural patterns -- they are things that were made and used through cultural knowledge and skills.

**Layers of Culture**

There are very likely three layers or levels of culture that are part of your learned behavior patterns and perceptions.  Most obviously is the body of cultural traditions that distinguish your specific society.  When people speak of Italian, Samoan, or Japanese culture, they are referring to the shared language, traditions, and beliefs that set each of these peoples apart from others. In most cases, those who share your culture do so because they acquired it as they were raised by parents and other family members who have it.

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| graphic representation of sub-cultures within a culture |
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The second layer of culture that may be part of your identity is a **subculture**.  In complex, diverse societies in which people have come from many different parts of the world, they often retain much of their original cultural traditions.  As a result, they are likely to be part of an identifiable subculture in their new society.  The shared cultural traits of subcultures set them apart from the rest of their society.  Examples of easily identifiable subcultures in the United States include ethnic groups such as Vietnamese Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans.  Members of each of these subcultures share a common identity, food tradition, dialect or language, and other cultural traits that come from their common ancestral background and experience.  As the cultural differences between members of a subculture and the dominant national culture blur and eventually disappear, the subculture ceases to exist except as a group of people who claim a common ancestry.  That is generally the case with German Americans and Irish Americans in the United States today.  Most of them identify themselves as Americans first.  They also see themselves as being part of the cultural mainstream of the nation.

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| photo of four casually dressed Cuban American women |  | These Cuban American women in Miami, Florida have a shared subculture identity that is reinforced through their language, food, and other traditions |

The third layer of culture consists of **cultural universals**.  These are learned behavior patterns that are shared by all of humanity collectively.  No matter where people live in the world, they share these universal traits.  Examples of such "human cultural" traits include:

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| 1. | communicating with a verbal language consisting of a limited set of sounds and grammatical rules for constructing sentences |
| 2. | using age and gender to classify people (e.g., teenager, senior citizen, woman, man) |
| 3. | classifying people based on marriage and descent relationships and having kinship terms to refer to them (e.g., wife, mother, uncle, cousin) |
| 4. | raising children in some sort of family setting |
| 5. | having a sexual division of labor (e.g., men's work versus women's work) |
| 6. | having a concept of privacy |
| 7. | having rules to regulate sexual behavior |
| 8. | distinguishing between good and bad behavior |
| 9. | having some sort of body ornamentation |
| 10. | making jokes and playing games |
| 11. | having art |
| 12. | having some sort of leadership roles for the implementation of community decisions |

While all cultures have these and possibly many other universal traits, different cultures have developed their own specific ways of carrying out or expressing them.  For instance, people in deaf subcultures frequently use their hands to communicate with sign language instead of verbal language.  However, sign languages have grammatical rules just as verbal ones do.

**Culture and Society**

Culture and society are not the same thing.  **While cultures are complexes of learned behavior patterns and perceptions, societies are groups of interacting organisms**.  People are not the only animals that have societies.  Schools of fish, flocks of birds, and hives of bees (κυψέλες, μελίσσια) are societies.  In the case of humans, however, societies are groups of people who directly or indirectly interact with each other.  People in human societies also generally perceive that their society is distinct from (ξεχωρίζει από) other societies in terms of (όσον αφορά) shared (κοινές) traditions and expectations.

While human societies and cultures are not the same thing, they are inextricably connected (άρρηκτα συνδεδεμένες) because culture is created and transmitted (μεταδίδεται) to others in a society.  Cultures are not the product of lone individuals.  They are the continuously evolving products of people interacting with each other.  Cultural patterns such as language and politics make no sense except in terms of the interaction of people.  If you were the only human on earth, there would be no need for language or government.

