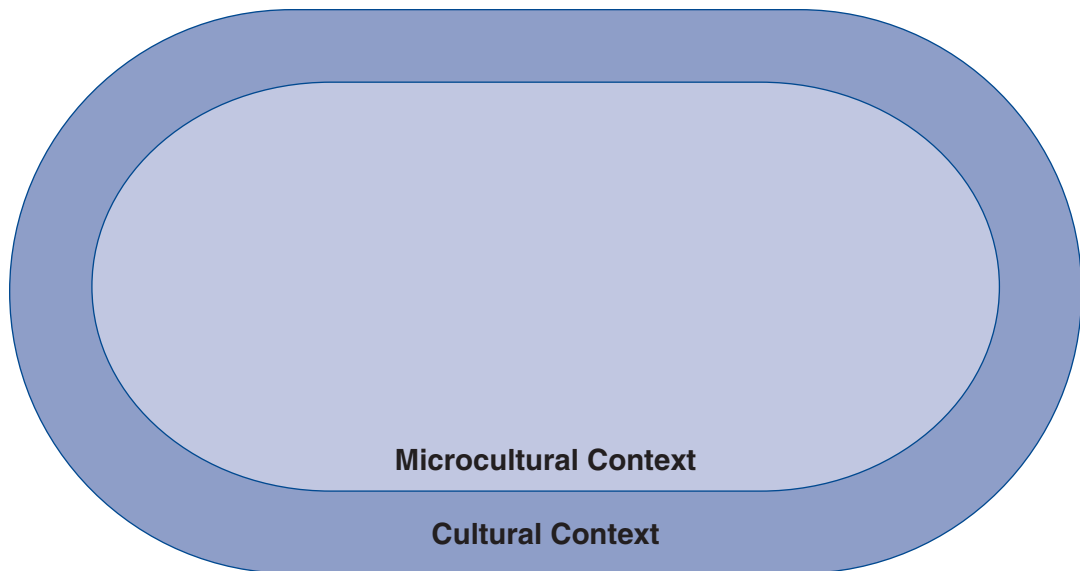


The Microcultural Context



For those of us who live in/between, being required, on the one hand, to cast off our cultural selves in order to don the worldview and ethos of an alien culture, on the other hand to cast off the influences of the alien culture as a means of purification and identification is more than a personal dilemma; it is always and most of all a condition of living in/between.

—Richard Morris¹

Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

1. Define and explain the concept of a microculture.
2. List and illustrate the five criteria for membership in a microculture.
3. Recount the fundamental assumptions of the muted group theory.
4. Provide examples of the various microcultures in the United States.
5. Identify and discuss two cultural values of the Hispanic microculture.
6. Identify and discuss at least three aspects of African American communication.
7. Identify and discuss at least three aspects of Amish communication.
8. Identify and discuss at least three aspects of Hmong communication.

Within most cultures there are groups of people who differ in some custom, habit, or practice from the general societal culture. These groups are sometimes called minorities, sub-cultures, or co-cultures. In this book, the term **microculture** is used to refer to those identifiable groups of people who share the set of values, beliefs, and behaviors of the macro-culture, possess a common history, and use a common verbal and nonverbal symbol system. In some way, however, the microculture varies from the larger, often dominant cultural milieu. Most microcultural groups are groups of individuals who have much in common with the larger macroculture yet are bonded together by similar experiences, traits, values, or in some cases, histories. Hence the term microculture includes different types of groups that could be classified by age, class, geographic region, sexual preference, disability (e.g., deaf), ethnicity, race, size, or even occupation. Perhaps most Americans are members of some kind of microcultural group.

Microcultures can be different from the larger culture in a variety of ways, often because of race or ethnicity. In the United States, for example, approximately 70% of the population is classified as White or Caucasian.² In this context, African Americans, Hispanics, and Hmong might be considered microcultural groups. Microcultures can also differ from the larger culture on account of language or religion. For example, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, or Muslims (persons of Islamic faith) might be considered microcultural groups. Finally, persons might be classified as members of microcultures because of their behavioral practices. Persons who use drugs are often said to belong to a “counter” or “drug” culture, not because of their race, ethnicity, or religion, but because they use drugs. Gays or lesbians could be considered a microculture because of their sexual orientation.

In any culture, microcultural groups often develop their own language for communicating outside of the dominant or majority culture’s context or value system. Indeed, deaf persons, who communicate using sign language, can be considered a microculture. Though not always, microcultural groups generally have less power than the majority or “macro” culture. The majority group’s power may be legal, political, economic, or even religious. The

group with the most power is considered the dominant or majority group, while the less powerful groups have been known as minority groups. Sociologist Richard Schaefer argues that the term *minority group* is a misnomer, however, in that it does not refer to the relative size of a group. According to Schaefer, **minority groups** are subordinate groups whose members have significantly less power and control over their own lives than members of the dominant or majority group.³ Although defined as a minority, such groups may actually be larger (in population) than the majority group. For example, from 1948 to 1994, Whites, who were greatly outnumbered by Blacks, ruled in South Africa under the political system of apartheid. In many countries colonized by Europeans, the indigenous people outnumbered the dominant Europeans. And, in parts of the United States, certain ethnic/cultural groups outnumber the “dominant” group.

The term *subculture* is often used to refer to microcultural groups. Like *minority group*, the term *subculture* carries negative connotations. By definition, *sub-* means beneath, below, and inferior. The perspective of this book is that no cultural group is beneath or below any other cultural group. To be sure, some cultures are subordinate (i.e., meaning they have less power) to other groups, but such groups should not be considered inferior.

Hence, for the reasons cited above, the term *microcultural group* has been chosen as a more appropriate label for these groups.

MICROCULTURAL GROUP STATUS

In many cultures, including the United States, microcultural group status is determined by one’s membership in sex, racial, ethnic, or religious groups. Schaefer notes that social scientists generally recognize five characteristics that distinguish microcultural groups from the dominant culture. The first characteristic is that members of the group possess some physical or cultural trait that distinguishes them from others. Two obvious physical properties that distinguish one group from another are skin color and sex. In the United States, for example, Blacks and women are considered minorities (even though women constitute about 51% of the population). White males are considered the most powerful political and economic group in the United States. Blacks are also considered a minority in Brazil, which depended on slave trading much more than the United States. In fact, Brazil imported eight times the number of African slaves brought to the United States.⁴

Other traits that can distinguish a microcultural group include language or distinctive dress habits. A microcultural group in Jamaica is the Rastafarians. According to Barrett, the Jamaican Rastafarian movement is the largest, most identifiable indigenous group in Jamaica. Rastas are recognizable by their dreadlock hair and unique dress habits. Barrett argues that this dreadlock appearance is the most distinguishing mark of the Rastafarians.⁵ Regardless of culture, the dominant group decides, perhaps arbitrarily, on what characteristics afford a group its microcultural status. Such traits vary considerably across cultures.

The second distinguishing characteristic is that minority group/microcultural membership is usually not voluntary. Though not always, people are generally born into their microculture. For example, people cannot choose to be of a certain race, ethnicity, or gender. Although people can choose their religion, most people are born into a religion and find it

very difficult to leave. In tracing its history, Schaefer notes that the roots of the violence in Northern Ireland are based in religion. Northern Ireland is two thirds Protestant and one third Catholic. The Catholics in Northern Ireland, a minority in both numbers and power, complain of inadequate housing and education, low income, and high unemployment. They often blame the Protestant majority for their problems. Armed conflict has been the result. Laungani notes that a unique feature of India's society is the caste system, that is, a rigid social hierarchy. In India, one is born into a given caste level, and it is virtually impossible to move from one caste level to another.⁶

The third property that distinguishes a microcultural group from the macroculture is that microcultural group members generally practice endogamy (i.e., marrying within the ingroup). In many cultures, the dominant group staunchly discourages or even prohibits exogamy (marrying out of one's own group). Ethnologist Suzan Ilcan of the University of Windsor writes that majority groups believe that endogamy strengthens familial ties, preserves family property through inheritance, and upholds cultural and group traditions. Ilcan's work has focused on marital practices in Turkey, where endogamous marriages are viewed as a family or community affair. According to Ilcan, in the village of Sakli, in the northwestern region of Turkey, spousal selection and all aspects of marriage are controlled by certain members of the family. Couples have little to do with the arrangements. Moreover, any meaningful romance between unmarried persons is not valued. Love and mutual attraction are expected to come after marriage and even then are not considered necessities. In Sakli, people are considered suitable marriage partners based on the compatibility of their families. Familial reputation and comparable economic and social classes are the crucial elements for a marriage.⁷ In cultures such as Pakistan, China, India, and Laos, among others, endogamous marriages are often arranged.

The fourth characteristic that distinguishes a microcultural group from the dominant group is that the group members are aware of their subordinate status. Because they know that they are less powerful within a particular culture, some microcultural groups are very cohesive. In the United States, for example, Blacks have gained significant political and economic strength and are arguably the most powerful microcultural group in the country.

