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Chapter 2: Culture and Media

Learning Objectives

Section 2.1 Thinking about Culture and Media Sociologically

2.1.1 Illustrate culture and cultural elements using media as an example.
2.1.2 Recognize how each of the five elements of the iSoc model can be used to examine culture and media sociologically.
2.1.3 Explain how ethnocentrism and cultural relativism lead to different understandings of cultural diversity.
2.1.4 Differentiate between subcultures and countercultures.

Section 2.2 Culture in Interactions

2.2.1 Explain what symbols are and how sociologists understand them as pieces of culture that simultaneously unite and divide.
2.2.2 Describe the ways that language shapes the ways we understand ourselves and the societies in which we live.
2.2.3 Differentiate among rituals, norms, and values, and identify the ways they are socially enforced.
2.2.4 Distinguish among folkways, mores, and laws, and recognize societal values as subject to change and disagreement.

Section 2.3 Cultural Institutions and the Institutionalization of Culture

2.3.1 Describe the primary components of contemporary mass media and how they have been subject to cultural change.
2.3.2 Differentiate between high and popular culture and how they relate to cultural capital.
2.3.3 Understand fads and fashions, how they emerge, and how they are a part of our cultural tool kits.
2.3.4 Explain the movement of culture around the world and the process by which some cultures are situated as more dominant than others as a result of this movement.

Section 2.4 Continuity and Change in Culture and Media

2.4.1 Summarize the ways that cultural change occurs and is resisted.

Chapter Summary

The concept of culture is a core way for sociologists to understand the context that links biography to history. Sociologists study cultural diversity both within and between cultures, examining the six elements of culture (material culture, symbols, language, rituals, norms, and values) to understand how culture shapes human behavior and beliefs. Sociologists also study

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the political issues behind culture, such as the difference between ethnocentric and cultural relativist views of other societies, the social forces dividing high culture and popular culture, and how cultural change may be imposed by others.

Chapter Outline

I. Section 2.1 Thinking about Culture and Media Sociologically
   a. Culture and Media LO 2.1.1 Illustrate culture and cultural elements using media as an example.
      i. The concept of culture is one of the core lenses through which sociologists see the world. *Culture* (the sets of values and ideals that we understand to define morality, good and evil, appropriate and inappropriate, larger structural forces, and how we perceive them) is part of what differentiates human life from that of other animals. Unlike other animals, humans have a conscious history, transmitting culture from generation to generation. Culture is also the foundation of society—both the material basis for social life and the ideas, beliefs, and values that people have.
      ii. Culture includes both *material culture* and *nonmaterial culture*. The ideas that make up our nonmaterial culture vary in relation to the material culture the society experiences.
         1. *Material culture* includes what people make and what they make it with, things that both achieve our subsistence needs and also things that help us answer larger questions about the meaning of what we do.
         2. *Nonmaterial culture* refers to the ideas and beliefs that people develop about their lives and their world.
      iii. Media (the ways we communicate with each other) is composed of both material and nonmaterial culture. Sociologists are interested in the access to media by different groups with different resources and also in the effects of media—how they affect our behaviors and attitudes, how they bring some of us together while driving some of us apart, and how they shape our everyday lives.
   b. iSoc: Culture and Media LO 2.1.2 Recognize how each of the five elements of the iSoc model can be used to examine culture and media sociologically.
      i. Identity: Culture provides you with the tools and the arena to experience yourself as a unique individual. Culture is what makes you feel like you. Importantly, people actively create their identities through media. From our Facebook pages to our texts, tweets, and emails, we use media to express, situate, and establish our personal identities.
      ii. Inequality: Cultures are not necessarily equal, and cultural ideas often become the basis for unequal treatment in society. For example, some cultures teach that homosexuality is a cultural abomination while others accept it as another way for people to love each other. Additionally, many cultures believe that their ways are superior to the ways of other cultures, which is a powerful way in which social inequality is expressed.
      iii. Interaction: Culture provides us with both a sense of belonging and a set of

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practices that reminds us of this feeling and reinforces it. Culture establishes pathways that facilitate social interactions and become the basis for developing new traditions and rituals in society. This is constantly evolving as mass and social media make new kinds of interactions possible.

iv. Institutions: Rituals and traditions can become codified into organized, coherent institutions, with formal rules and procedures governing how we will interact with members of our group, and with members of other groups. For example, mass media has become a social institution in its own right through its ability to transmit the cultural values and rules of society to its members.