**Is Culture Limited to Humans?**

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|  | photo of an orangutan mother with a baby on her back |  | **Non-human culture?**  This orangutan mother is using a specially prepared stick to "fish out" food from a crevice.  She learned this skill and is now teaching it to her child who is hanging on her shoulder and intently watching. |

There is a difference of opinion in the behavioral sciences about whether or not we are the only animal that creates and uses culture.  The answer to this question depends on how narrow culture is defined.  If it is used broadly to refer to a complex of learned behavior patterns, then it is clear that we are not alone in creating and using culture.  Many other animal species (είδος/είδη) teach their young what they themselves learned in order to survive.  This is especially true of the chimp**a**nzees and other relatively intelligent apes and monkeys.  Wild chimpanzee mothers typically teach their children about several hundred food and med**i**cinal plants.  Their children also have to learn about the [dominance hierarchy](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#dominance_hierarchy) (ιεραρχία κυριότητας/κυριαρχίας/επικράτησης) and the social rules within their communities.  As males become teenagers, they acquire hunting skills from adults.  Females have to learn how to nurse and care for their babies.  Chimpanzees even have to learn such basic skills as how to perform sexual intercourse.  This knowledge is not hardwired into (καταγεγραμμένη/ προγραμματισμένη/ έμφυτη) their brains at birth. They are all learned patterns of behavior just as they are for humans.

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| [Return to Menu](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/Default.htm) | [Practice Quiz](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/quizzes/Culquiz1.htm) | [Next Topic](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/culture_2.htm) |

**Source for the quiz that follows:** <https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/quizzes/Culquiz1.htm>

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| ***Practice Quiz for What is Culture?*** |
| *No. of Questions=****7*** |
| **INSTRUCTIONS:** To answer a question, click the button in front of your choice. A response will appear in the window below the question to let you know if you are correct. Be sure to read the feedback. It is designed to help you learn the material. You can also learn by reading the feedback for incorrect answers. |

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| ***1.*** | ***Human culture is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | |  |
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|  |  |  |  |
|  | **a)** | partly inherited genetically |  |
|  | **b)** | entirely learned |  |
|  | **c)** | limited to relatively rich societies with sophisticated technologies |  |
|  | **d)** | all of the above |  |
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| ***2.*** | ***Which of the following statements is true of culture?*** | |  |
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|  | **a)** | Languages are cultures. |  |
|  | **b)** | Archaeologists dig up culture in their excavations. |  |
|  | **c)** | Culture is a powerful human tool for survival. |  |
|  | **d)** | all of the above |  |
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| ***3.*** | ***Who first defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society?"*** | |  |
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|  |  |  |  |
|  | **a)** | E. B. Tylor |  |
|  | **b)** | the author of this tutorial |  |
|  | **c)** | Tylor Edwards |  |
|  | **d)** | none of the above |  |
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| ***4.*** | ***A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is  a regional, social, or ethnic group that is distinguishable from other groups in a society by the fact that its members share a common identity, food tradition, dialect or language, and other cultural traits that come from their common ancestral background and experience.*** | |  |
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|  |  |  |  |
|  | **a)** | culture |  |
|  | **b)** | subculture |  |
|  | **c)** | multi-ethnic society |  |
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| ***5.*** | ***Which of the following things would be cultural universals? (Think in term of the way "cultural universal" is used in this tutorial.)*** | |  |
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|  | **a)** | the language that you speak |  |
|  | **b)** | the kinds of clothes that you wear |  |
|  | **c)** | the specific knowledge that you acquired in school |  |
|  | **d)** | none of the above |  |
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| ***6.*** | ***Culture is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | |  |
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|  |  |  |  |
|  | **a)** | the same thing as society |  |
|  | **b)** | limited to humans |  |
|  | **c)** | possessed only by males |  |
|  | **d)** | none of the above |  |
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| ***7.*** | ***Societies are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | **a)** | groups of interacting organisms |  |
|  | **b)** | only found among humans |  |
|  | **c)** | created only by technologically sophisticated peoples such as those in the industrialized nations of the world |  |
|  | **d)** | none of the above |  |
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**Source:** <https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/culture_2.htm>

***Characteristics of Culture***

In order to better understand culture, it is useful to closely examine its characteristics and their ramifications (=s.th. that is the result of an action, decision, etc/ consequences).  In this section of the tutorial, you will learn about the specific advantages that culture gives our species.  You will also learn about culture's limitations (=restrictions) and shortcomings (=defects/ελλείψεις).