Finally, perhaps the most disturbing aspect of microcultural group membership is that such groups often experience unequal treatment from the dominant group in the form of segregation and discrimination. Women in Saudi Arabia, Blacks and Hispanics in the United States, and the Sudras in India are all vivid examples of how membership in a minority group or microculture can affect one's life negatively.⁸

MUTED MICROCULTURAL GROUPS

Another type of power that most microcultural groups lack is linguistic power, that is, the power of language. In all cultures, language is the vehicle for representing and expressing experience. And the experiences and perceptions of subordinate microcultural groups are often different from those of the dominant cultural group. For example, microcultural groups often are not able to communicate as freely as the dominant group does. Historically in the United States, for example, women and Blacks could not vote or join the armed services. Only since 1994 have Black South Africans been granted the right to vote in their country. Hence, for decades, they had no legal voice or representation. Today, Saudi women,

under strict Islamic law, suffer severe restrictions on daily life: They are not allowed to be anywhere with an unrelated man, cannot drive, appear before a judge without a male representative, or travel abroad without a male guardian's permission.⁹ In many cultures, the subordinate microcultural groups do not contribute to the construction of the language of the dominant group. In this sense, the language of a particular culture does not benefit its members equally. Yet the language of the dominant group may not provide the words and symbols representative of the microcultural group's perceptions and experiences. Thus, because such groups are forced to communicate within the dominant mode of expression, they become "**muted**." In essence, the language of the dominant cultural group, which is the preferred language, contributes to the microcultural group's subordination. This idea is known as the muted group theory.¹⁰

The manifestation of the muted group theory is that microcultural groups' speech and writing are not valued by the dominant cultural group. Moreover, microcultural groups experience difficulty expressing themselves fluently within the dominant mode of expression; that is, they may not speak the same language as the dominant group, and hence "micro-macro" interaction is difficult. However, because the microcultural groups must communicate within the dominant mode, they must achieve some level of linguistic competence to survive. The same is not true of the dominant group, however. In fact, the dominant cultural group experiences more difficulty than the microcultural groups in understanding the communication of the microcultural groups because the dominant group is not required to learn the microcultural groups' codes. Indeed, the communication style of the microcultural group is often considered substandard or inferior by the dominant group and is rejected as a legitimate form of communication. Shirley Weber contends that microcultural groups may respond to the dominant mode of expression in two ways. Some will refuse to live by the standards set forth by the dominant group and will try to change the dominant mode of expression. In the United States, for example, the replacement of words such as *chairman* with simply *chair* or *mailman* with *mail carrier* is demonstrative of this phenomenon. Another way subordinate groups respond is by using their own "private" language. They create symbols that are not understood or used by the dominant group. They use their own language in order to express their unique experiences. Weber argues that sometimes the language of the subordinate group serves as a political statement that the microcultural group has not relinquished or abandoned its political or social identity. The group's ability to sustain a living language indicates that the members have control over a certain aspect of their lives and their determination to preserve their culture. As Weber notes, one's language is a model of his or her culture's adjustment to the world.¹¹

Many social scientists consider the hip hop/rap music generation a microcultural group that has been muted by mainstream culture. Christopher Tyson argues that hip hop/rap has been the defining African American cultural movement in the United States over the past 35 years.¹² Terri Adams and Douglas Fuller of Howard University point out that rap music emerged as an artistic cultural expression of urban African American youth in the Bronx, New York, in the late 1970s. They describe rap as the poetry of the youth who are often disregarded as a result of their race and class status, that is, as members of a microcultural group. Adams and Fuller maintain that rap has gone through a number of phases, and has been used as a primary way for microcultural groups to express a variety of ideas, feelings, and emotions. They argue that hope, love, fear, anger, frustration, pride, violence, and misogyny (i.e., hatred or strong prejudice against women) have all been expressed through the medium of rap.¹³

As most college students know, rap is a very fast, rhythmical, and accentuated singing and speaking style. Christopher Tyson contends that rap music reflects the growing flux of non-conformity among young African Americans (and, now, other microcultural groups) in mainstream culture and the backlash against middle-class values.¹⁴ Aino Konkka asserts that one of the most recognized styles of rap music is called *gangsta rap*. This style originated on the West Coast, where inner-city gangs are prominent. Gangsta rap lyrics often tell the story of the desperate situation faced by many inner-city youths, who feel rejected and alienated by the dominant culture. Because the lyrics of gangsta rap are often profane, dealing with drugs and violence, especially violence against women and law enforcement, gangsta rap music has received a great deal of criticism from mainstream cultural critics.¹⁵ To be sure, Edgar Tyson, a professor at Florida State University, agrees that a major criticism of some rap music is its noticeable appetite for violent, sexist, and misogynistic images, and what many view as glorification of drugs and alcohol. Tyson argues that such a negative perception of rap music could be explained by the disproportionate media attention given to “gangsta” rap. Tyson argues that with a similar level of exposure on radio and television currently given to its negative counterpart, greater awareness of “positive and constructive” rap music would create a more balanced public perception of rap music.¹⁶ Finally, Konkka argues it is the language that young African Americans understand. According to Konkka, “Using language that children can relate to, added with humor and catchy rhythms, helps getting the message through.”¹⁷ Consistent with the tenets of the muted group theory, rappers have created and developed a unique vocabulary that they use in their music and to communicate with each other. Although rappers speak English, the vocabulary, and its meaning, differs considerably from mainstream culture. Table 3.1 has some examples of rap vocabulary.

Another example of a microcultural group is the Amish. Many Amish groups in the United States are trilingual. They speak low German at home, high German at church, and English at school or with outsiders. High German is more formal, whereas low German is a more relaxed oral dialect spoken at home. Koslow notes that in Canada, the people of Quebec define themselves as culturally unique from the rest of Canada because they speak French. In Quebec, the language debate is so great and emotional that many Quebecers are pushing for sovereignty. Quebecois (those who speak French) use French as a model and insist on keeping French in the home and on the street signs throughout the province.¹⁸

MICROCULTURES IN THE UNITED STATES

Many microcultures exist in the United States. The formation of microcultural groups is often the result of immigration, annexation, or colonization.¹⁹ In this chapter, five U.S. microcultures will be explored, with particular attention paid to their communication and how it differs from the dominant macroculture. The first microcultural group to be examined is the Hispanic/Latino group. Hispanics/Latinos represent the largest microcultural group in the United States. The second group consists of African Americans, whose many ancestors were brought to the United States as slaves. The group was selected because it represents perhaps the most powerful microcultural group in the United States. And although African Americans have made strides in social, legal, economic, and political power in the United States in the past century, they remain socially disenfranchised by many in the dominant culture. The third

| <i>Rap Vocabulary</i> | <i>Meaning</i> |
|-----------------------|--|
| “All that” | In possession of all good qualities. |
| “Ay yo trip” | Phrase to seek attention, similar to “check this out.” |
| “Bang” | To fight or kill. |
| “Be geese” | To leave: “Yo, we be geese.” |
| “Bitch” | Label generally for females, but not necessarily derogatory, and not necessarily limited to women, as in “all yo niggas be bitches.” |
| “Bone” | To have sexual intercourse: “Your aim is to bone.” |
| “Cave boy” | A white person. |
| “Chill” | To relax. |
| “Homeboy” | Close friend. |
| “Hood” | The neighborhood, usually a poor community. |
| “Nigga” | Originally considered racist and profane, now used by rappers to express pride; my friend, as in “my nigga.” |
| “Peckerwood” | Derogatory term for a white person. |
| “Roll up” | To arrive on the scene. |
| “Shank” | A custom-made knife used in prisons. |
| “Tag” | The act of writing graffiti, as in “tagging up.” |
| “Tight” | Feeling really good at the moment. |

SOURCE: P. Atoon, *The Rap Dictionary*, (2005), (www.rapdict.org).

group is the Amish. The Amish immigrated to the United States from Europe, escaping religious persecution. The Amish were chosen because, perhaps more than any other microcultural group, they have managed to maintain their cultural traditions in the face of immense pressure from the dominant culture to conform and yet have managed successfully to co-exist within the dominant cultural milieu. The fourth group to be explored is the Laotian Hmong (pronounced “mung”), who began their immigration to the United States after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. This group was chosen because its members represent perhaps the newest microculture. They are also a relatively powerless group who lack social, political, and economic power. The fifth microculture to be discussed encompasses Arab Americans. For the first time in its history, in 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau classified persons in the United States with Arab ancestry. In 2003, over 1 million people in the United States considered themselves as having Arab ancestry. Arab Americans represent a considerably diverse group of people about which generalizations are very complicated.

Hispanics/Latinos

For the first time in the history of the United States, Hispanics/Latinos comprise the largest microcultural group in the country, surpassing African Americans. In 2006, there were 43.2 million Hispanics in the United States. That is just over 13 % of the population. Recall from Chapter 1 that the U.S. government distinguishes between race and Hispanic origin. The government considers the two to be separate and distinct. Hence, Hispanics are not considered a racial group. Specifically, the government defines **Hispanic** or Latino as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” According to census data, nearly half of all Hispanics report their race as White. Six percent reported they were of two or more races, 2 % reported their race as Black or African American, while just over 1% indicated they were American Indian or Alaska native. Forty-two percent of Hispanics indicated “Some other race.”²⁰

So, Who Is Hispanic?

Given the above discussion, the term *Hispanic* is confusing to many. Crouch argues that the term *Hispanic* is a cultural reference, a way of identifying people that is neither racial nor geographic. According to Crouch, persons who consider themselves Hispanic may be Black, as in the Dominican Republic, or White, as in Argentina, or of mixed racial heritage, as in Mexico. Crouch argues that Hispanic is a cultural reference to people from any Spanish-speaking country except Spain (where people insist that they are Spanish, not Hispanic). In addition, Crouch also argues that the term *Latino* is a cultural reference that is more or less interchangeable with Hispanic.²¹

Due mostly to immigration and high fertility rates, the Hispanic population in the United States increased by nearly 60 % from 1990 to 2000, compared with an increase of approximately 13 % for the rest of the population. Of the various groups represented under the Hispanic label, the Mexican population represents nearly 66 %, Puerto Ricans comprise just under 9 %, and Cubans represent about 4 %. The remaining Hispanics of “some other origin” include Central and South Americans (14 %) and Dominicans (2 %). The remaining approximately 16 % are labeled “all other Hispanics.” As a group, 56 % of all Hispanics living in the United States were born in the United States. Hence, about 44 % were foreign-born. For the total U.S. population, 88 % of persons living in the United States were born in the United States and 12 % were born outside of the country.²² See Table 3.2 for some facts about U.S. Hispanics/Latinos.