v. Intersections: Many cultures draw boundaries between groups within a society on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, and so on. Examining these intersections helps sociologists understand how cultures works to differently position groups relative to one another in society.

c. Culture and Identity: Diversity and Universality LO 2.1.3 Explain how ethnocentrism and cultural relativism lead to different understandings of cultural diversity.

i. Cultures around the world, and even subcultures within one culture, are extremely diverse, and we may find the differences appealing or repulsive. *Cultural diversity* is a term used to describe the vast differences between the cultures of the world as well as the differences in belief and behavior that exist within cultures.

ii. We often experience *culture shock* when encountering a different culture, a feeling of disorientation when the cultural markers that we rely on to help us know where we are and how to act have suddenly changed.

iii. The condemnation of other cultures because they are different is called *ethnocentrism*. Ethnocentrism can bias one's view of another culture, so sociologists try to take the position of *cultural relativism*, a position which holds that all cultures are equally valid in the experience of their own members. However, many sociologists believe that there are some universal human values and that we can still make some moral judgments about other cultures while taking a cultural relativist perspective.

iv. Although cultures vary dramatically in the ways they go about even the most basic activities, certain elements appear in virtually every society. Sociologists refer to these as cultural universals (e.g., history, language, kinship, education).

d. Identity and Inequality: Subcultures and Countercultures LO 2.1.4 Differentiate between subcultures and countercultures.

i. Cultures may include subgroups, including subcultures and countercultures. A *subculture* is a group of people within a culture who share some distinguishing characteristics, beliefs, values, or attributes that set them apart from the dominant culture. Subcultures arise when a group both is the target of prejudice from the mainstream (providing the motive to create a subculture) and has social power (providing the ability to do so).

ii. While a subculture is defined by its difference from the mainstream, a *counterculture* is based on both difference from and opposition to the

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dominant culture, and so requires strict conformity from its members. Countercultures may be seen as a threat to the dominant culture and policed or controlled as a result.

II. Section 2.2 Culture in Interactions

a. Material Culture and Symbols LO 2.2.1 Explain what symbols are and how sociologists understand them as pieces of culture that simultaneously unite and divide.

i. A *symbol* is anything—an idea, a marking, an image—that carries additional meanings beyond itself to others who share in the culture. We use symbols to communicate our ideas and feelings to other members of our culture. The symbols do not mean the same thing to people outside the culture, and there are often conflicts within a society about the meaning of certain symbols.

b. Language LO 2.2.2 Describe the ways that language shapes the ways we understand ourselves and the societies in which we live.

i. *Language* is an organized set of symbols by which we are able to think and communicate with others and is essential for human beings to develop a sense of self. Other animals have some forms of communication, but it involves only the present. Human language engages past, present, and future; is used to transmit culture to the next generation; and shapes our perception of the world (the conclusion of the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*). The language we use can be political and can convey cultural ideas about certain groups (men and women, racial groups, etc.).

c. Rituals, Norms, and Values LO 2.2.3 Differentiate among rituals, norms, and values, and identify the ways they are socially enforced.

i. *Rituals* refer to practices by which members of a culture engage in routine behaviors to express their sense of belonging to the culture. Rituals help cultures cohere and persist over time by expressing the group's unity and enabling each member to feel connected to the culture.

ii. *Norms* are our cultural standards for behavior. *Values* are the culture's ethical standards and are therefore the foundation of norms. Norms prescribe behavior within the culture; values explain to us what the culture has determined is right and wrong. In other words, norms tell us how to behave and values tell us why.

d. Types of Norms and Values LO 2.2.4 Distinguish among folkways, mores, and laws, and recognize societal values as subject to change and disagreement.

i. Norms and values vary considerably between cultures and may also vary within a culture. Norms change over time, often spurred by changes in technology, which create new social situations that call for new norms. Depending on its level of formality, a norm may be a *folkway* (usually called etiquette or manners; breaches rarely punished), a *more* (usually enforced, but still informally), or a *law* (norms the society has written down and organized ways to officially punish violators).

ii. Sometimes, we change our norms and expect that changes in values will follow. Our values are often fluid and contradictory, allowing us to apply them situationally (i.e., when convenient).

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iii. As new values emerge over time, they may conflict with existing values. They may either become core values, or be absorbed or discarded. As we continue to hold contradictory values, our values become things that we draw upon to justify our beliefs and actions rather than things that guide our behavior. The presence of these contradictory values also creates deep polarization in our society, with different groups holding different sets of those values dear.