**Culture Is an Adaptive Mechanism**

The first humans evolved in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa about 2.5 million years ago.  Since then, we have successfully occupied all of the major geographic regions of the world, but our bodies have remained essentially those of warm climate animals.  We cannot survive outside of the warmer regions of our planet without our cultural knowledge and technology.  What made it possible for our ancestors to begin living in temperate and ultimately subarctic regions of the northern hemisphere after half a million years ago was the invention of efficient hunting skills, fire use, and, ultimately, clothing, warm housing, agriculture, and commerce.  Culture has been a highly successful [adaptive mechanism](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#adaptive_mechanism) for our species.  It has given us a major selective advantage in the competition for survival with other life forms.  Culture has allowed the global human population to grow from less than 10 million people shortly after the end of the last ice age to more than 6.5 billion people today, a mere 10,000 years later.  Culture has made us the most dangerous and the most destructive large animal on our planet.  It is ironic that despite the power that culture has given us, we are totally dependent on it for survival.  We need our cultural skills to stay alive.

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| map of the world showing the expansion of humanity out of Africa into the the rest of the world as a result of new cultural technology |
| Expanding human geographic range (=scale, scope/σειρά, εμβέλεια) into new environmental zones  made possible by the evolution of culture  (The ranges (rows/εκτάσεις) during later time periods include those of earlier periods) |

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| photo of a woman and a man wearing heavy, will insulated clothing to protect them in a sub-freezing environment |
| Successful cultural technology for adapting to very cold winter environments |

Over the last several hundred thousand years, we have developed new survival-related cultural skills and technologies at a faster rate than natural selection could alter our bodies to adapt to the environmental challenges that confronted (=trouble, face, try to resolve/ πιέζω, περιβάλλω/έρχομαι αντιμέτωπος με) us.  The fact that cultural evolution can occur faster than biological evolution has significantly modified the effect of natural selection on humans.  One consequence of this has been that we have not developed thick fat layers and dense fur coats like polar bears in the cold regions because our culture provided the necessary warmth during winter times.

**natural selection:**the process, whereby organisms, better adapted to their environment, tend to survive and produce more offspring. The theory of its action was first fully expounded by Charles Darwin, and it is now regarded as the main process that brings about evolution/φυσική επιλογή.**[**[Ορισμοί από Oxford Languages](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjz0dSpwY_tAhXT8eAKHY0-D4YQvecEMAB6BAgBEBI&url=https%3A%2F%2Flanguages.oup.com%2Fgoogle-dictionary-en&usg=AOvVaw3kNBXVjbAIAFeyFQVCJmJF)]

**Culture is learned**

Human infants come into the world with basic drives such as hunger and thirst, but they do not possess instinctive patterns (=πρότυπα) of behavior to satisfy them.  Likewise, they are without any cultural knowledge.  However, they are genetically predisposed (=susceptible/με προδιάθεση), to rapidly learn language and other cultural traits.  New-born humans are amazing learning machines.  Any normal baby can be placed into any family on earth and grow up to learn their culture and accept it as his or her own.  Since **culture is non-instinctive**, we are not genetically programmed to learn a particular one.

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|  | photo of a woman showing her young daughter and son how to use electric tooth brushes |
| North American children informally learning the culture of their parents |
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Every human generation potentially can discover new things and invent better technologies.  The new cultural skills and knowledge are added onto what was learned in previous generations.  As a result, **culture is cumulative** (αθροιστικός). Due to this cumulative effect, most high school students today are now familiar with mathematical insights (πληροφορίες, γνώσεις) and solutions that ancient Greeks such as Archimedes and Pythagoras struggled their lives to discover.