Like other microcultural groups, Hispanics are concentrated in certain geographical areas in the United States. In fact, half of all Hispanics live in California and Texas. Other states with concentrated Hispanic populations include Arizona, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York. On the other hand, many states have very small Hispanic populations, such as Alabama, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.²³ In addition to its overall population trends, the Hispanic population has unique demographics compared with the rest of the United States.

Cultural Values of Hispanics

Although very diverse, the Hispanic microculture is united by values, language, and religion. Consultants Anne Marie Pajewski and Luis Enriquez argue that, in Hispanic society, the

TABLE 3.2 Facts About U.S. Hispanics/Latinos²⁴

| |
|--|
| <p>More than 1 in 8 people in the United States is of Hispanic origin.</p> <p>Hispanics are more geographically concentrated than non-Hispanic Whites.</p> <p>Hispanics tend to live inside the central cities of metropolitan areas.</p> <p>Hispanics are more likely than Whites to be under the age of 18.</p> <p>Three out of 5 Hispanics were born in the United States.</p> <p>Hispanics tend to live in households that are larger than those of non-Hispanic Whites.</p> <p>Nearly 60 percent of Hispanics over the age of 25 have not graduated from high school.</p> <p>Hispanics are more likely than Whites to work in service occupations.</p> <p>Hispanics are more likely than Whites to live in poverty.</p> |
|--|

family or group needs take precedence over individual needs. Hispanics seem collectivistic across a variety of contexts, including academics. According to Pajewski and Enriquez, in school settings Hispanic students tend to be cooperative, whereas White students tend to be competitive and individualistic. When Hispanic students work in groups, not everyone is expected to do his or her equal share. A group member who does not work is not sanctioned, while in an Anglo group, each is expected to do his or her share. Moreover, Pajewski and Enriquez report that some Hispanic students are baffled by the idea of “cheating” in U.S. schools. During examinations, Hispanic students sometimes allow other students to copy their work. This is not considered cheating by Hispanic students. Instead, such behavior is viewed as cooperative.²⁵

Perhaps nowhere is the Hispanic group orientation more prevalent than in the family, or *familia*. Vasquez argues that commitment to the family is a dominant cultural value among virtually all Hispanics. According to Vasquez and others, family loyalty, the belief that a child’s behavior reflects on the family honor, that sibling relationships are hierarchically ordered, and that family needs are met before individual needs are dominant values in most Hispanic communities. Indeed, Schaefer argues that, among Hispanics, the family is the primary source of both social interaction and caregiving. Griggs and Dunn maintain that the influence of the Hispanic family can be observed in the behavior of Hispanic adolescents, who are more likely than Anglo adolescents to model and adopt their parents’ religious and political beliefs, occupations, and overall lifestyle.²⁶ Indeed, Crouch argues that

the group bonding process begins the minute Mexican children are brought home from the hospital and put into the children’s room—not their own, separate little pink or blue nursery. Their families tend to congregate in one large room. They are taught to play nicely with each other. Toys are toys and are played with by all the children. They are not owned by boy number one or girl number three. In Anglo culture, the more we misbehave with our siblings, the more attention we get . . . but beyond the conflicting pressures of adolescence, we seem to emerge as individualists . . . unlike the Mexicans, who believe that the more they conform, the more they will all prosper.²⁷

In general, Hispanics are a very religious people, with as many as 90% of all Hispanics belonging to the Roman Catholic faith. Clutter and Nieto point out that the church is a strong influence on Hispanic family life. In addition, many Hispanic communities celebrate their patron saint's day with more importance and ceremony than individuals do for their own personal birthdays. Pajewski and Enriquez have observed that, although Hispanics are generally very religious, they tend to believe in supernatural powers beyond their religious teachings. Many Hispanics believe in witchcraft and the *curadora*, as well as the healing powers of women and certain herbs.²⁸

Spanglish: The Language of Hispanic Americans

The communication style of most Hispanics is more formal than that of the dominant U.S. American culture. Pajewski and Enriquez maintain that Hispanics are sensitive to rank and customarily make use of formal titles. They also report that Hispanics tend to demonstrate affection nonverbally through touching, hugging, pats on the back, and cheek kissing.²⁹ Verbally, many Hispanics speak **Spanglish**, a combination of Spanish and English. Linguists (people who study language) have noted that when groups of people from different cultures who speak different languages come together and live in the same society, a hybrid language sometimes evolves. This new language will take some of the phonological features (i.e., sounds) and syntactic structures (i.e., grammar) from each group's language and blend them, creating a hybrid language that serves as a vehicle for communication between the groups. This very phenomenon is happening in the United States. According to Ilan Stavans, Spanglish is the intersection, perhaps the marriage (or divorce), of English and Spanish. Hispanics have taken English words and "Spanish-ized" them and have taken Spanish words and "English-ized" them. The result is what linguists call "Spanglish"—part Spanish and part English. Although Spanglish appears to be a fairly recent phenomenon, Stavans argues that it has been around for more than 150 years, tracing its origins to the U.S. annexation of Mexican territories in the early to mid-19th century. Moreover, Stavans explains that there are many varieties of Spanglish, including that which is spoken by Cuban Americans, called *Cubonics*.³⁰

Scholars and laypeople alike agree that Spanglish unites the Hispanic community. Jane Rifkin of the *Hispanic Times Magazine* points out that Spanglish is a widely accepted communication tool used by Spanish-speaking immigrants and native-born Americans. Although some reject Spanglish as intellectually unsophisticated, Rifkin believes that the hybrid language is an expression of friendship, acceptance, and approval. Rifkin refers to Spanglish as the new national slang and contends that Spanglish is "truly a form of communicating among people that has a warmth about it and an inviting expression meant to be non-threatening to people who come together in spite of language barriers."³¹

Stavans argues that there are many variations of Spanglish depending on the nationality, age, and class of its users. He contends that the Spanglish spoken by Cuban Americans (i.e., Cubonics) is different from that spoken by Dominicans, which is different still from Ganga Spanglish used by urban Hispanic gangs.³²

Although there may be many variations of Spanglish in the United States, Bill Cruz and Bill Teck, editors of *Generation ñ*, a magazine targeted primarily at Cuban American youths,

argue that authentic Spanglish is heard when a speaker switches from English to Spanish, or from Spanish to English, within the same sentence. They argue that Spanglish is commonplace in the homes of Hispanics who, as children, were educated in American schools but spoke Spanish at home. In their defense of Spanglish as a legitimate language, Cruz and Teck maintain that often there are no words in English (or Spanish) that accurately express the speaker’s intent. In such cases, the blending of the two languages allows the speaker to capture the essence of one culture in the language of the other. Cruz and Teck have compiled what they call *The Official Spanglish Dictionary*. Table 3.3 shows some examples of Spanglish, taken from their work.⁵³

| <i>Spanglish</i> | <i>English Example</i> |
|--|---|
| No creo que voy on the trip with you lonchando: (Having lunch) bacunclíner: (Vacuum cleaner) | “I don’t think I’m going on the trip with you.” “I’m lonchando, I don’t wanna talk to him now.” “Aye! I think the bacunclíner just swallowed my earring!” |
| tiempo is money frizando: (To make frozen, or freezing) | “Time is money.” “Turn up the heat, estoy frizando!” |
| el autopar | local auto parts store |
| guarejaus | a warehouse |
| Pisa Ho | Pizza Hut restaurant |
| Macdonal | McDonald’s fast food restaurant |
| Sebenileben | 7-11 convenience store |
| Guendis | Wendy’s fast food restaurant |

Chicano English

As immigrants from Mexico settled in California and other parts of the Southwest, they soon formed communities of people who spoke only Spanish. As usual, many of these people began learning English. And, as is typical of immigrants, they took phonological and grammatical complexes from each language and combined them. But the children of these immigrants grew up using both Spanish and English, and as the communities began to grow, a new dialect of English, called Chicano English, evolved. Carmen Fought, a professor of linguistics, studies Chicano English. Fought maintains that Chicano English is neither Spanglish nor a version of nonstandard Spanish, but is a unique dialect used by speakers who are typically not bilingual. In fact, Fought argues that most speakers of Chicano English do not know any Spanish at all.⁵⁴ In fact, Fought maintains that Chicano English is spoken

only by native English speakers. She argues that the central myth about Chicano English is that it is spoken by people whose first language is Spanish and whose Spanish introduces mistakes into their English. Fought asserts that Chicano English

is one of the English dialects available in the United States for native speakers to learn, like Appalachian English or AAE [African-American English] or the English spoken by professors at Harvard University, or by used car dealers in Houston. Chicano English cannot possibly be just a non-native variety spoken by second-language users of English if it is only spoken by people who *only* know English.³⁵

Fought notes that because of its origins, Chicano English shares many of the phonological features of Spanish. But, she maintains, Chicano English is not Spanglish. For example, in endings like *going* or *talking*, Chicano English speakers tend to have a higher vowel, more like the “i” of Spanish (as in *si*), so that the words sound like “goween” and “talkeen.” According to Fought, people who hear Chicano English typically assume that they are hearing the “accent” of a native Spanish speaker. But Fought maintains that many speakers of Chicano English are not bilingual and may not know any Spanish at all. To be sure, notes Fought, these Mexican American speakers have learned English natively and fluently, like most children growing up in the United States. They just happened to have learned a non-standard variety that retains indicators of contact with Spanish.³⁶

