

## Ch. 4 Folk and Pop Culture

### Key Issue 1: Where do folk and pop cultures originate and diffuse?

*Habit- a repetitive act that a particular individual performs.*

*Custom- a repetitive act that a particular group performs.*

*Folk culture- the culture traditionally practiced primarily by small, homogenous groups living in isolated rural areas.*

*Popular culture- the culture found in large, heterogeneous societies that share certain habits despite differences in other personal characteristics.*

A social custom originates at a hearth, a center of innovation. Folk customs tend to have anonymous sources, from unknown dates, through multiple hearths, whereas pop culture generally has a known originator, normally from MDC's, and results from more leisure time and more capital.

EX: Folk music tells stories or conveys information about daily activities. Pop music is written by specific individuals for the purpose of being sold to a large number of people.

Diffusion of folk and pop culture differs:

Folk customs tend to diffuse slowly and then, primarily through physical relocation of individuals.

Pop customs tend to diffuse rapidly and primarily through hierarchical diffusion from the nodes.

(Certain fads can diffuse contagiously)

### Key Issue 2: Why is folk culture clustered?

ISOLATION promotes cultural diversity as a group's unique customs develop over several centuries.

Therefore, folk culture varies widely from place to place at one time. Since most folk culture deals in some way with the lives and habits of its people, the physical environment in which the people act has a tremendous impact on the culture.

People living in folk culture are likely to be farmers growing their own food, using hand tools and/or animal power. Local food preferences are a large part of the folk customs of that region. Religious, social, or economic factors often determine the type and amount of food consumed in a given region.

*Taboo- a restriction on behavior imposed by social custom.*

Ex: little to no pork is consumed in predominantly Muslim countries.

Housing preference is another major contributor to folk culture. Local traditions, as well as environmental factors determine the type of house that is built in a region.

### Key Issue 3: Why is popular culture widely distributed?

Pop culture, compared to folk, varies widely from time to time in a given place. This is due to its widespread and rapid diffusion, and the relative wealth of the people to acquire the materials associated with pop culture. Pop culture flourishes where people have sufficient income to acquire the tangible elements of the culture and the leisure time to make use of them.

Housing in the US, from the 1940's on, has been less dependent on what type of house is appropriate for what site or region, but more on what the dominant trend is in the architectural field at the time of construction.

The most prominent example of pop culture in the realm of clothing is the mighty blue jeans. They have become a symbol of youth and “westernization” throughout the world. Many people in foreign countries are willing to depart with a week’s earnings just for a pair of Levi jeans.

Food preferences in pop culture depend on high income and national advertising. The spatial distribution of many food or beverage trends are difficult to explain. However, the dist. of wine shows the environmental impact. Wine is generally consumed in areas where the vineyards grow best, and where people can afford to drink it. Religious taboos often are responsible for certain areas’ preference or dislike of specific foods, much as in folk custom. Ex: Wine is rarely consumed outside Christian dominate countries.

**TELEVISION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MECHANISM FOR THE RAPID DIFFUSION OF POP CULTURE.** It is also the most popular leisure activity in MDC’s throughout the world. There are four levels of television service:

1. Near universal ownership. US, Japan, Europe, etc.
2. Ownership common, but not universal. Latin American countries, etc.
3. Ownership exists, but is not widely diffused. Some African and Asian countries,
4. Very few televisions. Sub-Saharan Africa, some regions of Mid East.

Diffusion of the Internet is following roughly the same pattern as TV did at the start, which is the U.S. has a disproportionately large share of the Internet hosts compared to its share of the world population. As the Internet increasingly becomes the people’s resource of choice, pop culture will have yet another conduit to rapidly and effectively diffuse to nearly every inhabited place on the planet.

In the U.S., TV stations are typically private enterprises that receive licenses from the government in order to broadcast over a specific frequency. Elsewhere in the world, the governments normally control the stations or at least have a board that controls them. This censorship is used to minimize the likelihood that programs hostile to current policies will be broadcast. This 1984-esque government regulation has lost some of its strength in recent years however. The main reason is the increased number of small satellite dishes that allow the customer to receive signals from stations based in other countries. Although some countries outlaw the ownership of these dishes, individuals continue to invent new ways to hide the dishes and thus continue to receive their contraband signal.

Key Issue 4: Why does globalization of popular culture cause problems?

## **DIRECT THREAT TO FOLK CULTURE**

As TV and Internet spread to more people in more social classes, many people are turning from their folk cultures to the new pop customs. As this occurs, people may also turn away from the society’s traditional values.

The spread of popular ideas concerning the role of women in society threatens to undermine the subservience of women to men that is central to many folk societies. While positive from a Western standpoint, this reversal of traditional roles may actually threaten the economy in some lesser developed areas of the world.

## **DOMINANCE OF WESTERN PERSPECTIVES**

Three MDC’s, the U.S., the U.K., and Japan, virtually control the television industry. At least one of the three serves nearly every LDC on Earth. The U.S. serves primarily Latin America; the U.K. serves primarily Africa; Japan serves mainly S. and E. Asia.

Many LDC leaders claim that because the “westerners” own nearly all of the TV broadcast within their countries, a fair, unbiased report of local news is not presented. Instead, the media focuses only on sensational, rating-boosting stories.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pop culture is less likely than folk to be considerate of physical features. For many popular customs, the environment is something to be modified to enhance a product or promote its sale. Ex: golf courses, destruction/modification of large expanses of wilderness to promote a popular social custom.

Pop culture also promotes uniformity of landscape, as evidenced by the prevalence of nearly identical fast-food restaurants at convenient stops along highways.

Quite obvious is the increased need of natural resources to feed the pop culture craze. As a new trend engulfs a population, a specific resource may be required to satisfy the demand, and little care is taken to ensure the preserving of that resource for posterity. This, in turn, can lead to higher pollution levels as a result of pop cultures.