Cultural evolution is due to the cumulative effect of culture.  We now understand that the time between major cultural inventions has become steadily shorter, especially since the invention of agriculture 8,000-10,000 years ago.  The progressively larger human population after that time was very likely both a consequence and a cause of accelerating culture growth.  The more people there are, the more likely new ideas and information will accumulate.  If those ideas result in larger, more secure food supplies, the population will inevitably grow.  In a sense, culture has been the human solution to surviving changing environments, but it has continuously compounded (=intensify the negative aspects of s.th. /εντείνω) the problem by making it possible for more humans to stay alive.  In other words, human cultural evolution can be seen as solving a problem that causes the same problem again and again.  The ultimate cost of success of cultural technology has been a need to produce more and more food for more and more people.

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| **Parallel Growth of the Human Population and Cultural Technology** |
| graph of the human population size globally and the amount of cultural technology for survival over the last 2,000,000 years--there was very little population growth or signiificant cultural development until towards the end of the last ice age; after that time, there was a rapid explosion of both population and culture |

The invention of agriculture made it possible for our ancestors to have a more controllable and, subsequently, dependable food supply.  It also resulted in settling down in permanent communities.  This in turn set the stage (=make it possible for s.th. else to happen/ετοιμάζω το έδαφος) for further developments in technology and political organization.  The inevitable result was more intensive agriculture; new kinds of social and political systems dominated by emerging elite classes, the first cities, and ultimately the industrial and information revolutions of modern times.  City life brought with it the unexpected consequence of increased rates of contagious diseases.  Large, dense populations of people make it much easier for viruses, bacteria, and other disease causing microorganisms to spread from host to host.  As a result, most cities in the past were periodically devastated by epidemics.

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| photo of the ancient Temple of Luxor at Thebes on the Nile in Upper Egypt |  | Photo of the New York City skyline with its densely packed tall buildings |
| Agriculture based ancient city (Thebes, Egypt) | Modern post-industrial city (New York) |

The rate of cultural evolution for many human societies during the last two centuries has been unprecedented (=never done before/άνευ προηγουμένου).  Today, major new technologies are invented every few years rather than once or twice a century or even less often, as was the case in the past. Likewise, there has been an astounding (=very impressive/εκπληκτικός) increase in the global human population.  It is worth reflecting on the fact that there are people alive today who were born before cell phones, computers, televisions, radios, antibiotics, and even airplanes.  These now elderly individuals have seen the human population double several times. The world that was familiar to them in their childhood is no longer here. It is as if they have moved to a new alien culture and society. Not surprisingly, they often have difficulty in accepting and adjusting to the change.  The psychological distress and confusion that accompanies this has been referred to as [future shock](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#future_shock).

**Cultures Change**

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| Photo of a hand holding a CD disk |
| Tool of modern technology |
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All cultural knowledge does not perpetually accumulate.  At the same time that new cultural traits are added, some old ones are lost because they are no longer useful.  For example, most city dwellers today do not have or need the skills required for survival in a wilderness.  Most would very likely starve to death because they do not know how to acquire wild foods and survive the extremes of weather outdoors.  What is more important in modern urban life are such things as the ability to drive a car, use a computer, and understand how to obtain food in a supermarket or restaurant.

The regular addition and subtraction of cultural traits results in culture change.  **All cultures change over time**--none is static.  However, the rate of change and the aspects of culture that change varies from society to society.  For instance, people in Germany today generally seem eager to adopt new words from other languages, especially from American English, while many French people are resistant to it because of the threat of "corrupting" their own language.  However, the French are just as eager as the Germans to adopt new technology.

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| photo of a uniformed policewoman and two policemen |
| North American woman in a job that formerly would not have been open to women |

Change can occur as a result of both invention within a society as well as the [diffusion](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#diffusion) (διάχυση, διάδοση) of cultural traits from one society to another.  Predicting whether a society will adopt new cultural traits or abandon (εγκαταλείπω) others is complicated by the fact that **the various aspects of a culture are closely interwoven** (συνυφασμένος, συνδεδεμένος) **into a complex pattern**.  Changing one trait (χαρακτηριστικό) will have an impact (επίδραση, αντίκτυπος) on other traits because they are functionally interconnected.  As a result, there commonly is a resistance to major changes.  For example, many men in North America and Europe resisted the increase in economic and political opportunities for women over the last century because of the far ranging consequences.  It inevitably changed the nature of marriage, the family, and the lives of all men.  It also significantly altered the workplace as well as the legal system and the decisions made by governments.