Stereotypes of Hispanics

In most cultures, microcultural groups are often stereotyped by the dominant cultural group. In the United States, the Hispanic microculture has been the target of several unfortunate stereotypes. Perhaps the most common, and the most hotly debated, stereotype about Hispanics revolves around the construct of male gender identity called *machismo*. Machismo centers on the notion of Hispanic masculinity and male superiority and dominance in the traditional patriarchal Hispanic society. Stereotypical characteristics associated with macho males include aggressiveness, violence, dominance and supremacy over women, infidelity, and emotional insensitivity.³⁷

Manuel Roman, a Puerto Rican psychiatrist, argues that the concept of machismo is power based. He says,

Men are physically more powerful than women. And machismo is derived from the natural state of being bigger, more muscular. It has to do with dominance, autocracy, having power over others. A macho man is somebody who is expected to be sexually knowledgeable and aggressive with women, and to be fearless in his interactions with other males.³⁸

To be sure, scholars disagree about the uniqueness of machismo in Hispanic culture. Counseling psychologist J. Manuel Casas and his associates argue that machismo has never been a uniquely Hispanic phenomenon. Instead, they argue that many of the traits associated with machismo can be found in virtually every culture. They note, however, that differences may exist in how the equivalent of the machismo construct is defined across cultures.³⁹ In other words, there may be many cultures in which the male gender identity

is associated with aggressiveness, male supremacy, infidelity, and so on. Although there has not been a substantial amount of research conducted on the machismo identity, some data indicate that at least one characteristic associated with machismo, infidelity, is not unique to Hispanic males. University of Chicago sociologists Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata, authors of the widely publicized “Sex in America” study, found that the infidelity rate among Hispanics in the United States is about the same as for the general U.S. population.⁴⁰

U.S. media, especially advertisers, have been particularly culpable in the dissemination of Hispanic stereotypes. Octavio Nuiry points out that one of the earliest images of Hispanics, and particularly Mexicans, is that of the ruthless bandito. This image has been depicted in all sorts of media from movie westerns to the famous advertising campaign for Frito corn chips. In 1967, Frito-Lay Corporation launched an advertising campaign for its brand of corn chips. The ads featured a cartoon character called the “Frito Bandito,” whose persona was replete with a thick Spanish accent, a long handlebar mustache, a sombrero, and a pair of six-shooters. In the ads, the bandito was described as “cunning, clever, and sly.” Contemporary ads, such as those of Taco Bell, encourage taco lovers to “Run for the Border!” in an apparent reference to the immigration issue. Interestingly, in what advertisers call crossover commercials, a Miller Lite beer advertisement features boxing champion Carlos Palomino encouraging viewers to “Drink Miller Lite, but don’t drink the water.”⁴¹

The influences of the Hispanic microculture in the United States are growing. Now more than ever, Hispanics are noticed by the dominant culture. We see images of Hispanics in television and movies. Hispanic cuisine is more popular than ever. Although their unemployment rates are high and their incomes are low, as a microcultural group, Hispanics are increasing their political and economic power. Soon, their voices will not be muted.

African Americans

According to Richard Schaefer, the history of **African Americans** in the United States dates as far back as the history of Euro-Americans (persons of European descent). Blacks arrived in the new world with the first White explorers. Schaefer reports that in 1619, 20 Africans arrived in Jamestown as indentured servants. At that time, their children were born free people. By the 1660s, however, the British colonies passed laws making Africans slaves for life.⁴²

According to Schaefer, the proportion of Blacks in the United States has varied over the centuries and actually declined until the 1940s, primarily because White immigration (mostly from Europe) far outdistanced population growth by Blacks. In 1790, Africans represented a little over 19% of the total population of the United States. That percentage continued to decline to 9.7% in 1910. Today, Blacks, or African Americans, represent nearly 13% of the population and are the second largest microcultural group in the United States. In 2007, Blacks and Hispanics comprise nearly 27% of the U.S. population. Unlike the rapid and disproportionate growth of the Hispanic population since 1990, the rate of Black population growth remains relatively stable.⁴³

African Americans made significant progress in the 20th century due mostly to the civil rights movement. Although there remain significant gaps between Blacks and Whites in such areas as income, education, employment, and housing, Blacks have made significant progress in the past 60 years. For example, in 2005 nearly 30% of all Black families had

incomes of \$50,000 or more. Politically, the number of Black elected officials has increased nearly 300% since 1972. Schaefer notes also that an interesting phenomenon is developing: An ever-growing proportion of the Black population consists of Blacks that are foreign-born. Since 1984 the percentage of Blacks in the United States born outside the United States (mostly in the Caribbean) has almost doubled.⁴⁴

Black English, Dialect, and Ebonics

One of the primary ways in which members of cultural groups define themselves and establish ingroup and outgroup identities is through verbal and nonverbal language; that is, through conversation. Language is the foundation of individual and group construction. As groups residing in the same geographical country, African Americans and Euro-Americans differ in their use of language codes. Some linguists maintain that 80% to 90% of African Americans engage in what is frequently labeled “Black Language,” “Black Dialect,” “Black English,” or African American English (AAE). Geneva Smitherman argues that Black language is “an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage.”⁴⁵

The acceptance or rejection of Black English dialect has been a societal dilemma for many decades. As Smitherman and Cunningham note:

As in the past, today’s negative pronouncements on Ebonics reveal a serious lack of knowledge about the scientific approach to language analysis and a galling ignorance about what Ebonics is (more than slang) and who speaks it (at some point in their lives 80% to 90% of African-Americans).⁴⁶

To begin, it needs to be clear that both linguistically and functionally, Ebonics serves all communication functions. The term **Ebonics** (from *ebony* and *phonics*) was first coined in 1973 and refers to a grammatically complex African American speech pattern. Ebonics, or Black language, is uniquely derived from the language of descendants of slaves. Many linguists recognize Black language as a Creole that developed as a result of contact between Africans and Europeans; a new language was formed that was influenced by both languages and took on a variety of forms depending on whether there was French, Portuguese, or English influence. According to Weber, there is evidence that these languages were spoken on the western coast of Africa as early as the 1500s. Some linguists believe that Africans responded to the English language as do all other non-native speakers, that is, from the phonological and grammatical constructs of their native language. An example of Ebonics is the verb “to be,” which has a richer number of forms and meanings than in Standard English. For example, “Ahm in the hospital” would mean that “I am visiting the hospital once,” whereas, “I be in the hospital” means that “I am currently staying in the hospital for an indefinite period of time.” The language is spoken like other African languages in a consonant-vowel-consonant pattern, where some syllables are held longer and accented more strongly than in standard English, as in “DEE-troit.”⁴⁷

According to Ebonics scholar John Rickford, typical Ebonic pronunciations include the omission of the final consonant in words like *pas* (i.e., past) or *han* (i.e., hand), and the pronunciation of the *th* in *bath* as “t” (i.e., bat), and the pronunciation of the vowel in words like *my* and *ride* as long “ah,” as in “mah rahd.” According to Rickford, Ebonics pronunciations are systematic and the result of regular rules and restrictions found in any and all languages.

For instance, speakers regularly produce sentences without present tense *is* and *are*, as in “Joe trippin’” or “They allright.” But they don’t omit present tense *am*. Instead of the ungrammatical “Ah walkin,’” Ebonics speakers would say “Ahm walkin.’” Ebonics speakers use an invariant *be* in their speech (e.g., “They be goin’ to school every day”); however, this *be* is not simply equivalent to *is* or *are*. Invariant *be* refers to actions that occur regularly or habitually rather than on just one occasion.⁴⁸

In addition to its phonological and syntactic elements, Black language includes other communication dimensions that distinguish it from other languages and mark its speakers as members of a unique group. Thomas Kochman argues that African American expression is characteristically “emotionally intense, dynamic, and demonstrative,” whereas Euro-American expression is “more modest and emotionally restrained.”⁴⁹

In comparing African American and Euro-American modes of expression, Kochman asserts that when engaging an issue, Euro-Americans use a detached and unemotional form of “discussion,” whereas African Americans use an intense and involving form of “argument.” Kochman maintains that Euro-Americans tend to understate their talents whereas African Americans tend to boast about theirs. In essence, African American speech acts and events are more animated, lively, and forceful than Euro-American speech acts. According to Kochman, the animation and vitality of Black communication is due to the emotional force and spiritual energy that Blacks invest in their public presentations and the functional role that emotions play in realizing the goals of Black interactions, activities, and events. For example, a common goal of many African American speech events is to energize the audience into an emotional and spiritual release. Such speech events require a strong speaker, a medium that facilitates the emotional and spiritual release, and active participation from the audience. One type of communication that captures the essence of such revitalization is the “call-and-response” pattern involving reciprocal speech acts between speaker and audience. In the typical call-and-response mode, a speaker begins by calling, that is, making some point or assertion to which the audience responds. African studies professor Shirley Weber describes an instance of call and response while teaching:

During the lecture, one of my more vocal black students began to respond to the message with some encouraging remarks like “all right,” “make it plain,” “that all right,” and “teach.” She was soon joined by a few more black students who gave similar comments. I noticed that this surprised and confused some of the white students. When questioned later about this, their response was that they were not used to having more than one person talk at a time, and they really could not talk and listen at the same time. They found the comments annoying and disruptive. As the lecturer, I found the comments refreshing and inspiring.⁵⁰

African Americans often engage in call-and-response modes in a variety of formalized settings, such as church meetings, and during informal, everyday gatherings.

