

police just smile and tell the people to have fun. At other times of the year, they will arrest people for these same behaviors. This is an example of

- the flexibility of norms and values
- what happens when the police are corrupt
- the police failing to uphold the law
- moral holidays

- The air conditioner wasn't working in the summer heat, and it was stifling hot in the office. Ben said he didn't care if people stared. He took off his shirt. (Ben was not wearing an undershirt.) Ben violated
  - an ethnocentrism
  - a sanction
  - a folkway
  - one of the mores
- The air conditioner wasn't working in the summer heat, and it was stifling hot in the office. Jenn said she didn't care if people stared. She took off her blouse. (Jenn was not wearing a slip or a bra.) Jenn violated
  - an ethnocentrism
  - a sanction
  - a folkway
  - one of the mores
- Mary was photographed, fingerprinted, and booked. Later the judge sentenced her to 7 years in prison for having sex with her teenaged son. Mary had violated
  - a taboo
  - a sanction
  - a folkway
  - one of the mores

## Subcultures

People who participate in the same activity, whether snowboarding or stamp collecting, tend to develop specialized ways to communicate with one another. To outsiders, their talk, even if it is in English, can seem like a foreign language. Here is one of my favorite quotes by a politician:

*There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns; there are things we do not know we don't know. (Donald Rumsfeld, quoted in Dickey and Barry 2006:38)*

Whatever Rumsfeld, the former secretary of defense under George W. Bush, meant by his statement probably will remain a known unknown. (Or would it be an unknown known?)

The same thing occurs in the subculture of sociology. Try to figure out what this means:

*Path analysis showed that parental involvement fully mediated the effect of parental acculturation on intergenerational relationship, whereas intergenerational relationship mediated the effect of parental involvement on child outcomes. (Ying and Han 2008)*

As much as possible, I will try to spare you from such “insider’s” talk.

People who specialize in an occupation—from cabbies to politicians—tend to develop a **subculture**, *a world within the larger world of the dominant culture*. Subcultures are not limited to occupations. They can originate anywhere that people's experiences lead them to have distinctive ways of looking at the world. Even if we cannot understand the quotation from Donald Rumsfeld, it makes us aware that politicians don't view life in quite the same way most of us do. Nor do sociologists.



### Watch the Video

The Big Picture:  
Culture in **mysoclab**

U.S. society contains *thousands* of subcultures. Some are as broad as the way of life we associate with teenagers, others are as narrow as those we associate with body builders. Some U.S. ethnic groups also form subcultures: Their values, norms, and foods set them apart. So might their religion, music, language, and clothing. As you are learning, sociologists also use a unique language in their efforts to understand the world.

Some subcultures can be illustrated by photos. Take a look at the photo essay on the next two pages.

# UNIT

# 3.6

## Many Cultural Worlds

### WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO LEARN?

After you have read this unit, you should be able to

Explain the difference between subcultures and countercultures.

## Countercultures

Consider this quote from another subculture:

*If everyone applying for welfare had to supply a doctor's certificate of sterilization, if everyone who had committed a felony were sterilized, if anyone who had mental illness to any degree were sterilized—then our*

**subculture** the values and related behaviors of a group that distinguish its members from the larger culture; a world within a world

# Looking at Subcultures

*Each subculture provides its members with values and distinctive ways of viewing the world. What values and perceptions do you think are common among body builders? What other subculture do you see in this photo?*

Subcultures can form around any interest or activity. Each subculture has its own values and norms that its members share, giving them a common identity. Each also has special terms that pinpoint the group's corner of life and that its members use to communicate with one another. Some of us belong to several subcultures.

As you can see from this photo essay, most subcultures are compatible with the values and norms of the mainstream culture. They represent specialized interests around which its members have chosen to build tiny worlds. Some subcultures, however, conflict with the mainstream culture. Sociologists give the name *countercultures* to subcultures whose values (such as those of outlaw motorcyclists) or activities and goals (such as those of terrorists) are opposed to the mainstream culture. Countercultures, however, are exceptional, and few of us belong to them.