**People Usually are not Aware of Their Culture**

The way that we interact and do things in our everyday lives seems "natural" to us.  We are unaware of our culture because we are so close to it and know it so well.  For most people, it is as if their learned behavior was biologically inherited.  It is usually only when they come into contact with people from another culture that they become aware that their patterns of behavior are not universal.

The common response (ανταπόκριση, αντίδραση) in all societies to other cultures is to judge them in terms of (σύμφωνα με) the values and customs of their own familiar culture.  This is **ethnocentrism**.  Being fond of (αρέσω) your own way of life and condescending (αλαζονικός, επικριτικός, υπεροπτικός) or even hostile (εχθρικός) toward other cultures is normal for all people.  Alien culture traits are often viewed as being not just different but inferior, less sensible (λογικός), and even "unnatural."  For example, European cultures strongly condemn other societies that practice [polygamy](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#polygamy) and the eating of dogs--behavior that Europeans generally consider to be immoral (ανήθικος) and offensive (προσβλητικός).  Likewise, many people in conservative Muslim societies, such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, consider European women highly immodest (άσεμνος, αναιδής) and immoral for going out in public without being chaperoned (συνοδευόμενη) by a male relative and without their bodies covered from head to toe so as to prevent men from looking at them.  Ethnocentrism is not characteristic only of complex modern societies.  People in small, relatively isolated societies are also ethnocentric in their views about outsiders.

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| photo of a woman in the snow hugging her big dog |  | Our ethnocentrism causes us to be shocked and even disgusted at attitudes about other animals in different cultures.  This North American woman considers her dog to be a close friend and essentially a member of her own family. …. In some areas of Southeast Asia, dogs have multiple functions, including being a source of food for people. |

Our ethnocentrism can prevent us from understanding and appreciating another culture.  When anthropologists study other societies, they need to suspend (αναστέλλω, αποβάλλω, απορρίπτω) their own ethnocentric judgments and adopt a **cultural relativity approach**.  That is, they try to learn about and interpret the various aspects of the culture they are studying in reference to that culture rather than to the anthropologist's own culture.  This provides an understanding of how such practices as polygamy can function and even support other cultural traditions.  Without taking a cultural relativity approach, it would otherwise be difficult, for example, to comprehend why women among the Masai cattle (βοοειδή) herding (βόσκω/κοπάδι) people of Kenya might prefer to be one of several co-wives rather than have a [monogamous](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#monogamy)  marriage.

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| map of Africa showing the location of the Masai in Kenya, East Africa |  | photo of two Masai women in traditional clothes  Masai women |

Taking a cultural relativity approach is not only useful for anthropologists.  It is a very useful tool for diplomats, businessmen, doctors, and anyone else who needs to interact with people from other societies and even other subcultures within their own society.  However, it can be emotionally difficult and uncomfortable at first to suspend (απορρίπτω,αποβάλλω) one's own cultural values in these situations.

From an obj**e**ctive persp**e**ctive, it can be seen that ethnocentrism has both positive and negative values for a society.  The negative potential (δυνατότητα, προοπτική) is obvious.  Ethnocentrism results in prejudices about people from other cultures and the rejection of their "alien ways."  When there is contact with people from other cultures, ethnocentrism can prevent open communication and result in misunderstanding and mistrust.  This would be highly counterproductive (αντιπαραγωγικός) for businessmen trying to negotiate (διαπραγματεύομαι) a trade deal (εμπορική συμφωνία) or even just neighbors trying to get along with each other.  The positive aspect of ethnocentrism has to do with the protection that it can provide for a culture.  By causing a rejection of the foods, customs, and perceptions of people in other cultures, it acts as a conservative (συντηρητική) force in preserving traditions of one's own culture.  It can help maintain the separation and uniqueness of cultures.