The Dozens

Weber outlines other modes of African American communication, including rappin’, runnin’ it down, and doin’/playin’ the dozens. The original meaning of the term *rappin’* refers to a dialogue between a man and woman wherein the man generates creative and imaginative

statements designed to win the affection of the woman. *Runnin' it down* is a speech event where the speaker's goal is to describe some event or situation in such detail that there is complete agreement and comprehension between speaker and audience. **Doin'/playin' the dozens** is a verbal battle of insults between speakers who are judged for their originality and creativity by a small group of listeners. This is the highest form of verbal warfare and impromptu speaking. The term *dozens* was used during slavery to refer to a selling technique used by slave owners. If an individual slave had a disability, he or she was considered damaged goods and was sold with eleven other damaged slaves at a discount rate. The term *dozens*, then, refers to negative physical attributes.⁵¹

In the early 1970s, University of Pennsylvania linguist William Labov conducted extensive field research in the inner cities of some of the major cities in the United States. Labov was interested in the language of the inner city used primarily by African Americans, and he called the language Black English vernacular (BEV). One practice studied by Labov was *playin' the dozens*. The dozens is game-like interaction according to a set of rules in which two players compete, in the form of insulting each other, for the admiration of the audience. There is a minimum of two players, and anyone within speaking distance can be forced by social pressure to play (see Figure 3.1). *Playin' the dozens* is also known as *soundin'*, *signifyin'*, *woofin'*, *cuttin'*, and so on depending on the particular location. The dozens is a highly rule-oriented speech event in which players insult (called *sounding*) each other, and an audience of listeners evaluates and selects a winner. *Sounding* is almost always about someone's mother—her age, weight, ugliness, Blackness, smell, the food she eats, the clothes she wears, her poverty, or her sexual activity. An important point here is that ritual insults are not intended as factual statements; they are not to be denied. The players and the audience know that these propositions are not true. Whether a sound is good or bad is determined by the amount of laughter it receives. But, as Labov notes, an even more forceful mode of approving sounds is for the audience members to repeat them. Negative reactions include the absence of laughter.⁵²

Origins of Black Language

The origins of many of these African American communicative modes can be traced to ancient African philosophies about the relationship between humans, the spoken word, and the fostering of community. According to African scholar Janheinz Jahn, the traditional African view of the world is one of extraordinary harmony. All being, all essence, in whatever form it is conceived, is subsumed under one of four categories: (a) *muntu*, or human being; (b) *kintu*, or thing; (c) *hantu*, or place and time; and (d) *kuntu*, or modality. Everything that exists must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and is conceived of not as some tangible substance but as a force that affects and is affected by the other forces. All of the forces are interrelated and work together to accomplish a common goal. For example, “scholar” belongs in the *muntu* category, “pen” in the *kintu* category, “university” in *hantu*, and “knowledge” in *kuntu*. Anything that exists has distinct characteristics that combine and relate with characteristics in the other categories. For example, the most distinguishing characteristic of *muntu* is the possession of *nommo*, that is, the magic power of the word. Through *nommo*, humans establish their mastery over the other things. According to Jahn, *nommo* is the

FIGURE 3.1 Black language includes many different communication dimensions that distinguish it from other languages.



SOURCE: © Kristin Finnegan/Getty Images.

life force, is the fluid as such, a unity of spiritual-physical fluidity, giving life to everything, penetrating everything, causing everything. . . . And since man has the power over the word, it is he who directs the life force. Through the word he receives it, shares it with other beings, and so fulfills the meaning of life.⁵³

Nothing exists without *nommo*; it is the force that fosters the sense of community between speaker and audience wherein they become one as senders and receivers.

Shirley Weber argues that the philosophy of *nommo* has been carried into contemporary African American society, where the audience listening and responding to a message is equally as important as the speaker. One of the foremost goals within any African American communicative context is to bring speaker and audience together as one, hence the call-and-response mode. In contemporary and traditional African American speech contexts, the speaker and audience share the platform.⁵⁴

The above discussion suggests that there are differences in the language use of African Americans and Euro-Americans, and that the reason for such differences may lie in its purpose. African Americans tend to use language to establish and maintain a sense of community. The use of a language that expresses their unique history, bridges social and economic gaps, and helps build their future is a critical ingredient in African American communication and membership in their microcultural group.

The Amish

One microcultural group that continues to fascinate much of America is the Amish. John Andrew Hostetler is a former Amish member who left his community and is considered the country's leading expert on Amish custom. Hostetler describes them as "a church, a community, a spiritual union, a conservative branch of Christianity, a religion, a community whose members practice simple and austere living, a familistic entrepreneuring system, and an adaptive human community."⁵⁵

The **Amish**, sometimes called "The Plain People" or "Old Order Amish," are an Anabaptist religious group that emigrated from Europe to the United States in the early 1700s. Currently, there are no Amish communities remaining in Europe. Today, Amish groups have settled in about 22 states and Ontario, Canada. Historically, the Amish immigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution. Their name is derived from one of their earliest leaders, Jacob Amman, a young Alsatian bishop and farmer who held a strong Bible-centered faith and was staunchly conservative. To his followers, Amman advocated nonresistance, adult baptism, disciplinary dress standards, and separatism from worldly fashion and influence. From 1730 through 1770, between 50 and 100 Amish families arrived in the United States and initially settled in Pennsylvania. Since then, several groups of Amish have moved farther west to settle in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, among other areas. The greatest concentration of Amish is in Holmes and adjoining counties in northeast Ohio. Next in size is a group of Amish people in Elkhart and surrounding counties in northeastern Indiana. Then comes the Amish settlement in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The Amish population in the United States numbers more than 150,000 and growing, due to large family size (seven children on average) and a church-member retention rate of approximately 80%.⁵⁶

An Isolated Microculture

Perhaps more than any other microcultural group, the Amish have been relatively successful at isolating themselves from the influences of the dominant culture. The Amish follow five basic tenets: adult baptism, separation of church and state, excommunication from the church for those who break moral law, living life in accordance with the teachings of Christ, and refusal to bear arms, take oaths, or hold political office. Living what they call nonresistant lives, they do not serve in the U.S. military. According to Rich Huber, who was raised a Mennonite in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the Amish follow the Bible as literally as possible, citing "Be ye not conformed to the world" (Romans 12:2) as their fundamental principle. Based on their interpretation of this Biblical passage, the Amish believe that true followers of Christ are to be separate from the world. Hence, to evade worldliness and the corruption and sin associated with it, the Amish have drawn strict boundaries between themselves and the dominant cultural milieu.⁵⁷

Although they are generally successful at avoiding contemporary American society, the Amish are considered American citizens and observe most U.S. laws. Hostetler notes that the Amish pay income, property, and sales taxes like everyone else. They do not pay Social Security taxes, nor do they receive Social Security benefits or any other type of government aid (e.g., food stamps, welfare). In addition, they avoid the courts in settlements of disputes, are forbidden to take oaths, do not serve on juries, and do not collect settlements by the courts.⁵⁸ Moreover, they take full responsibility for the education of their children and generally do not send their children to public schools. In fact, in 1972, the Supreme Court heard the case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* wherein the court exempted the various Amish sects from compulsory school attendance laws beyond eighth grade. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* represented the first time conflicts over education between the Amish and the government had been argued before the Supreme Court. This is significant because most Amish follow a “turn the other cheek” mentality and do not defend themselves. MacKaye notes that, when confronted, many Amish simply pack up their belongings and move somewhere else in order to be left alone.⁵⁹

Today, most Amish children are taught in one-room schoolhouses by teachers with no more than an eighth-grade education. Amish children attend school until the eighth grade, after which they are educated at home and go to work on the family farms. The Amish consider their society as a form of schooling. The Amish train their children vocationally. Almost exclusively, Amish boys become farmers, carpenters, or tradesmen and girls become homemakers. Beginning on their 16th birthday, Amish youth enter a kind of decision-making phase, called a “simmie” period, wherein they are to contemplate whether or not they will maintain or renounce their Amish identity. During this time, they are exposed to deviant behaviors and attitudes. The Amish believe that exposing their youth to deviance functions to select out those who might not be fit to be adult Amish. Professor Denise Reiling, of Eastern Michigan University, argues that many of the behaviors considered deviant among the Amish would be considered relatively harmless in many other cultural contexts. Behaviors considered deviant to the Amish include being an annoyance, acting irresponsibly, hurting another person’s feelings, telling lies, excluding another person from a group activity, or just acting in an unwise, reckless, or impractical fashion. Reiling reports that at the end of their simmie period, the teens announce their decision to either reject or adopt Amish identity. Approximately 20% of youths eventually defect from the Amish. Although the simmie period often results in depression and anxiety for the youth, Reiling notes that most youth remain in the simmie period for 2 to 3 years, whereas others take as long as 8 to 10 years to make a decision. Those that defect are immediately excommunicated, resulting in ostracism and physical separation from their family and from the entire Amish settlement.⁶⁰

The Amish have virtually no unemployment.⁶¹ Like other religiously oriented microcultural groups, the Amish believe that God is the absolute power in the universe. They believe that their life on earth is preparation for their afterlife in heaven. As a result, many of the values and behaviors of the Amish may be similar to mainstream America, but for very different reasons. By the time they die, the Amish want their earthly sins settled. Hence, every day is to be lived well so as to please God. The Amish do not believe that entrance to heaven is guaranteed, however.⁶² As Hostetler notes, complete assurance of heaven is seen as obnoxious because it smacks of pride and boasting. Hence, humility, self-denial, and submissiveness are at the core of Amish values.⁶³

Because the Amish very much want their group to remain much as it was in the 17th century, they are very slow to change. They choose to examine change very carefully before

they accept it. If a new idea or change does not help them keep their lives simple and their families together, they will probably reject it. Hence, the Amish eschew most modern technologies such as electricity, automobiles, and other conveniences (see Figure 3.2).⁶⁴ Also, based on the Biblical passage “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that . . . is in the earth” (Exodus 20:4), the Amish do not take photographs.⁶⁵

Unlike mainstream American society, the Amish are a collectivistic community, what they call *Gemeinde*, which translates to “redemptive community.” From this perspective, individuals depend on their community for their identity. The Amish believe that a person’s self-worth is defined by his or her role in the community. Individual achievement, self-ambition, power, and worldly acquisitions are not valued. Sharing, community effort, and trading are the core values of most Amish communities. The Amish believe that community service gains access to God and eternal life.⁶⁶ Because of their collectivistic orientation, each member of the group has a well-defined role. For example, sex roles among Amish men and women are very clearly prescribed. Patterns of dress and a strict division of labor separate

FIGURE 3.2 The Amish eschew many modern technologies.