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III. Section 2.3 Cultural Institutions and the Institutionalization of Culture

a. Cultural Institutions: The Mass Media LO 2.3.1 Describe the primary components of contemporary mass media and how they have been subject to cultural change.
    i. Cultural institutions are elements within a culture that are important to its members for their identity. Mass media are among the most powerful cultural institutions in society that shape both how we see the world and ourselves. Media representations are not neutral and thus can perpetuate dominant social and cultural ideas. Examples include print media, radio, television, movies, and the Internet.

b. High Culture and Popular Culture LO 2.3.2 Differentiate between high and popular culture and how they relate to cultural capital.
    i. Cultural expressions often come in the form of what people call either *high culture* or *popular culture* (culture of the masses). Sociologists are concerned with understanding what cultural activities get placed into each category, who has the power to determine those classifications, and how people negotiate the two realms. In particular, sociologists examine how knowledge of high culture is a form of cultural capital that the dominant class uses to justify its dominance.

c. The Politics of Popular Culture LO 2.3.3 Understand fads and fashions, how they emerge, and how they are a part of our cultural tool kits.
    i. While cultural elites control high culture, popular culture usually comes from the margins, from those who have been excluded from a role in defining other forms of culture.
    ii. Popular culture is fluid and constantly changing, and includes *fads* (in objects, activities, ideas, and personalities) and *fashions*. Fads are defined by being short-lived, highly popular, and widespread behaviors, styles, or modes of thought. A fashion is a behavior, style, or idea that is more permanent than a fad and thus involves more widespread acceptance of the activity.
    iii. Culture is not something we do or do not have; rather, it is a set of behaviors, attitudes, and symbols that we actively use, drawing on different cultural elements in different circumstances. Sociologist Ann Swidler refers to this as a "cultural tool kit," or a repertoire of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct their identities.

d. The Globalization of Popular Culture LO 2.3.4 Explain the movement of culture around the world and the process by which some cultures are situated as more dominant than others as a result of this movement.
    i. Fashion and other forms of popular culture in the United States are increasingly apparent in other countries. Our popular culture may be exported deliberately, which some critics consider a form of *cultural imperialism*. For example, the global spread of U.S. fashion, media, and language is often seen as an imposition of U.S. values and ideas on the rest of the world. However, cultural transfer is not one directional and may emerge from below without any deliberate efforts. Thus, trends may be transferred from other countries to the United States.

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IV. Section 2.4 Continuity and Change in Culture and Media

a. Cultural Change LO 2.4.1 Summarize the ways that cultural change occurs and is resisted.

i. Cultures are constantly changing, and we often experience *culture wars* as groups clash over certain symbols and cultural changes. Not all parts of society change at the same rate or same time; for example, material culture often changes before nonmaterial culture does, creating a situation called *culture lag*, in which we may be uncomfortable, feel confused, or experience conflict with others as we establish new norms and values related to the new material objects. Cultures may also change through *cultural diffusion*, which refers to the spreading of new ideas through a society, independent of population movement. Sometimes, a technological change allows one group to impose its values on another, causing rapid cultural change.

Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for 2.1

- Who has ever visited another culture? What kinds of things stood out to you as being different about other cultures you have visited? What kinds of things did you learn about the United States that you hadn't noticed before? [NOTE: Use these discussion questions to distinguish ethnocentrism from cultural relativism. From an ethnocentric perspective, other cultures look "weird," but so does ours. From a cultural relativist perspective, different ways of doing things are simply different.]
- What kinds of subcultures exist on campus? Would you say there are any countercultures?

Discussion Questions for 2.2

- What are some examples of material culture that you use in your daily life? How do these influence your way of life? How would your life be different if these material objects did not exist?
- Consider ideas and attributes conventionally associated with the genders: male and female. In what ways have you seen these gender norms change over time?

Discussion Questions for 2.3

- In traveling to other countries, what evidence have you seen of globalization of popular culture?
- Make a list of ten things you would think of as being popular culture. Now list ten things you think of as being high culture. [NOTE: Create a list of each as a class after students have a few minutes to think on their own.] Now go through each item and look at the race and social class of the people most associated with each item (e.g., singers, actors, types of music, etc.). What differences do you see between the people associated with popular culture and high culture? Why do you think these differences exist? [NOTE: Use this discussion to demonstrate the politics of popular culture.]

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Discussion Questions for 2.4

- What kinds of cultural changes have you witnessed so far in your lifetime? How do you think these changes have impacted your life?
- Culture lag often occurs when material culture changes before nonmaterial culture. If we think about cell phones and their multiple functions (e.g., texting, Internet use, etc.) as an example of a newer technology, what kinds of formal and informal norms and values have been established to regulate their use? Are there any instances in which the norms and values regarding cell phone use are unclear, demonstrating culture lag? [NOTE: Other examples could be used here, for example, reproductive technologies.]

WHAT DO YOU THINK/WHAT DOES AMERICA THINK
Confidence in the Press

In an age of globalization and media conglomerates, many sources of news are controlled by a small number of large corporations and powerful individuals.

What Do You Think? *As far as the people running the press are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?*

a) A great deal of confidence
b) Only some confidence
c) Hardly any confidence

What Does America Think?
The General Social Survey results for 2016 indicate that 50 percent of the population has "hardly any" confidence in the press. Almost half of respondents had only some confidence in the press. Only 8 percent of respondents reported having "a great deal" of confidence in the press. But these responses are different depending on other factors as well, like age. The youngest Americans have the least confidence in the press—57 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds report having "hardly any." Compare that with only 41 percent of adults 65 years and older who report the same level of confidence. The percentage of respondents reporting "hardly any" confidence in the press has steadily increased since 1972 among all age groups, but the change is most pronounced among the youngest.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT SURVEY DATA
Why do you think older Americans might be more likely to be confident in the press when compared with younger Americans? What might that mean?

Revel Assets

Chapter 2 Introduction
Video: WATCH Introduction: *Culture and Media*

Chapter 2: The Pearson Original docuseries videos
#Fakenews: Can the Press Fight Back?
https://mediaplayer.pearsoncmg.com/assets/_video.true/sociology_2017_blue_chalk_videos-Can_the_Press_Fight_Back

This video examines the ways that politicians have invoked the catch-phrase “fake news” following Trump’s presidency in an attempt to delegitimize the press. News and the media are important pieces of culture, as is maintaining the legitimacy of news media in an era when people have new social media outlets. It is a powerful example of how culture works: how cultural modes of communication are given legitimacy, and how that legitimacy is questioned and maintained.

2.1 Thinking about Culture and Media Sociologically

Accordion: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *Using Media Use to Detect Rhythms in Our Lives*; Journal Prompt: JOURNAL: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *Using Media Use to Detect Rhythms in Our Lives*; Text Map: APPLYING *iSOC Culture and Media*; Image Gallery: VIEW *Selling "Hippie" in the U.S.*; Module Quiz 2.1: *Thinking about Culture and Media Sociologically*

2.2 Culture in Interactions

Accordion: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *U.S. Race Relations and the Confederate Flag*; Journal Prompt: JOURNAL: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *U.S. Race Relations and the Confederate Flag*; Map: MAP 2.1 *Confederate Monuments in the United States*; Chart: FIGURE 2.1 *How Fast Can a Society Change Its Values?*; Module Quiz 2.2: *Culture in Interactions*

2.3 Cultural Institutions and the Institutionalization of Culture

Map: U.S./WORLD *Print Newspaper Reach, 2014/2015*; Survey: WHAT DO YOU THINK? WHAT DOES AMERICA THINK? *Confidence in the Press*; Image Gallery: VIEW *High Culture and Popular Culture*; Accordion: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *The High Culture–Low Culture Divide*; Journal Prompt: JOURNAL: SOCIOLOGY AND OUR WORLD *The High Culture–Low Culture Divide*; Video: WATCH *Fads*; Module Quiz 2.3: *Cultural Institutions and the Institutionalization of Culture*; Shared Writing Prompt: CHAPTER 2 *Thinking Critically about Survey Data*

2.4 Continuity and Change in Culture and Media

Module Quiz 2.4: *Continuity and Change in Culture and Media*; 3PI-inline currency window: CHAPTER 2 *Culture and Media NOW*

Chapter 2 Review

Advanced Flashcards: REVIEW 2.1 Key Terms; Advanced Flashcards: REVIEW 2.2 Key Terms; Advanced Flashcards: REVIEW 2.3 Key Terms; Advanced Flashcards REVIEW 2.4 Key Terms; Chapter Exam: CHAPTER 2 QUIZ Culture and Media

Teaching Suggestions

Film

- *A World of Differences*: This 30-minute film explores the range of ways culture affects us, from the food we eat, to the emotions we express, to our relationships with our families. The film presents the differences through clips of interviews with people who have experienced both American culture and another culture, and it will prompt laughter

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as well as lots of personal examples from students of similar experiences with cross-cultural encounters. This film was produced by the Anti-Defamation League to teach anti-bias and diversity. More information about this film can be found at: www.adl.org/about.asp?s=topmenu

Projects, Papers, and Homework Exercises

- *Exploring the Contradictions in American Values*: The authors discuss the fact that the values we hold are more fluid than we often think—that sometimes we hold contradictory values at the same time, and sometimes we apply values situationally. In his famous studies of American values, sociologist Robin Williams Jr. (1970) enumerated a dozen "core" American values that contain contradictory elements: (1) achievement and success (though we may not care how one achieves it), (2) individualism (but we also volunteer to help neighbors in crises), (3) activity and work (though often we want to achieve affluence easily), (4) efficiency and practicality (but indulging in luxury is a virtue as well as a vice), (5) science and technology (which can save us, but we also believe that salvation is realized only through religion), (6) progress (everything should be constantly improving, but also everything happens for a reason and what goes around comes around), (7) material comfort (but the rich are immoral and money is the root of all evil), (8) humanitarianism (but we also believe in "looking out for number one"), (9) freedom (but we also believe in conformity and expression of freedom only where we think it's appropriate), (10) democracy (though sometimes rights need to be curtailed in the name of national security), (11) equality (but inequality is justified based on different abilities and motivations), and (12) racism and group superiority (but we do not like to be seen as members of a group). To help your students explore this issue, choose some popular texts (e.g., TV shows, advice magazines) for students to examine using content analysis. Have individual students or groups take the list of values from Williams's 1970 study and code several texts, finding all examples of the presence of these values in that text. Have the class bring together its findings and create a group summary of all the values you found and their relative frequencies. Discuss as a class what you conclude from this exercise. Are the authors correct that Americans subscribe to contradictory values? What are the possible consequences of this fact? Follow up on the exercise by lecturing on Swidler's concept of culture as a tool kit (see references, below, to her original and more recent work on this concept) as an illustration of how people deal with these contradictions in daily life.

Additional Sources

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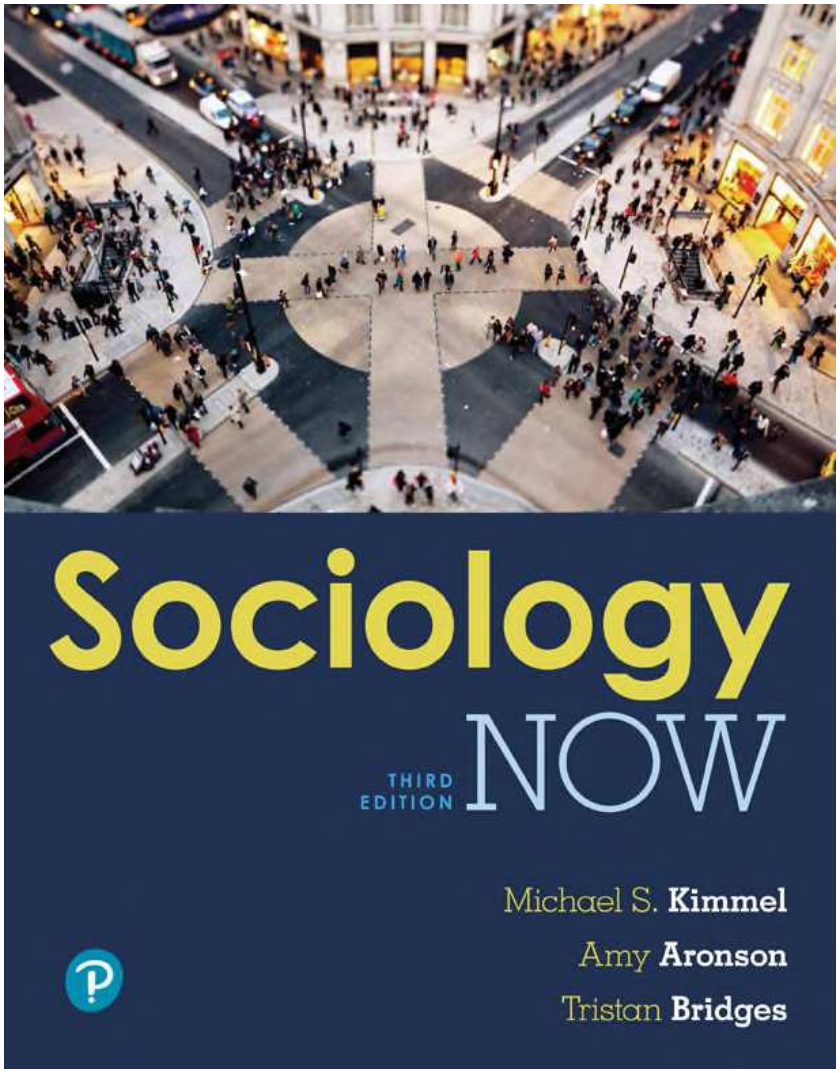
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Chapter 2

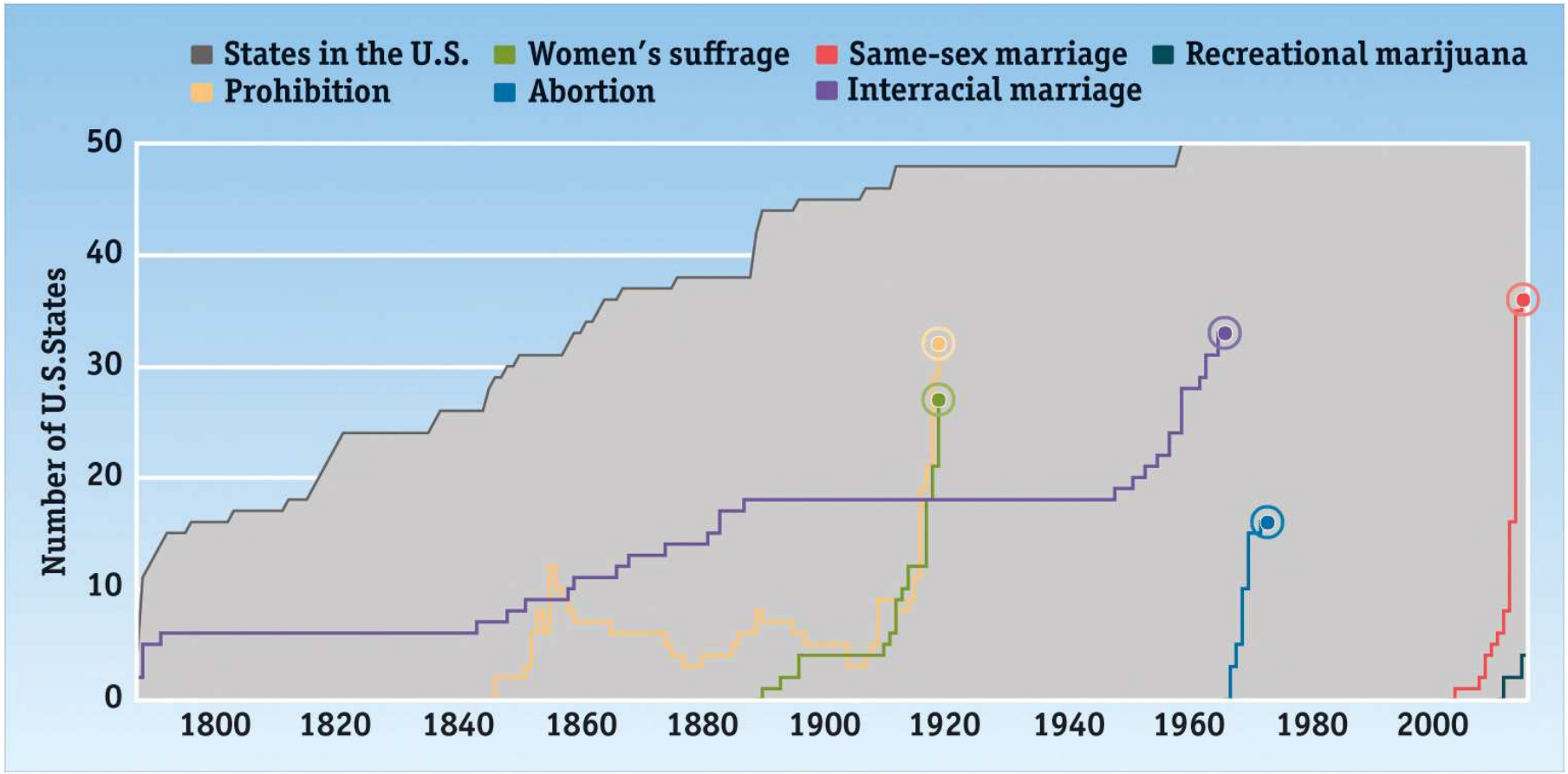
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Figure 2.1: How Fast Can a Society Change Its Values?



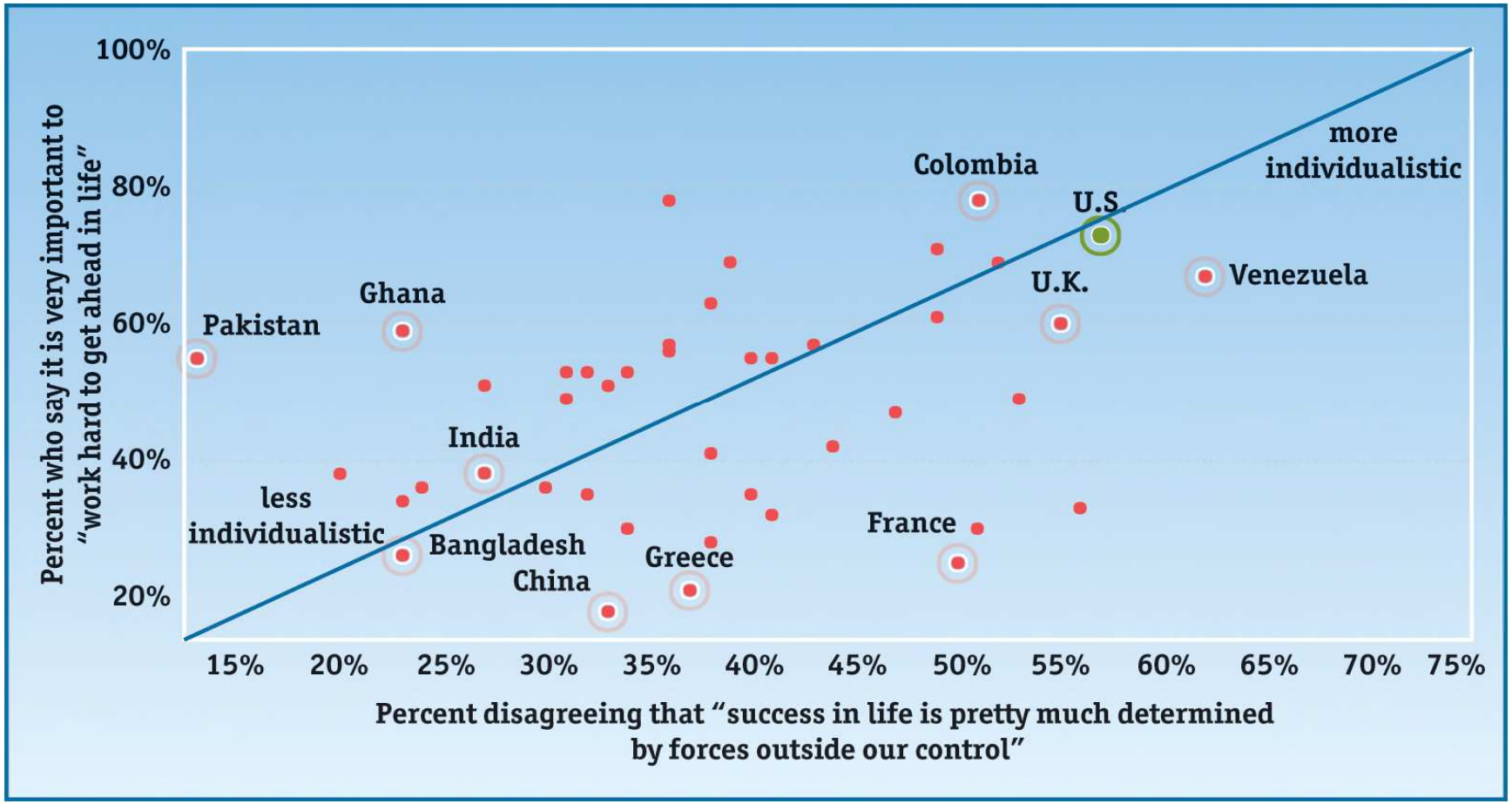
SOURCE: Data from Tribou, Alex and Keith Collins. "This is How Fast America Changes Its Mind." Bloomberg.com, June 26, 2015. Available at: https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-pace-of-social-change/.

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Figure: Our Values—And Others' Values

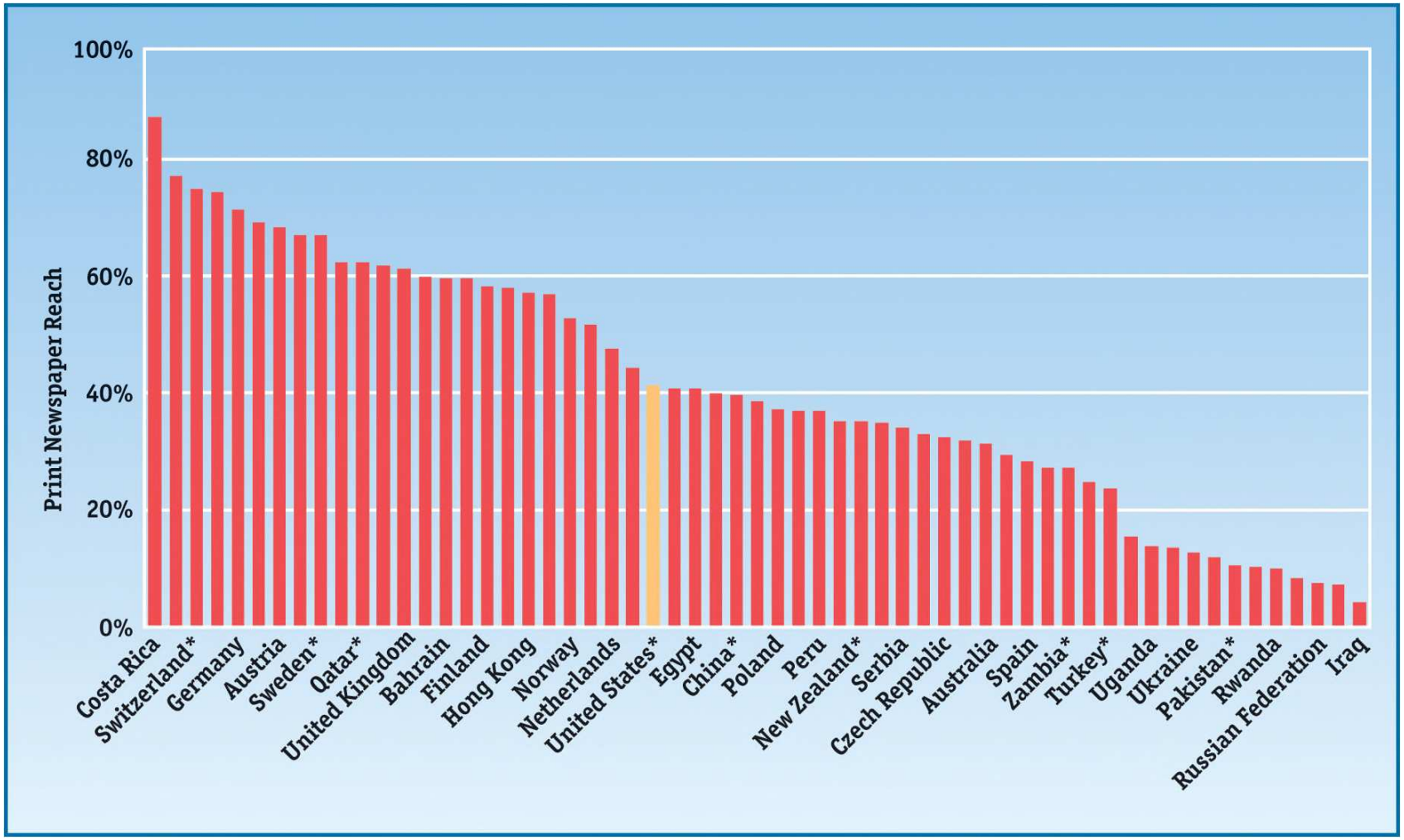


SOURCE: Data from Pew Research Center, Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q13b & Q66b. http://www.pewglobal. org/files/2014/10/Pew-Research-Center-Inequality-Report-FINAL-October-17-2014.pdf.

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Figure: Print/Newspaper Reach 2014/2015



SOURCE: Data from WAN-IFRA. "World Press Trends 2016." WAN-IFRA, 2016. Available at: http://www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/world-press-trends.

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