**We Do Not Know All of Our Own Culture**

No one knows everything about his or her own culture.  In all societies, there are bodies (σύνολο) of specialized (εξειδικευμένη) cultural knowledge that are [gender](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#gender) specific (με αναφορά στο κάθε φύλο ξεχωριστά) -- they are known to men but not women or vice versa (αντιστρόφως).  In many societies there are also bodies of knowledge that are limited largely to particular social classes, occupations, religious groups, or other special purpose associations (σχέσεις, συνεταιρισμοί).

Gender based skills, knowledge, and perceptions largely stem from the fact that boys and girls to some extent are treated differently from each other in all societies.  While there may be considerable overlap (αλληλοεπικάλυψη) in what they are taught, there are some things that are gender specific.  In the Western World, for instance, it is more common to teach boys about the skills of combat and how machines work. Girls are more often exposed to the subtleties (λεπτά σημεία, λεπτομέρειες, λεπτότητες) of social interaction and the use of clothing and makeup to communicate intentions (προθέσεις).  Not surprisingly, men are more likely to know how to fix their car or computer, while women generally are better at predicting the outcome of social interaction and make finer distinctions in fabric and color terms. You can test your own gender related cultural knowledge with the following pictures of relatively common items from North America:

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| photo of six tool components |  | **What are the intended functions of these objects?** |

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| photo of a woman with a red skirt |  | **How would you describe the cloth pattern of the material used in this woman's skirt?** | |
|  | | photo of a woman with a striped shirt | **Do you think that this woman is wearing makeup?  If so, what kinds of makeup is she using? Look closely and take your time.** | |
|  | |  |  | |

#### There are many professions in large-scale societies.  Each one usually has its own terminology and specialized tools.  Lawyers, medical doctors, soldiers, and other specialists use numerous technical terms in their professions.  To make it even more obscure (σκοτεινός, δυσνόητος) for outsiders, these professionals often use abbreviations (συντομεύσεις) to refer to their technical terms.  For instance, orthopedic surgeons commonly refer to a particular kind of knee operation as ACL surgery.  ACL stands for anterior cruciate ligament(ρήξη προσθίου χιαστού συνδέσμου).

Most people outside of the medical fields who have not had this surgery are unlikely to know where this ligament is and what it does, let alone know what the abbreviation means.  You can test your knowledge of another common profession in North America with the following picture:

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| photo of a red and black tool |  | **Who is most likely to use this tool?  What is its function?** |

**Culture Gives Us a Range of Permissible Behavior Patterns**

Cultures commonly allow a range of ways in which men can be men and women can be women.  Culture also tells us how different activities should be conducted, such as how one should act as a husband, wife, parent, child, etc.  These rules of permissible behavior are usually flexible to a degree--there are some alternatives rather than hard rules.  In North America, for instance, culture tells us how we should dress based on our gender, but it allows us to dress in different ways in different situations in order to communicate varied messages and statuses (καταστάσεις). The clothing patterns of women in this society can be particularly rich and complex. Their clothing can be intentionally business-like, recreational (ψυχαγωγικός), as well as sexually attractive, ambiguous, neutral, or even repulsive. North American women are generally more knowledgeable than men about the subtleties of using clothing and other adornment to communicate their intentions. The wide range of permissible ways of being a woman in North America today makes women somewhat unpredictable as individuals when others are trying to understand their intentions but do not fully comprehend the cultural patterns. It is particularly hard for men from other cultures to comprehend the subtle nuances. This at times can result in awkward (αδέξιος, δύσκολος, άβολος, αμήχανος) or even dangerous situations. For instance, the easy friendliness and casual (ανέμελος, πρόχειρος), somewhat revealing dress of young North American women in the summertime is sometimes interpreted by traditional Latin American and Middle Eastern men as a sexual invitation. What messages do the clothes and body language of the women in the pictures below communicate to you?  How do you think they might be interpreted by members of the opposite gender and by people in other cultures?  Do you think that the age of the observer might play a part in their interpretation?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| photo of a woman in a low-cut black cocktail dress |  | photo of a woman firefighter wearing her heavy work clothes |