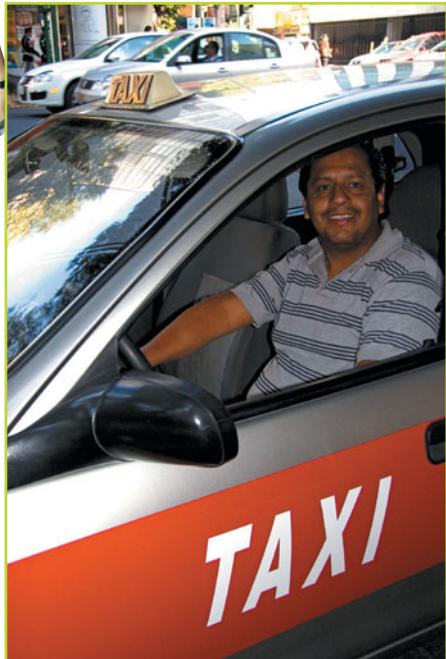


*Membership in this subculture is not easily awarded. Not only must high-steel ironworkers prove that they are able to work at great heights but also that they fit into the group socially. Newcomers are tested by members of the group, and they must demonstrate that they can take joking without offense.*

Specialized values and interests are two of the characteristics that mark subcultures. What values and interests distinguish the modeling subculture?



The cabbie subculture, centering on their occupational activities and interests, is also broken into smaller subcultures that reflect their experiences of race—ethnicity.



Why would people decorate themselves like this? Among the many reasons, one is to show solidarity with the football subculture.



The subculture that centers around tattooing previously existed on the fringes of society, with seamen and circus folk its main participants. It now has entered mainstream society, but not to this extreme.



Can you identify this subculture?



Even subcultures can have subcultures. The rodeo subculture is a subculture of "cowboy" subculture, which is a subculture of "western" subculture. The values that unite its members are reflected in their speech, clothing, and specialized activities, such as the one shown here.



Why are the Hell's Angels not a subculture but a counterculture?

economy could easily take care of these people for the rest of their lives, giving them a decent living standard—but getting them out of the way. That way there would be no children abused, no surplus population, and, after a while, no pollution....

When the . . . present world system collapses, it'll be good people like you who will be shooting people in the streets to feed their families. (Zellner 1995:58, 65)

Welcome to the world of the Aryan supremacist survivalists, where the message is much clearer than that of politicians—and much more disturbing.

The values and norms of most subcultures blend in with mainstream society. In some cases, however, as with the survivalist quoted here, some of the group's values and norms place it at odds with the dominant culture. Sociologists use the term **counterculture** to refer to these groups. To better see this distinction, consider motorcycle enthusiasts and motorcycle gangs. Motorcycle enthusiasts—who emphasize personal freedom and speed *and* affirm cultural values of success through work or education—are members of a subculture. In contrast, the Hell's Angels, Pagans, and Banditos not only stress freedom and speed but also value dirtiness and contempt toward women, work, and education. This makes them a counterculture.

Any challenge to core values is met with resistance, often with hostility, and sometimes with violence. To affirm their own values, members of the mainstream culture may ridicule, isolate, or even attack members of the counterculture. The Mormons, for example, were driven out of several states before they finally settled in Utah, which was at that time a wilderness. Even there, the federal government would not let them practice *polygyny* (one man having more than one wife), and Utah's statehood was made conditional on its acceptance of monogamy (Anderson 1942/1966; Williams 2007).

**counterculture** a group whose values, beliefs, norms, and related behaviors place its members in opposition to the broader culture

## UNIT 3.6 // TESTING MYSELF DID I LEARN IT?

ANSWERS ARE AT THE  
END OF THE CHAPTER

- Nancy was invited to a meeting at someone's house in the country. She was curious about what the group taught, and she went. She made friends with some of the members, and she joined the group, which taught that aliens were the original inhabitants of Earth. The members didn't look weird. They voted and worked at all sorts of regular jobs. This group is an example of a
  - monoculture
  - neoculture
  - counterculture
  - subculture
- Nancy was invited to another meeting. She went and after making friends with some of the members, she joined this group, too. This group taught that the U.S. government had been taken over by insane people who were leading the country to destruction. The members were told to keep their jobs so no one would suspect them, and to store weapons for their coming attack on the government. This group is an example of a
  - nanoculture
  - neoculture
  - counterculture
  - subculture
- Nancy was a busy woman. This time she joined a group that taught that work and bathing were corrupting the world. What people should do is beg from the corrupters and stay away from water. Nancy's friends ridiculed her for joining this group, and they stopped seeing her. The reason her former friends acted like this was because
  - they were heartless and unsympathetic
  - Nancy was assaulting core values
  - Nancy stank
  - Nancy was asking them for money