SOURCE: © Sylvain Grandadam/Getty Images.

men and women in Amish society. Exclusively, Amish women are homemakers and Amish men are farmers, with the exception of those men who join the ministry.⁶⁷

Verbal Communication of the Amish

Most Amish are trilingual; that is, they speak three languages. They speak a dialect of German, called high German, during church services. At home or during informal gatherings, they speak low German, sometimes called Pennsylvania Dutch (the term derived from non-Amish mispronunciation of *Deutsche*). They also learn and speak English at school and when interacting with non-Amish persons. Like all other microcultures, the Amish frequently use phrases and sayings that carry meaning to them. In their study of Amish verbal phrases and colloquialisms, Moellendorf, Warsh, and Yoshimaru report that one traditional Amish saying in German is “Das alt Gebrauch ist besser,” which translates to “The old way is the better way.” According to Moellendorf and her colleagues, the Amish believe that past traditions and the old way of living are superior to the conveniences of modern life and its new technologies. Occasionally, outsiders look to the Amish as an idyllic community. They see the Amish lifestyle as free from the pressures of the modern world. To this, the Amish say, “It’s not all pies and cakes,” meaning that the life of the Amish may appear simple and serene, but in reality, the life of an Amish person is hard, disciplined, and strenuous. Although it happens only infrequently, sometimes an individual will leave the Amish community and join a less demanding church, such as the Mennonites, or another community. To this, the Amish say, “He got his hair cut” as a polite way of communicating that the individual was unable to meet the rigorous standards of the Amish. The saying also suggests that the person has lost his masculine tie (i.e., his long hair) to the community. Another way of communicating a similar phenomenon is “He went English,” which is said when an Amish member has left the community to become a part of mainstream American culture.⁶⁸

To enforce church order and discipline, the Amish engage in a form of excommunication called “the ban” or “shunning.” Shunning includes prohibiting attendance at church and, in its most extreme form, most types of involvement with members of the community. The ban is particularly difficult for other members of a family who may have a member shunned. In such cases they are expected to cut off all communication with that person.⁶⁹

Nonverbal Communication of the Amish

Moellendorf and her colleagues also studied the nonverbal communication of the Amish and found that the Amish have a very distinct nonverbal communication system. According to Moellendorf, one’s role in an Amish community is nonverbally communicated by his or her physical appearance and dress. For example, the style of hats worn by Amish men communicate their age and marital status. A black hat with three or more inches of brim is given to Amish boys at about the age of 2. The larger brim is to communicate the young boy’s innocence. A bridegroom’s hat has a crease around the top and a wide seam along the brim signaling his marriage. Amish fathers wear hats with flat crowns. An Amish woman’s bonnet is her way to communicate her marital status. All Amish women wear bonnets over the back part of their hair. Young girls wear colored bonnets and begin to wear black bonnets at about the age of 9. Married Amish women wear white bonnets.⁷⁰

In addition to hats and bonnets, Amish hairstyles communicate status. Young girls wear braids that are fastened around their forehead. At about the age of 10, their hair is arranged into a bun. Adult Amish women never cut their hair; they part it in the middle and wear a bun. Most Amish women do not shave their legs or trim their eyebrows, as such behavior is seen as interfering with God's work. Amish men shave until marriage, at which time they grow beards, which are analogous to wedding rings. If a single man reaches the age of 40, he may grow a beard. In all cases, married or not, the beard is left untrimmed, and mustaches are not allowed because of their long association with the military.⁷¹ To communicate submissiveness and pride, enhance group unity, and indicate the desire to be separate from the rest of the contemporary world, only very plain clothing is worn by the Amish. To the Amish, dress is a statement of conformity to group values. A man's shirt is pocketless, and his trousers do not have hip pockets and are worn with suspenders so that they are not tight. For women, ribbons, bows, makeup, and jewelry are forbidden as they are seen as haughty and vain. The dresses of older Amish women close in front with skirts that touch the tops of their shoes. Women are never allowed to wear pants and typically wear an apron over the dress. Generally the colors of both men's and women's clothing are restricted to white, green, blue, or purple.⁷²

Another nonverbal dimension to the Amish is the horse and buggy. Kraybill argues that the horse and buggy serve as the prime symbol of Amish life. To the Amish, the horse communicates tradition, time, and proof that the Amish have not succumbed to the conveniences of modern life. The buggy, which is typically gray, communicates *Gelassenheit*, which means a surrender to communal values and modesty. Moreover, because the buggies all look alike, they serve as a kind of equalizer among the Amish.⁷³

Amidst incredible societal and technological change, the Amish have maintained their lifestyle for more than 200 years. Although they are generally a quiet and reserved micro-culture that prefers to be isolated from the dominant culture, some Amish have recently become the target for hate crimes. Ironically, their nonflamboyant appearance and subdued behavior, along with their horses and buggies and their refusal to adapt the modern technologies, have rendered the Amish an easy target. In a recent example where a young man shot at an Amish buggy full of children and then raped a young Amish woman, the assailant was quoted as saying that he wanted the Amish to know that they do not own this world and that there are other people in the world.⁷⁴ Father J. Mahoney, a priest who has studied various religious groups, argues that the Amish have tried to freeze their culture in the late 17th century. Throughout the centuries, as the mainstream culture of the United States progressed technologically, the Amish have tried to preserve their lifestyle, creating a disparity between them and the dominant culture. That disparity, and disagreements as to how far they should go in accommodating to it, will remain the major challenge in the coming decades for the Amish.⁷⁵ As Hostetler notes:

Over the past three centuries the Amish and other Anabaptist groups have been suspended between two opposing forces: the political forces that would eliminate ethnicity from the face of the earth and the human communities who regard ethnicity as a natural and necessary extension of the familial bonds that integrate human activities. Caught between these forces the "plain" people have sometimes prospered and sometimes suffered for their faith.⁷⁶

The Hmong

While most students in the United States learn about America's involvement in the Vietnam War, some never learn of the "Secret War" fought on behalf of the United States during this time. The "Secret War" refers to the thousands of **Hmong** who were recruited by the U.S. military through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to help fight the war against Communism in Southeast Asia. According to Daphne Winland, the Hmong belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Being culturally similar to the Chinese, Hmong origins can be traced back to China, where they lived peacefully for hundreds of years. Approximately 150 years ago, Chinese rulers began a campaign of persecution to extinguish the Hmong language. The Hmong moved southward and westward out of China and organized communities in Burma, Thailand, North Vietnam, and the mountains of Laos. Winland points out that the Hmong, which means "free people" or "mountain people," were singled out by the Central Intelligence Agency during the Vietnam War because of their geographically strategic location in the mountains of Laos.⁷⁷ In the 1960s, the CIA began secretly enlisting Hmong to prevent North Vietnamese troops from entering and moving supplies to South Vietnam through Laos. The Hmong also set up navigational aids for American bombers and fought to protect them when they were attacked by the North Vietnamese. In addition, Hmong soldiers were highly skilled in the operations required to rescue American pilots shot down over Laos (the United States flew more tactical missions over Laos than it did over Vietnam).⁷⁸ The Hmong were fierce fighters yet suffered devastating losses estimated at more than 100 times greater (proportionately) than the United States. Although estimates vary, most experts agree that more than 25,000 Hmong lost their lives fighting for the United States during the Vietnam War.⁷⁹

Due to intense political pressures at home, the United States had vowed not to escalate the war into Laos. Hence, the Hmong became known as "the Secret Army," and their participation in the war was called "the Secret War."⁸⁰ In 1975, the United States withdrew its forces from Vietnam. Concurrently, a Communist-backed government, supported by the Vietnamese and Soviets, assumed power in Laos. One of the foremost goals of the new Laotian government was to annihilate the Hmong people because of their alliance with the United States. The Communists tortured, raped, and murdered thousands of Hmong. They napalmed their villages and slaughtered their cattle. There is evidence that the Communists used chemical and biological weapons in their attempt to wipe out the Hmong. With the United States having withdrawn from Vietnam, the Hmong were left without any allies in the midst of their enemies and a new war.⁸¹ More than 200,000 Hmong fled to Thailand, where they were housed in prison-like conditions in refugee camps. Many Hmong immigrated to the United States, Australia, and France. Approximately 100,000 or so made it to the United States. Today, approximately 150,000 Hmong reside in the United States, with large concentrations in California, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Although they were hired and paid by the United States, Hmong soldiers have received little or no recognition for their efforts and do not receive veteran benefits. In May 1997, the United States finally acknowledged Hmong veterans with a granite marker in Arlington National Cemetery that reads, "The U.S. Secret Army in the Kingdom of Laos 1961–1973." In both the Laotian and Hmong languages, the marker also reads, "You will never be forgotten." In 1995 there were still as many as 40,000 Hmong residing in refugee camps in Thailand.⁸²

Duffy alleges that life in the United States has been very difficult for many Hmong. For the most part, Hmong immigrants have not been welcome. Unfortunately, many people inaccurately associate the Hmong with the “enemy” in the Vietnam War. To add to their arduous situation, many stereotypes preceded their immigration to the United States. News coverage of the Hmong often referred to them as a “pre-literate,” “primitive,” and “hill-tribe” group.⁸³ Moreover, writes Winland, during this time period just about anything associated with the Vietnam War was anathema. Hence, the Hmong entered the United States being doubted and distrusted by many, and facing the straightforward bigotry of others. The Hmong find themselves in a situation of relative dependency on U.S. culture while simultaneously facing a real sense of cultural isolation.⁸⁴

Unlike the African Americans or the Amish, who have been in the United States for centuries, the Hmong are unique in that they are first-generation immigrants. Their values, customs, and modes of communication have collided head-on with mainstream American culture. For example, the Hmong are traditionally a collectivistic culture.