The range of permissible (επιτρεπτός) ways of dressing and acting as a man or woman are often very limited in strictly (αυστηρά) fundamental (φονταμενταλιστής, ζηλωτής/ θεμελιώδης, βασικός) Muslim,**\*** Jewish, Christian, and Hindu societies. In Afghanistan under the Taliban rule (ηγεσία) during the late 1990's, men were expected to wear traditional male clothing and were beaten or jailed by morality police (αστυνομία ηθών) for not having a full beard, playing or listening to music, or allowing female family members to go out in public unchaperoned (ασυνόδευτος).  Women were similarly punished for being in public without wearing a plain loose outer gown that covered their face and entire body including their feet. They also were not allowed to go to school or to work outside of the home. To the surprise (προς έκπληξη) of Europeans and North Americans, many of these conservative cultural patterns did not disappear with the end of Taliban control. They are deeply ingrained (βαθιά ριζωμένος/ενσωματωμένος) in the Islamic tradition of Afghanistan and in the more conservative nations of the Middle East.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| photo of two Moslem women covered from the top of their heads to their feet with black loose gowns that cover up their body; a Moslem man in European style clothes is walking in front of them |  | Conservative Muslim women in the Middle East.  They are fully covered for modesty in public and are being escorted by a male relative  (Note: women in some predominantly Muslim countries lead lives that are much less constrained by tradition.) |

**Cultures No Longer Exist in Isolation**

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|  |
| photo of an elederly Australian Aborigine man wearing a European style shirt and hat |
| Australian Aborigine wearing European style clothes |

It is highly unlikely that there are any societies still existing in total isolation from the outside world.  Even small, out of the way tribal (φυλετικές) societies are now being integrated (εντάσσομαι) to some extent (ως ένα βαθμό) into the global economy.  That was not the case a few short generations ago.  Some of the societies in the Highlands of New Guinea were unaware of anyone beyond their homeland until the arrival of European Australian miners (μεταλλωρύχοι) in the 1930's.  A few of the Indian tribes in the Upper Amazon Basin (Λεκάνη του Άνω Αμαζονίου) of South America remained unaware of the outside world until explorers entered their territories (περιοχές, εδάφη) in the 1950's and 1960's.  Members of these same New Guinean and Amazonian societies today buy clothes and household items produced by multinational corporations (πολυεθνικές εταιρείες/πολυεθνικές επιχειρήσεις).  They are developing a growing (αυξανόμενη) knowledge of other cultures through schools, radios, and even televisions and the Internet. As a result of this inevitable process (αναπόφευκτη διαδικασία), their languages and indigenous (αυτόχθων, γηγενής, εγχώριος, ντόπιος) cultural patterns (πολιτισμικά μοτίβα) are being rapidly replaced. Virtually (practically/πρακτικά,κατ’ ουσίαν) all societies are now acquiring cultural traits from the economically dominant societies of the world. The most influential of these dominant societies today are predominantly (κυρίως, κατ’ εξοχήν) in North America and Western Europe. However, even these societies are rapidly adopting words, foods, and other cultural traits from all over the world.

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| [Wade Davis: Dreams from endangered cultures](http://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures.html)--National Geographic anthropologist describes some       of the indigenous cultures being lost in our time*.*This link takes you to an external website. To return       here, you must click the "back" button on your browser program.       (length = 22 mins, 5 secs) |

The emergence of what is essentially a shared global culture is not likely to result in the current major cultures disappearing in the immediate future the same way many of the small indigenous ones have. Language differences and ethnocentrism will very likely prevent that from happening. There are powerful conflicting trends in the world today. At the same time that many people are actively embracing [globalism](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#globalism), others are reviving [tribalism](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/glossary.htm#tribalism). The break-up (διάσπαση) of the former empire (πρώην αυτοκρατορία) of the Soviet Union into largely ethnic based nations (έθνη που βασίζονται στην εθνότητα) is an example of the latter. Likewise, some of the nations in Africa whose boundaries were arbitrarily (τυχαία) created by Europeans during the colonial era (εποχή αποικιοκρατίας) are now experiencing periodic tribal wars that may result in the creation of more ethnically based countries.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**\*https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36101150** - **(BBC news on dress code et al in Iran – 2016 – Article)** ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Source:** <https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/quizzes/Culquiz2.htm>

