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Culture is more than traditions or spoken language; it's the shared foundation of human life. Understanding the main elements of culture—language, religion, customs and traditions, arts and literature, and social organization—helps us comprehend how societies develop, function, and relate to one another. Language Language is the lifeblood of culture. It's more than a communication tool; it's a record keeper of history and values. Language binds communities, allowing people to share experiences, beliefs, and knowledge. Dialects and linguistic nuances reveal regional influences and historical context. For example, Indigenous languages carry deep meanings and stories passed down through generations, highlighting their people's worldviews. Religion Religion offers moral guidance and serves as the spiritual framework of societies. It binds individuals through shared beliefs and rituals. In Christianity, for instance, traditions like Christmas bring communities together, fostering a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, Buddhism focuses on personal enlightenment through meditation and good deeds. Each religious practice reflects the values and ethics prioritized within that society, shaping cultural norms. Customs and Traditions Customs and traditions form the daily and annual practices that define a culture's way of life. These rituals, whether tied to weddings, festivals, or daily routines, embody cultural identity and continuity. In Japan, tea ceremonies epitomize respect, harmony, and tranquility, emphasizing cultural values that prioritize mindfulness and community. Similarly, family meals in Italy highlight the importance of kinship and celebration. Customs adapt over time but always reflect the deep-rooted principles of a society. Arts and Literature Art and literature are powerful cultural storytellers. They capture collective emotions and memories, showcasing a society's creativity and struggles. The cave paintings of Lascaux, France, tell tales of ancient hunts and beliefs. Modern literature, from Shakespeare's plays to Maya Angelou's writings, bridges generations and preserves the essence of cultural thought and reflection. Music, dance, and visual arts often reflect shared joys and pains, showcasing the unique cultural soul of a community. Social Organization Social organization determines how people relate and contribute to their society. This includes the structure of families, community roles, and hierarchies. In many Asian cultures, the emphasis on respecting elders shapes the way families operate and how decisions are made. Meanwhile, Western cultures may highlight individualism, affecting societal roles and expectations. The structure and interaction within social organizations keep societies functioning cohesively, offering stability and identity. Interconnection of Cultural Elements These cultural elements don't exist in isolation; they interconnect and influence one another. Language is used to convey religious teachings; art often represents historical customs, and social structures influence how traditions are celebrated. Together, they create a comprehensive cultural landscape that adapts and evolves with time. Cultural Adaptation and Change Culture isn't static. It evolves with new influences and ideas. Globalization, migration, and technological advancements have accelerated cultural changes. While the core elements remain, their expression may shift—new forms of art emerge, languages blend, and customs adapt to modern lifestyles. This adaptability ensures the resilience and relevance of culture through generations. Why Understanding Culture Matters Recognizing the elements of culture enriches personal and professional interactions. It fosters respect and empathy, essential for effective communication in a globalized world. Whether you're traveling, working in a multicultural team, or engaging in global business, understanding cultural nuances strengthens relationships and avoids misunderstandings. Conclusion The five elements of culture—language, religion, customs and traditions, arts and literature, and social organization—are the building blocks of society. They shape how people view their world, interact with others, and pass down knowledge. Appreciating and understanding these elements can deepen our connection to both our heritage and the wider world. Receive insights and EXCLUSIVE resources on language education in a monthly newsletter, fresh into your inbox. No Fees, No Spam, so No Worries!Receive insights and EXCLUSIVE resources on language education in a monthly newsletter, fresh into your inbox. No Fees, No Spam, so No Worries!Andresen, J.T., & Carter, P.M. (2016). 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Each culture has some basic elements. Basic Elements of Culture There are some basic Cultural Elements given below: Language Symbols Norms Values Beliefs Cognitive Elements 1. Language A group of words or ideas having common meaning and is shared to a social situation is called language. Language is the entrance to a culture. Language is a set of socially sound pattern, words, and sentences having specific meaning and terminology common to the same culture. you can learn effects of ethnocentrism. Language is a source of communication and to transmit message from one person to another. It is the method to mold the behavior and experience of a person. Language differs from culture to culture and is transmitted from one generation to another. Language is like a vehicle through which we can carry out our complex social activities. Language is the foundation of a culture and ticket to the entrance of a social life. Animal have not culture because they have no specific language to transmit worlds to others. So, language is the key to open a social life of an individual with some special characteristics. 2. Symbols Culture is a system of symbols. Symbols are anything used to represent express and stand for an event situation. Symbols direct to guide our behavior. It is used to show an event of past, present or future. For example the heap of ash show that the something has been burnt or the wet street shows that it has rained. Bowing head, whistling, winkling of eyes situation, all are the symbols, which express a specific object idea about other. BaithUllah is the symbol of God and we pray to it. American Shake their hand to answer for No. Other examples are flag, anthem, picture, statues are symbols. Symbols are the short expression for the identification of an object or situation. 3. Norms Norms as elements of culture are the rules and the guidelines which specify the behavior of an individual. Norms keep a person within the boundary of society and its culture. It gives us restriction about something which to do and which not to do. It molds our behavior and gives as knowledge about wrong and right. Norms can be divided into: a.   Folkways. Folkways are the simple customary ways of the people. It is the normal and habitual action of people within a culture. Folkways are the recognized or accepted ways of behavior. These are the behavior pattern which a person use generally in his daily life. b.   Mores. Mores is a Latin word and the plural of mos which means customs or beliefs accordance with a group customary expectation. It is the "must" behavior of a person. Mores refers to "what ought to be and what ought not to be." Mores are serious norms but are informed like folkways. They have a serious binding on a group the violation of mores threats to social order. Punishment may be both formal and informal for the violation of mores. 4. Values Anything getting importance in our daily life becomes our values. The origin of values is not biological but it is social production while living in society the values develop. Values depend upon the culture. Culture varies from society to society and thus values are different in every social situation. Values are what we like and what we say will in our society values are the good idea and thinking of a person. Some values are hereditary which we gain from our elders, books and parents. The culture is full of values and can transmit from one generation to another. When a natural object get a meaning it becomes a value. 5. Beliefs Every sect within a culture having some beliefs for cultural refuge. These beliefs are responsible fro the spiritual fulfillment of needs and wants. Muslims believe in God, Holly Prophet, The Day of Judgment, recitation of Holly Quran, Hajj etc. Sikh wear bangle in one hand, bear a long beard, keeping a dagger. Cross for Christians and a necklace or a cotton thread around nick, the water of ganga and are sacred for Hindus. 6. Cognitive Elements Cognitive elements of culture are those though which an individual know how to cope with an existing social situation. How to survive, how make shelter from storms and other natural calamities, how to travel and transport etc. are the practical knowledge which make a culture. Such knowledge is carefully thought to every generation. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. Elements of culture include our norms, languages, rituals, holidays, food and diet, art, and architecture. It's often hard to picture what a culture will look like. There are so many subtle things that inform our cultural identities. But the above elements can help us visualize some key building blocks of any culture. Every culture has its own norms. Norms comes from the same origin as the word 'normal'. Our cultural norms are the things we do that seem normal or natural within our culture. But different cultures will have different norms. That's why in your own culture you may feel comfortable and completely 'normal', but when you travel to another culture, you might seem a little strange! Think about, for example, eating with a fork. This is a norm in Western cultures. But go to parts of Asia and they might think you're a little weird, or even have poor dexterity, because you don't know how to use chopsticks. Chopsticks are the norm in many Asian cultures. Other norms include ways of saying 'hello' and 'goodbye', how to dress in the workplace, and even which side of the footpath you should walk on! Related: The 4 Types of Norms Examples of Folkways Examples of Mores (Moral Norms) Most cultures are brought together by a common language and way of speaking. But even within languages (like English or French) there are regional dialects. And this is often where cultures express themselves most. We will often identify common euphemisms within a cultural group, for example. American culture has euphemisms like: A home run – This baseball idiom means to have an amazing success. This comes from baseball. It grinds my gears – A euphemism for being annoyed by something. When I lived in England, they found it funny that I used this term! Monday-morning quarterback – This is a person who judges something after the event with the benefit of hindsight. This comes from US Football. By contrast, Australian culture has its own euphemisms like: Flat out like a lizard drinking – To be very busy. Chuck a sickie – To call in sick from work for a day. You little ripper – An exclamation used when you are excited by something. Cultures often celebrate their uniqueness and identities through festivals. The festivals often show-off the clothing and outfits of a culture, as well as the food and music. Cultural festivals are also very regularly (but not always) oriented around religious beliefs or superstitions. An example of a cultural festival that's linked to superstition is Día de los Muertos, a festival in Mexico designed to celebrate and commemorate their deceased loved ones. In the United States, festivals are often oriented around music, such as the famous Burning Man festival. Read More: Examples of Cultures. Cultural rituals and ceremonies are similar to festivals but often have a more solemn and commemorative element. In the United States, we could consider Veteran's Day to be an important national ritual to remember fallen soldiers. While this isn't religious, it's still very important to the national culture. Another common ritual is to lower a flag to half mast as a sign of mourning. But many types of rituals can also be intertwined with other parts of culture such as religion. For example, when someone does, we often have a funeral for them. This is usually in a Church or other place of worship. In India, the cremation is often a much more central part of the burial ritual than in Western nation. Some cultures have very important holidays where everyone decides not to work for the day. In the UK, which has its own national culture but also shares elements of a Western cultural identity, they celebrate what's called bank holidays. Bank holidays are days that everyone gets off to rest and relax. Thanksgiving is a common holiday in the United States that's not celebrated in many other countries. It has its origins in the founding of the nation as well as a harvest celebration. All cultures have their own unique pastimes. These often revolve around sports but also could include activities like hiking and following certain television shows! Baseball is called "America's Pastime" because it's so popular in the United States. Another cultural pastime (or, rather, subculture pastime) is video gaming in South Korea. Being incredibly popular there, it has come to be associated with South Korean youth. In the 21st Century, where sub-cultures and countercultures are emerging online via digital media, shared pastimes are becoming increasingly important in bringing together disparate people to form cultural groups, such as cosplay and blogging cultures. Read More: In Groups vs Out Groups Many cultures develop their own tastes for particular foods and diets. Famously Italian culture is oriented around coffee, pasta, and pizza. Japanese culture is well-known for sushi and other seafood and salmon-based dishes. Mexican culture is well-known for its spicy foods and tacos. Interestingly, the south of the United States has appropriated parts of Mexican culture into its own cultural dishes, often considered Tex-Mex. This is an example of cultural diffusion. When traveling the world, you can see different architectural influences in different countries. Here, we can see how culture shapes architectural choices. Head to old Soviet countries and there is a lot of solid concrete architecture, tall buildings, and grey colors. The architecture here reflects the communist political ideology that was predominant in Eastern European culture in the mid-20th Century. Other parts of Eastern Europe, like Prague, are influenced by an older Gothic style architecture. This architecture stems from the Goths who were the dominant culture in the region in the late Middle Ages. While religion and culture are different concepts, they also overlap a lot. Cultures are often built upon religions over hundreds of years. Many people in the Western culture believe it's built upon Christianity. While it's more complex than that (secular enlightenment philosophy also had a huge influence), it's true that Christianity and Western culture are traditionally intertwined. For example, some in the United States credit its rapid rise in the 19th and 20th Centuries to the 'protestant work ethic'. There are cultures in India strongly influenced by Hinduism and many in the Arabian peninsula are strongly influenced by Islam and its values. Many cultures coalesce around a certain set of values. In the West, individual liberty has been a central cultural marker since the enlightenment. Individual liberty is particularly prominent in American culture, whereas just north in Canada, social democratic values tend to be more prominent. In China, dominant values tend to be more conservative and individual liberty is a secondary concern to the integrity of the national character, currently highly oriented around the ruling party. Cultural taboos are things that are considered shocking or shameful within a culture. An examples of an American taboo is not tipping the waitress. If you failed to tip the waitress, you would be very much frowned upon. Other nations, like New Zealand, do not have tipping as part of the culture. Therefore, a New Zealander coming to the United States might get a little culture shock! Another cultural taboo example is men wearing shorts in Morocco. Westerners might find it quite normal, but shorts in Morocco are often seen as too informal, especially among older generations. Sports help us come together as a culture. They can also help us transcend cultures to get to know others. Cricket, for example, is very popular in India, and a prominent cultural pastime. But it is also shared by Australia, creating a link between many people who would identify as ethnic Hindus and those who would identify as ethnic Western Christians, who would otherwise be disconnected. In the United States, we'd see Baseball and American football as central to American culture. Association football (soccer) is hugely popular in many cultures around the world, which is why it has the nickname "the world game". The clothes we wear might seem normal within our culture but strange or even 'dress-ups' in another culture. For example, in Pakistan, men often wear traditional the shalwar kameez, whereas in Western contexts they might wear a suit jacket and tie. For women, dresses are quite traditional in Western culture, whereas in some Islamic cultures women will often traditionally wear a hijab. You may notice this traditional cultural attire being worn at festivals and ceremonies where people come together to celebrate their tradition. Unique music tastes and preferences become dominant in some cultures. Southern USA culture embraces country music, for example, while the UK is famous for its pop rock music stemming from the influence of the Beetles. Head to Japan and you will find traditional instrumental music played on Japanese string instruments such as the Shamisen, Shakuhachi, or Koto. Different cultures have their own ways of organizing society into hierarchies. A hierarchy is needed to help a culture sort out who will be the decision-makers and get preferential treatment in social situations. For example, conservative cultures tend to prefer men as leaders at the expense of women. But, they may also give preferential treatment to women and children when it comes to comforts and healthcare. As another example, some societies sort out their social hierarchy through tribal rights or birthright, such as in kingdoms and monarchies. By contrast, other cultures have traditions of sorting out who will have power through democratic elections. Related: Social Identity Examples Traditional symbols of cultural groups include the flag of a culture as well as elements like national birds or flowers. The culture of the United States is identifiable by symbols like the star spangled banner and bald eagle. Up North in Canada, you might see the maple leaf as a national and cultural symbol. For Chinese people, national symbols might include the Chinese dragon, panda bear, or Chinese lantern. Cultures also develop their own dance preferences. If you don't dance in the same way as the rest of the cultural group, you might look a bit funny on the dance floor! In North America, young people often dance in 'mosh pits', bouncing up and down to the music. Head to South America, and you're likely to find people of all ages dancing tango instead. Not only this, but they'll likely be dancing to different types of music. There are also traditional dances, such as the traditional dance of Indigenous cultures in Australia and Canada. Even the artistic preferences of cultures can differ. Art works of France are closely associated with famous artists like Monet and Matisse, whereas Turkish art tends to be more associated with miniatures, marbling, and calligraphy. Traditional Australian Aboriginal art embraces dot painting, earthy colors, and artwork that depicts traditional 'dreaming' stories. Traditional Chinese art is called guó huà and associated with gentle, fine strokes often painted on thin tissue paper or silk. See More Examples of Cultural Preferences Here A culture is a group of people who tend to share the same cultural elements (18 of which are listed above). A cultural identity is the individual's sense of who they are. It involves the cultural elements you identify with that. Your cultural identity is part of who you are. It shows the 'in groups' you identify with and the values you hold. Generally, if you identify as being a part of a culture, you endorse many or all of the cultural elements which it connotes. Enjoy subscriber-only access to this article's pdf Cultures, nations, and religions are intertwined but not the same thing. A culture is a group of people who identify with one another due to common values, beliefs, arts, music, sport, architecture, and pastimes. A nation is a political entity recognized as being in control of a defined geographical area. But since the rise of nation-states, nations often develop cultural identities. This doesn't mean nations and cultures are the same thing, but nations cohere around a culture. National laws will often embrace and promote the dominant culture, such as by creating national holidays so people can celebrate the dominant culture's festivals. A religion is a philosophical entity whose members share a belief one or more a higher powers or Gods. As religion was a primary organizing system for societies for many centuries, cultures grew with and around religions. Thus, today, many cultures contain dominant religious beliefs as well as festivals, values, and norms that can be traced back to a religion that is dominant within the cultural grouping. RELATED: Culture has many elements which, combined, create a coherent cultural identity. Often, we only personally identify with some elements of the culture. But, we can usually identify dominant elements of our culture, even if we only choose to participate in a few of them. This shows how culture is fluid and hard to pin down. It changes with each generation. Nevertheless, by looking at examples of the elements of culture, we can reflect on how many complex elements intertwine to create cultural identities. Distinguish material culture and nonmaterial culture. List and define the several elements of culture. Describe certain values that distinguish the United States from other nations. Culture was defined earlier as the symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are part of any society. As this definition suggests, there are two basic components of culture: ideas and symbols on the one hand and artifacts (material objects) on the other. The first type, called nonmaterial culture also known as symbolic culture, includes the values, beliefs, symbols, and language that define a society. The second type, called material culture, includes all the society's physical objects, such as its tools and technology, clothing, eating utensils, and means of transportation. These elements of culture are discussed next. Every culture is filled with symbols, or things that stand for something else and that often evoke various reactions and emotions. Some symbols are actually types of nonverbal communication, while other symbols are in fact material objects. As the symbolic interactionist perspective discussed in Chapter 1 "Sociology and the Sociological Perspective" (Links to an external site.) emphasizes, shared symbols make social interaction possible. Let's look at nonverbal symbols first. A common one is shaking hands, which is done in some societies but not in others. It commonly conveys friendship and is used as a sign of both greeting and departure. Probably all societies have nonverbal symbols we call gestures, movements of the hands, arms, or other parts of the body that are meant to convey certain ideas or emotions. However, the same gesture can mean one thing in one society and something quite different in another society (Axtell, 1998). In the United States, for example, if we nod our head up and down, we mean yes, and if we shake it back and forth, we mean no. In Bulgaria, however, nodding means no, while shaking our head back and forth means yes! In the United States, if we make an "O" by putting our thumb and forefinger together, we mean "OK," but the same gesture in certain parts of Europe signifies an obscenity. "Thumbs up" in the United States means "great" or "wonderful," but in Australia it means the same thing as extending the middle finger in the United States. Certain parts of the Middle East and Asia would be offended if they saw you using your left hand to eat, because they use their left hand for bathroom hygiene. •Gestures are the signs that we make with our body, such as hand gestures and facial expressions; it is important to note that these gestures also carry meaning. This familiar gesture means "OK" in the United States, but in certain parts of Europe it signifies an obscenity. An American using this gesture might very well be greeted with an angry look. Some of our most important symbols are objects. Here the U.S. flag is a prime example. For most Americans, the flag is not just a piece of cloth with red and white stripes and white stars against a field of blue. Instead, it is a symbol of freedom, democracy, and other American values and, accordingly, inspires pride and patriotism. During the Vietnam War, however, the flag became to many Americans a symbol of war and imperialism. Some burned the flag in protest, prompting angry attacks by bystanders and negative coverage by the news media. As these examples indicate, shared symbols, both nonverbal communication and tangible objects, are an important part of any culture but also can lead to misunderstandings and even hostility. These problems underscore the significance of symbols for social interaction and meaning. Perhaps our most important set of symbols is language. In English, the word chair means something we sit on. In Spanish, the word silla means the same thing. As long as we agree how to interpret these words, a shared language and thus society are possible. By the same token, differences in languages can make it quite difficult to communicate. For example, imagine you are in a foreign country where you do not know the language and the country's citizens do not know yours. Worse yet, you forgot to bring your dictionary that translates their language into yours, and vice versa, and your iPhone battery has died. You become lost. How will you get help? What will you do? Is there any way to communicate your plight? As this scenario suggests, language is crucial to communication and thus to any society's culture. Children learn language from their culture just as they learn about shaking hands, about gestures, and about the significance of the flag and other symbols. Humans have a capacity for language that no other animal species possesses. Our capacity for language in turn helps make our complex culture possible. To what extent does language influence how we think and how we perceive the social and physical worlds? The famous but controversial Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after two linguistic anthropologists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, argues that people cannot easily understand concepts and objects unless their language contains words for these items (Whorf, 1956). They explained that language structures thought. Language thus influences how we understand the world around us. For example, people in a country such as the United States that has many terms for different types of kisses (e.g. buss, peck, smack, smooch, and soul) are better able to appreciate these different types than people in a country such as Japan, which, as we saw earlier, only fairly recently developed the word kissu for kiss. Another illustration of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is seen in sexist language, in which the use of male nouns and pronouns shapes how we think about the world (Miles, 2008). In older children's books, words like fireman and mailman are common, along with pictures of men in these jobs, and critics say they send a message to children that these are male jobs, not female jobs. If a teacher tells a second-grade class, "Every student should put his books under his desk," the teacher obviously means students of both sexes but may be sending a subtle message that boys matter more than girls. For these reasons, several guidebooks promote the use of nonsexist language (Maggio, 1998). Table 3.1 "Examples of Sexist Terms and Nonsexist Alternatives" (Links to an external site.) provides examples of sexist language and nonsexist alternatives. Table 3.1 Examples of Sexist Terms and Nonsexist Alternatives Term Alternative Businessman Businessperson, executive Fireman Fire fighter Chairman Chair, chairperson Policeman Police officer Mailman Letter carrier, postal worker Mankind Humankind, people Man-made Artificial, synthetic Waitress Server He (as generic pronoun) He or she; he/she; s/he "A professor should be devoted to his students" "Professors should be devoted to their students" Norms Cultures differ widely in their norms, or standards and expectations for behaving. We already saw that the nature of drunken behavior depends on society's expectations of how people should behave when drunk. Norms of drunken behavior influence how we behave when we drink too much. •Norms are the formal and informal rules regarding what kinds of behavior are acceptable and appropriate within a culture. •Norms are specific to a culture, time period, and situation. Norms are often divided into two types, formal norms and informal norms. Formal norms, also called mores (MOOR-ayz) and laws, refer to the standards of behavior considered the most important in any society. Examples in the United States include traffic laws, criminal codes, and, in a college context, student behavior codes addressing such things as cheating and hate speech. Informal norms, also called folkways and customs,refer to standards of behavior that are considered less important but still influence how we behave. Table manners are a common example of informal norms, as are such everyday behaviors as how we interact with a cashier and how we ride in an elevator. Many norms differ dramatically from one culture to the next. Some of the best evidence for cultural variation in norms comes from the study of sexual behavior (Edgerton, 1976). Among the Pokot of East Africa, for example, women are expected to enjoy sex, while among the Gusii a few hundred miles away, women who enjoy sex are considered deviant. In Inis Beag, a small island off the coast of Ireland, sex is considered embarrassing and even disgusting; men feel that intercourse drains their strength, while women consider it a burden. Even nudity is considered terrible, and people on Inis Beag keep their clothes on while they bathe. The situation is quite different in Mangaia, a small island in the South Pacific. Here sex is considered very enjoyable, and it is the major subject of songs and stories. While many societies frown on homosexuality, others accept it. Among the Azande of East Africa, for example, young warriors live with each other and are not allowed to marry. During this time, they often have sex with younger boys, and this homosexuality is approved by their culture. Among the Sambia of New Guinea, young males live separately from females and engage in homosexual behavior for at least a decade. It is felt that the boys would be less masculine if they continued to live with their mothers and that the semen of older males helps young boys become strong and fierce (Edgerton, 1976). Other evidence for cultural variation in norms comes from the study of how men and women are expected to behave in various societies. For example, many traditional societies are simple hunting-and-gathering societies. In most of these, men tend to hunt and women tend to gather. Many observers attribute this gender difference to at least two biological differences between the sexes. First, men tend to be bigger and stronger than women and are thus better suited for hunting. Second, women become pregnant and bear children and are less able to hunt. Yet a different pattern emerges in some hunting-and-gathering societies. Among a group of Australian aborigines called the Tiwi and a tribal society in the Philippines called the Agta, both sexes hunt. After becoming pregnant, Agta women continue to hunt for most of their pregnancy and resume hunting after their child is born (Brettell & Sargent, 2009). Different cultures also have different rituals, or established procedures and ceremonies that often mark transitions in the life course. As such, rituals both reflect and transmit a culture's norms and other elements from one generation to the next. Graduation ceremonies in colleges and universities are familiar examples of time-honored rituals. In many societies, rituals help signify one's gender identity. For example, girls around the world undergo various types of initiation ceremonies to mark their transition to adulthood. Among the Bemba of Zambia, girls undergo a month-long initiation ceremony called the chisungu, in which girls learn songs, dances, and secret terms that only women know (Maybury-Lewis, 1998). In some cultures, special ceremonies also mark a girl's first menstrual period. Such ceremonies are largely absent in the United States, where a girl's first period is a private matter. But in other cultures the first period is a cause for celebration involving gifts, music, and food (Hathaway, 1997). Are rituals more common in traditional societies than in industrial ones such as the United States? Consider the Nacirema, studied by anthropologist Horace Miner more than 50 years ago (Miner, 1956). In this society, many rituals have been developed to deal with the culture's fundamental belief that the human body is ugly and in danger of suffering many diseases. Reflecting this belief, every household has at least one shrine in which various rituals are performed to cleanse the body. Often these shrines contain magic potions acquired from medicine men. The Nacirema are especially concerned about diseases of the mouth. Miner writes, "Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them" (p. 505). Many Nacirema engage in "mouth-rites" and see a "holy-mouth-man" once or twice yearly. Spell Nacirema backward and you will see that Miner was describing American culture. As his satire suggests, rituals are not limited to preindustrial societies. Instead, they function in many kinds of societies to mark transitions in the life course and to transmit the norms of the culture from one generation to the next. Our examples show that different cultures have different norms, even if they share other types of practices and beliefs. It is also true that norms change over time within a given culture. Two obvious examples here are hairstyles and clothing styles. When the Beatles first became popular in the early 1960s, their hair barely covered their ears, but parents of teenagers back then were aghast at how they looked. If anything, clothing styles change even more often than hairstyles. Hemlines go up, hemlines go down. Lapels become wider, lapels become narrower. This color is in, that color is out. Hold on to your out-of-style clothes long enough, and eventually they may well end up back in style. Values are another important element of culture and involve judgments of what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. A culture's values shape its norms. In Japan, for example, a central value is group harmony. The Japanese place great emphasis on harmonious social relationships and dislike interpersonal conflict. Individuals are fairly unassertive by American standards, lest they be perceived as trying to force their will on others (Schneider & Silverman, 2010). When interpersonal disputes do arise, Japanese do their best to minimize conflict by trying to resolve the disputes amicably. Lawsuits are thus uncommon; in one case involving disease and death from a mercury-polluted river, some Japanese who dared to sue the company responsible for the mercury poisoning were considered bad citizens (Upham, 1976). In the United States, of course, the situation is quite different. The American culture extols the rights of the individual and promotes competition in the business and sports worlds and in other areas of life. Lawsuits over the most frivolous of issues are quite common and even expected. Phrases like "Look out for number one!" abound. If the Japanese value harmony and group feeling, Americans value competition and individualism. Because the Japanese value harmony, their norms frown on self-assertion in interpersonal relationships and on lawsuits to correct perceived wrongs. Because Americans value and even thrive on competition, our norms promote assertion in relationships and certainly promote the use of the law to address all kinds of problems. Another important value in the American culture is the work ethic. By the 19th century, Americans had come to view hard work not just as something that had to be done but as something that was morally good to do (Gini, 2000). The commitment to the work ethic remains strong today: in the 2008 General Social Survey, 72% of respondents said they would continue to work even if they got enough money to live as comfortably as they would like for the rest of their lives. The last element of culture is the artifacts, or material objects, that constitute a society's material culture. In the most simple societies, artifacts are largely limited to a few tools, the huts people live in, and the clothing they wear. One of the most important inventions in the evolution of society was the wheel. Although the wheel was a great invention, artifacts are much more numerous and complex in industrial societies. Because of technological advances during the past two decades, many such societies today may be said to have a wireless culture, as smartphones, netbooks and laptops, and GPS devices now dominate so much of modern life. The artifacts associated with this culture were unknown a generation ago. Technological development created these artifacts and new language to describe them and the functions they perform. Today's wireless artifacts in turn help reinforce our own commitment to wireless technology as a way of life, if only because children are now growing up with them, often even before they can read and write. Sometimes people in one society may find it difficult to understand the artifacts that are an important part of another society's culture. If a member of a tribal society who had never seen a cell phone, or who had never even used batteries or electricity, were somehow to visit the United States, she or he would obviously have no idea of what a cell phone was or of its importance in almost everything we do these days. Conversely, if we were to visit that person's society, we might not appreciate the importance of some of its artifacts. The major elements of culture are symbols, language, norms, values, and artifacts. Language makes effective social interaction possible and influences how people conceive of concepts and objects. Major values that distinguish the United States include individualism, competition, and a commitment to the work ethic. References Axtell, R. E. (1998). Gestures: The do's and taboos of body language around the world. New York, NY: Wiley. Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life. 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Litigation and moral consciousness in Japan: An interpretive analysis of four Japanese pollution suits. Law and Society Review, 10, 579–619. Whorf, B. (1956). Language, thought and reality. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Cultures are rules and laws which are passed from one generation to the next generation. This is a basic definition from which culture can be explained theoretically but to define a culture more precisely we have to classify and name its basic element moreover the subjected elements are needed to be explained in detail; to describe and understand the deep and real sense of the term "Culture".The basic elements of culture LanguageNormsBeliefsSymbolsValuesCognitive ElementsLanguage: – Every culture has a particular language which is passed by the person belongs to that particular culture to the next generation and the following generation also has to learn the language. The language can be defined, in a very precise manner, and can be compared, in the best way, with a vehicle. Language is a medium or an instrument which is used to express one's view and to keep forward one's opinion.Language is the most basic and most important element in a culture. For example, a person who speaks nagamese can be judged to be a citizen of Nagaland. The person who speaks Hindi and having an accent like that of Indians can be recognized easily, that he is a citizen of India and likewise person speaking other languages can be recognized that to which culture he/she belongs.Norms: – The very important element of a culture is this norms. This decides the rules and regulation of a society. Norms define two types of rules one of which it must be followed by people of that particular society these rules are known as "mos". The other rule tells the daily habits of individual of that society it is known as "folkways".Beliefs:- Before the creation of any culture by a society, society decides their source of motivation, which they considered as appropriate. For example god Shiva to Hindus, Sikh wear bangle in one hand, bear a long beard, keeping a dagger. Cross for Christians and a necklace or a cotton thread around the neck.Symbols:- Importance of Symbols may differ for different people, belonging to a different culture. For example sign of cross means nothing for Hindus but for Christians, this is a symbol of Lord Christ.Values:– Anything or any material when collects importance in our daily life it starts having value. Value of some materials, sometimes, are received and taught by parents to their children. Some values are explained by society, in this way values of a particular society gets accumulated and move forward from generations to generations.Cognitive elements:- Cognitive elements are that element of culture which deals with the management of difficult times or natural calamities. Cognitive elements of culture are those through which an individual learn how to cope with an existing situation whether natural or social. These qualities are learned by children and taught, to them, by their parents, so that their son/daughter can live with peace in a particular situationCulture is a symbolic continuous, cumulative and progressive process.Linton: – Culture is social heredity, which is transmitted from one generation to another with the accumulation of individual's experiences.Also Read: What is Cultural Studieskey features of culture1. Culture is learned2. Culture is social3. Culture is shared4. Culture is transmitted5. Culture is continuous6. Culture is accumulative7. Culture is integrate8. Culture is changing9. Culture varies from society to societyWe believe in sharing knowledge with everyone and making a positive change in society through our work and contributions. If you are interested in joining us, please check our 'About' page for more information Exotica.im/Universal Images Group/Getty Images The five components of culture include symbols, language, values, beliefs and norms. Symbols may be either physical or non-physical. A flag is an example of a physical symbol, and bows and curtsies are examples of non-physical symbols.Language is used for communication. It can be written or spoken. Even when a culture uses the same basic language as another culture, differences in terminology and inflection create new meanings.Values help define acceptable behavior within the society. Values can be different for each group to which a person belongs. For example, it may be acceptable in the family group to eat certain foods that are not accepted within the religious group a person chooses.Beliefs fulfill the spiritual needs of a culture. A whole culture can be based on one set of beliefs, yet a larger cultural group may have many different sets of beliefs.Norms are the rules, mores and traditions within a culture. As a group develops laws and regulations, norms change. A law that was necessary 100 years ago may not be needed in modern times.Technological advances also change the way cultures behave. Traditions are norms that a culture holds onto once the norms are no longer common. Wearing certain clothing for a holiday is an example of a norm that has become a tradition. MORE FROM REFERENCE.COM