According to Katie Thao, a native Hmong who immigrated to the United States when she was a teenager, the most important group is the family clan. Hmong family clans are patrilineal. Hmong males are given two names—one in childhood and the other when they reach adulthood. When children are born, they are given their father’s clan name. When women marry, they keep their father’s clan name and do not adopt their husband’s even though they become formal members of his clan. Conversely, Hmong women do not receive an adult name, but become known by their husband’s clan name. There are between 20 and 30 clan names. The most common clan names in the United States include Cha, Hang, Her, Kong, Kue, Moua, Lee, Lo or Lor, Thao or Thor, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang.⁸⁵

Role Relationships and Marriage

According to Ray Hutchison and Miles McNall, many of the Hmong customs associated with clan membership that have been imported to the United States include sex role relationships and marriage practices (see Figure 3.3). For the most part, these practices clash with American customs. For example, in traditional Hmong culture, women maintain clearly subordinate roles. Their role is to bear children, maintain the household, and be subservient to their husbands. One way Hmong women demonstrate their subordinate status is by walking directly behind their husbands when in public. Moreover, they have little or nothing to say in the decision making or political affairs of their clans. Some husbands refuse to allow their wives to learn English, hence keeping them muted and powerless in American culture. For the most part, first-generation Hmong women are not allowed an education and are expected to marry early, between the ages of 13 and 18 (whereas men marry between the ages of 18 and 30). Although the practices are gradually changing in the United States, many Hmong marriages in the United States are still arranged. Many communities report that a high percentage of Hmong girls drop out of high school to get married. Indeed, Hmong women have the youngest average age of marriage of all Southeast Asian refugee groups. Moreover, Hmong fertility rates in the United States are much higher than those of any other refugee or immigrant group.⁸⁶

Katie Thao participated in an arranged marriage. She did not meet her husband-to-be until the day of her wedding. To many Americans, an arranged marriage seems ridiculous

FIGURE 3.3 Many customs are imported to the United States, such as sex role relationships and marriage practices.



SOURCE: Copyright © Keren Su/Getty Images.

and absurd. But Thao asserts that she was completely comfortable with the idea because she had confidence in her parents, especially her father, to negotiate a good husband for her. Thao contends that an arranged Hmong marriage is a matter of considerable maneuvering and bargaining. Typically each family selects an elderly male spokesman. These spokesmen, usually the fathers, then negotiate and bargain a bride price that is to be paid to the bride's parents. The philosophy behind "buying a wife" is to ensure that she will be highly valued by her new family. In many cases, the parents of the bride hold a feast of roasted pig in their home in celebration of the wedding. After the wedding ceremony, the souls and good fortune of the bride and groom are symbolically wrapped in an umbrella that is carried in procession to the groom's home, where another feast is held. If the bride is entering the groom's home for the first time (which is usually the case because the bride and groom are strangers), a rooster is waved over the bride to symbolize her membership in the groom's clan. In most cases, a Hmong marriage is seen not as a bonding of two people but as a union of two family clans. In some cases, if a married Hmong woman's husband dies, she automatically becomes the wife of his younger brother.⁸⁷

Communication Patterns of the Hmong

Like most microcultural groups, the Hmong share some unique verbal and nonverbal communication patterns. The overwhelming majority of the first Hmong immigrants entering the United States did not speak English. Historically, because the Hmong migrated so often, their written language was eventually lost. Not until the 1950s were orthographies of the written language developed. Well over half of the Hmong who immigrated to the United States could not read or write. For the Hmong who immigrated to Laos, they were taught in Buddhist temples in the Lao language and Lao alphabet.

In Laos today, there are two major dialects of Hmong language. One is “Hmoob Dawb,” meaning White Hmong, and the other is “Hmoob Ntsuab,” meaning Blue Hmong. Because the White Hmong are in the majority, Hmoob Dawb is spoken more frequently.⁸⁸

According to Thao, the phrase “Playing a flute into a water buffalo’s ear” is used by the Hmong when someone is trying, without success, to explain something to another who simply does not understand. Often, Hmong will refer to someone who does not understand a message as some kind of animal, often a water buffalo. The idea of a flute is significant because in traditional Hmong culture, the flute communicates emotions, such as sorrow, love, and even anger or depression. Another phrase, “The grinder doesn’t taste salty,” is used to refer to a person who is bankrupt. Salt is a very valuable ingredient to the Hmong, and when there is no salt, it is an indication that the family is out of money.

The Hmong are animistic, meaning that they believe that everything has a spirit. According to Thao, the supernatural is a very real part of Hmong life. Evil spirits are thought to exist in unpopulated areas; therefore many Hmong are afraid to travel alone in uninhabited places. The phrase “The devil will not eat or chew anyone for it” is said when an act or crime is committed wherein no one will be caught or found guilty. The Hmong believe that evil spirits such as the devil are omnipresent and can hear and see everything. If the devil will not eat anyone, then the act will go unpunished. “Go check the mousetrap” is said in reference to a meal that is shared by an entire clan or village. The phrase is used when someone goes to the meal, similar to when a mouse goes to the trap in search of food and gets trapped. When a person goes to a meal, he or she gets trapped in the company of the clan or family. Many of the Hmong sayings and colloquialisms are indirect expressions. The Hmong believe that if the truth is spoken directly, evil spirits or unwanted guests can overhear it. Thao says that a Hmong farmer might call out to his family, “Come sharpen your knives” rather than calling out “It’s time to eat” because the latter might attract evil spirits or animals, who will eat up the meal.⁸⁹

One of the most significant forms of nonverbal communication for the Hmong are their *paj ntaub*, pronounced “pandoa.” Paj ntaub, meaning “flower cloth,” are sophisticated stitched quilts embroidered with bright threads. They often feature picturesque geometric designs that occasionally feature animals or other creatures. Since their immigration to the United States, paj ntaub have evolved into “storycloths” often depicting the history and life experiences of the Hmong culture. Evolving from the Thai refugee camps, story cloths were a means to teach written language to Hmong children and others. Now they are treated as works of art and a vehicle for the Hmong to document their history and retain their cultural identity. Created exclusively by Hmong women, the cloths carry much significance. The quality of the needlework communicates the skill and creativity of the women who make them and may bring them a higher bride-price at the time of marriage bargaining.⁹⁰

Other nonverbal gestures used in Hmong culture include twitching the eyes to communicate contempt to another. Twitching the eyes during a long stare is very offensive and may

lead to a physical confrontation. Slapping oneself on the buttocks is a nonverbal way of saying “kiss my ass” or “lick my ass.” Kneeling is done only by men when they want to express their thanks or to ask another for mercy and forgiveness. A woman’s kneeling has little or no value because of her low rank and position in Hmong clans.⁹¹

Elliot Barkan writes that acculturation in the United States has been difficult for the Hmong. The first-generation Hmong, arriving in the United States in the mid-1970s, have tried hard to preserve their culture, whereas their children, exposed to the values and communication system of the dominant culture, are caught in between two cultures. The older Hmong try to preserve the traditional ways while contemporary culture, including the educational system, encourages their assimilation. Acculturation for the elderly Hmong has been particularly difficult. The age and sex hierarchies that prescribed their superior status are gone. In Laos, women have few, if any, rights. In the United States, of course, wives have equal rights. Language has played a key role as well. A Hmong child’s quick acquisition of English almost reverses traditional family roles. Contrary to their traditional roles, the parents are now dependent on the child’s communication skills to get along. Many parents feel that the learning of such skills undermines their authority. Hence some parents develop a sense of loss and worthlessness and fall into deep depressions.⁹²

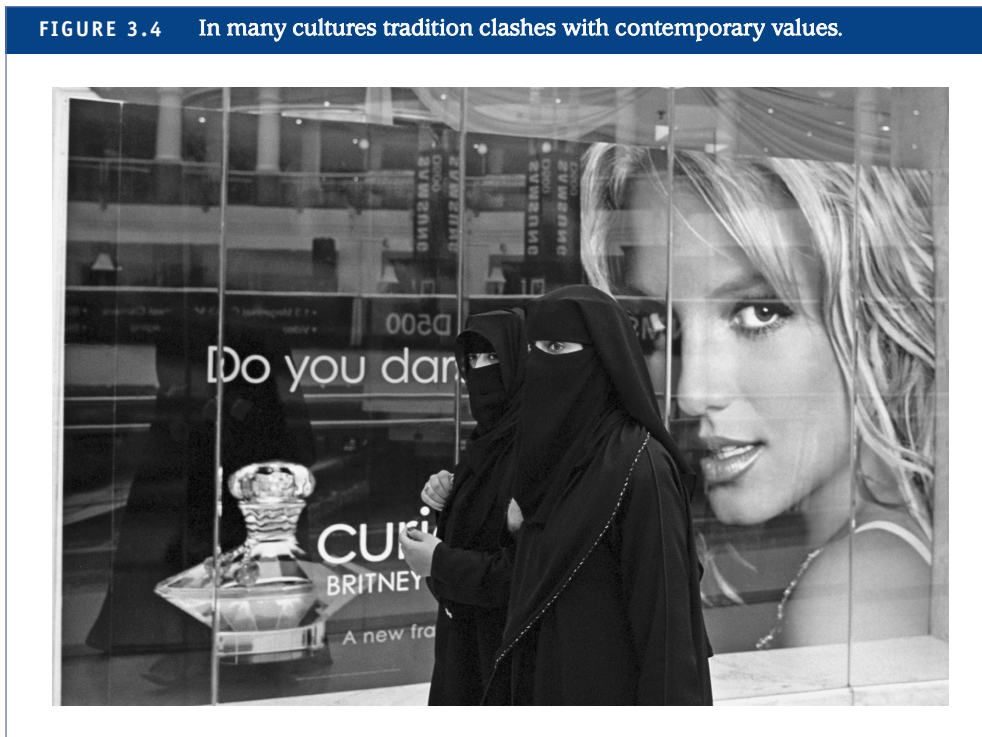
Arab Americans

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., in September 2001, increased racial, ethnic, and religious hostility has left Arab Americans, Middle Easterners, and those who bear physical likeness to members of these groups in a precarious state. Arab American groups (such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) report numerous attacks on people from these various cultural and ethnic groups since September 11, 2001. Hundreds of people have been beaten, killed, threatened, ridiculed, and harassed because they were thought to be Arabian and somehow associated with those who attacked the United States. But of all the microcultural groups discussed in this chapter thus far, these groups (i.e., Arab Americans, Middle Easterners) are perhaps the most ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse group in the country. In fact, to classify these people into one group is impossible.

The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Arabs as White. And, for the first time in its history, in 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau officially classified persons in the United States who had Arab ancestry. According to the Census Bureau, people with ancestries originating from Arabic-speaking countries or areas of the world were classified as **Arab**. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that in 2003, 1.2 million people living in the United States consider themselves as having Arab ancestry, an increase of nearly 40% since 1990. The Arab American Institute believes that at least 3.5 million people in America have roots in the Arabic-speaking world, however. They maintain that Arab Americans are undercounted in the census because some Arab Americans do not understand the relevance of the census and its confidentiality, or did not respond to the question that measures ethnic ancestry. Another problem with this classification is that a person is included in the Arab ancestry category if he or she reported being Arab, Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, North African, Palestinian, Syrian, and so on. Yet many people from these countries do not consider themselves to be Arab, and conversely, some people who consider themselves Arab may not be included in this classification. For example, groups such as Kurds and Berbers who are typically not considered Arab were

included in this definition for consistency with the 1990 and 2000 census. Moreover, some groups, such as Mauritians, Somalians, Djiboutians, Sudanese, and Comoros Islanders, who may consider themselves Arab, were not included. Arab Americans can be found in virtually every state in the United States, but over 60% live in 10 states. Approximately 30% of all Arab Americans live in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York. Moreover, the majority of Arab Americans were born in the United States and over 80% are citizens.⁹⁵

To be sure, the Arab American population is misunderstood. For example, Arab Americans are often thought to be Muslim. But Helen Hatab Samhan, the Executive Director of the Arab American Institute, points out that Arab Americans are as diverse as any other microcultural group in the United States (see Figure 3.4). Moreover, she maintains that religious affiliation among Arab Americans is one of their most defining characteristics. Most people do not know, for example, that the majority of Arab Americans descend from mostly Christian immigrants. In fact, roughly two thirds of the Arab population identifies with one or more Christian sects. To be sure, however, Samhan notes that since the 1950s, Arab Muslims represent the fastest growing segment of the Arab American community. And Samhan recognizes that this creates some challenges for this group. For example, Muslim Arabs in America have religious traditions and practices that differ considerably from other religions in the United States. The beliefs of Islam emphasize the importance of modesty, reject interfaith marriage, and object to typical standards of dating or gender integration. Other religious practices such as the five-times-daily prayers, the monthlong fast at Ramadan, beards for men, and the wearing of the hijab (headcover) for



SOURCE: © Steve Raymer/Corbis.

women render Muslims more visible than other microcultural groups and thus open to stereotyping. Despite the challenges, Samhan notes that Arab Americans continue to make significant contributions to U.S. culture. She points out that the Lebanese-born poet–artist Kahlil Gibran is widely read and appreciated by American readers, and William Blatty (*The Exorcist*), children’s author Naomi Shihab Nye, and Edward Said are also well known. White House press corps leader Helen Thomas and consumer advocate and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader are internationally known. In the field of entertainment, Arab Americans include the actor–comic Danny Thomas, actress Kathy Najimy, and Tony Shalhoub, singers Paul Anka and Paula Abdul, and Casey Kasem, “America’s Top 40” disc jockey. Well-known sports figures include Doug Flutie and Jeff George of the National Football League. Such business stars as J. M. Hagggar, the clothing manufacturer, and Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s photocopy stores, are among the many Arabs who have made significant contributions to American culture.⁹⁴

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Within most cultures, there are groups of people who differ in some significant way from the general societal culture. In this book, the term *microculture* is used to refer to those identifiable groups of people who share a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors and who possess a common history and a verbal and nonverbal symbol system that is similar to the dominant culture but varies in some way, perhaps subtly. Microcultures can be different from the larger culture in a variety of ways, most often because of race, ethnicity, language, or behavior. But one’s age group or occupation might also render one a member of a microcultural group. Perhaps every member of a culture is also a member of a microcultural group. In this chapter, Hispanics, African Americans, Amish, Hmong, and Arab Americans were profiled as microcultural groups in the United States. Mostly because of immigration and high fertility rates, Hispanics are now the largest microcultural group in the United States. Like many microcultural groups, Hispanics experience lower incomes, higher poverty, and higher unemployment rates than the non-Hispanic White groups. The U.S. government estimates that the Hispanic population will continue to grow through the first half of the 21st century. By then, Hispanic economic influence will be significant. As an economic, political, and socially powerful group, African Americans have maintained an important part of their history, that is, their language. African American history is expressed in the language games that African Americans play and in their daily communication with others in the form of Ebonics. The Amish were also profiled in this chapter. More than any other microcultural group, the Amish have preserved their traditional culture while peacefully coexisting within the rule structure of the dominant cultural milieu. Unlike any other microcultural group, the Amish have successfully isolated themselves from most of mainstream American culture.

Possibly the newest microcultural group in the United States is the Hmong. The Hmong are a group of people who fought alongside American troops in the Vietnam War, only to be abandoned when the war was lost. Having immigrated to the United States, the Hmong try desperately to adapt to U.S. culture while simultaneously maintaining some aspects of their traditional culture. Like African Americans, the Hmong face a great deal of racism and resentment.

Finally, Arab Americans were profiled. Unfortunately, these people are now one of the most negatively stereotyped groups in the United States. Until we learn more about their complex culture, this trend will probably continue.

Although each of the microcultural groups portrayed in this chapter is obviously different from the others, they share at least one major feature, that is, language. Each group, while adapting and accommodating to the dominant cultural surroundings, has successfully preserved a part of its original culture through communication. The verbal and nonverbal language of its cultural group maintains its heritage and allows its people to pass along its ancestry for future generations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what microcultural groups do you belong?
2. Who do you know who is a member of a microcultural group?
3. How are microcultural group members in your community treated differently than other members?
4. What are some of the common stereotypes in your community of microcultural group members?
5. How might members of your community assist microcultural groups in becoming fully engaged in the culture?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

African Americans: Microcultural group in the United States whose ancestors were brought to the United States as slaves.

Amish: A microcultural religiously oriented group whose members practice simple and austere living.

Arab: A person with ancestries originating from Arabic-speaking countries or areas of the world.

Doin’/playin’ the dozens: A verbal battle of insults between speakers who are judged for their originality and creativity by a small group of listeners. This is the highest form of verbal warfare and impromptu speaking in many African American communities.

Ebonics: From the terms *ebony* and *phonics*, a grammatically robust and rich African American speech pattern whose roots are in West Africa.

Hispanic: Defined by the U.S. government as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

Hmong: Microculture belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family and culturally similar to the Chinese. The Hmong, whose name means “free people” or “mountain people,” fought for the United States during the Vietnam War, and many have immigrated to the United States since the end of the war.

Microculture: An identifiable group of people who share a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors and who possess a common history and a verbal and nonverbal symbol system that is similar to but systematically varies from the larger, often dominant cultural milieu.

Minority group: A subordinate group whose members have significantly less power and control over their own lives than members of the dominant or majority group.

Muslim: A person who practices Islam.

Muted groups: Microcultures whose members are forced to express themselves (e.g., speak, write) within the dominant mode of expression.

Spanglish: Hybrid language combining the phonological features (i.e., sounds) and syntactic structures (grammar) of English and Spanish.

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