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| ***Practice Quiz for Characteristics of Culture*** | | |
| ***No. of Questions= 13*** | | |
| **INSTRUCTIONS:** To answer a question, click the button in front of your choice. A response will appear in the window below the question to let you know if you are correct. Be sure to read the feedback. It is designed to help you learn the material. You can also learn by reading the feedback for incorrect answers. | | |
| ***1******.*** | ***Which of the following statements is true concerning human evolution?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | The first humans evolved in the cold temperate regions of the world because of the need to develop culture for survival in those areas. | |  |
|  | **b)** | Culture is necessary for survival in the complex industrialized nations, but it is not in small societies that live by hunting and gathering wild foods. | |  |
|  | **c)** | Culture is an adaptive mechanism for humans. | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
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| ***2******.*** | ***Compared to what it was before the end of the last ice age (about 10,000 years ago), the rate of human culture change is now \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | faster | |  |
|  | **b)** | slower | |  |
|  | **c)** | about the same | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***3******.*** | ***Which of the following statements is true?*** | | |  |
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|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | The fact that cultural evolution can occur faster than biological evolution has altered the effect of natural selection on humans. | |  |
|  | **b)** | People are pre-adapted by their genes to acquire particular cultures. | |  |
|  | **c)** | none of the above | |  |
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| ***4******.*** | ***All human cultures evolve over time. Which of the following things is most responsible for this?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | culture is an adaptive mechanism | |  |
|  | **b)** | culture is instinctive | |  |
|  | **c)** | culture is cumulative | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***5******.*** | ***Approximately 8,000-10,000 years ago, our ancestors invented agriculture. Which of the following things was a consequence of this development?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | a more controllable and dependable food supply | |  |
|  | **b)** | the creation of villages, towns, and ultimately cities | |  |
|  | **c)** | the emergence of new kinds of political systems. | |  |
|  | **d)** | all of the above | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
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| ***6******.*** | ***Which of the following is a likely consequence of cultural evolution?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | culture loss | |  |
|  | **b)** | better health | |  |
|  | **c)** | greater intelligence | |  |
|  | **d)** | all of the above | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
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| ***7******.*** | ***Culture change occurs as a result of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | diffusion | |  |
|  | **b)** | invention | |  |
|  | **c)** | both of the above | |  |
|  | **d)** | neither of the above | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***8******.*** | ***Ethnocentrism refers to the fact that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | | |  |
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|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | some cultures are actually better than others | |  |
|  | **b)** | people usually believe that their way of life is superior, and they are somewhat condescending or even hostile toward other cultures | |  |
|  | **c)** | the technologically simpler societies usually feel that their cultures are inferior | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***9******.*** | ***When anthropologists study other societies, they need to suspend their own culture-based judgments. What is this kind of approach called?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | cultural relativity | |  |
|  | **b)** | ethnocentric | |  |
|  | **c)** | diffusion | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***10******.*** | ***The Masai people live in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | South America | |  |
|  | **b)** | Australia | |  |
|  | **c)** | Africa | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
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| ***11******.*** | ***Which of the following statements is true?*** | | |  |
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|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | People usually are unconscious of their culture in their daily lives. | |  |
|  | **b)** | There are always a few people in small-scale societies who know all of their culture. | |  |
|  | **c)** | In most societies, boys and girls are taught the same things about their culture. | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***12******.*** | ***Which of the following statements is true?*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | The range of permissible ways of dressing and acting as a man or woman are relatively unlimited in traditional Moslem societies. | |  |
|  | **b)** | It is likely that there still are some societies existing in total cultural isolation from the outside world. | |  |
|  | **c)** | Cultures usually allow a range of permissible behavior patterns. | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
| ***13******.*** | ***The break-up of the former empire of the Soviet Union into largely ethnic based nations is an example of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*** | | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  | **a)** | globalism | |  |
|  | **b)** | tribalism | |  |
|  | **c)** | none of the above | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |