

Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World,  
Brief Edition, v2.0  
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# CHAPTER 2

## Culture and Society



# Culture and the Sociological Perspective

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## Learning Objectives

1. Describe examples of how culture influences behavior.
2. Explain why sociologists might favor cultural explanations of behavior over biological explanations.



# Culture and the Sociological Perspective

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- **Culture:** The artifacts and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are part of any society
  - It is a key concept to the sociological perspective — It influences people's beliefs and behaviors
  - The profound impact of culture becomes most evident when we examine behaviors that are biological in nature





# Culture and the Sociological Perspective

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- Sociologists favor culture over biology for two reasons:
  - Differences from one society to the next in various behaviors underscore the importance of cultural differences for behavioral differences
  - Biology cannot easily account for why groups and locations differ in their rates of committing certain behaviors
- Implications of biological explanations
  - The explanations implicitly support the status quo
  - The explanations of human behavior might still be used to support views of biological inferiority



# The Elements of Culture

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## Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish material culture and nonmaterial culture.
2. List and define the several elements of culture.
3. Describe certain values that distinguish the United States from other nations.



# The Elements of Culture

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- Two basic components of culture
  - Ideas and symbols
  - Artifacts
- **Nonmaterial culture:** Values, beliefs, symbols, and language that define a society
- **Material culture:** Physical objects in a society





# The Elements of Culture

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- The elements of culture are:
  - **Symbols**
    - Types of nonverbal communication — Gestures
    - Material objects
  - Language
    - Most important set of symbols
    - **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:** Argues that people cannot easily understand concepts and objects unless their language contains words for these items



# The Elements of Culture

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- **Norms**

- **Formal norms:** Standards of behavior considered the most important in any society
- **Informal norms:** Standards of behavior that are considered less important but still influence how we behave

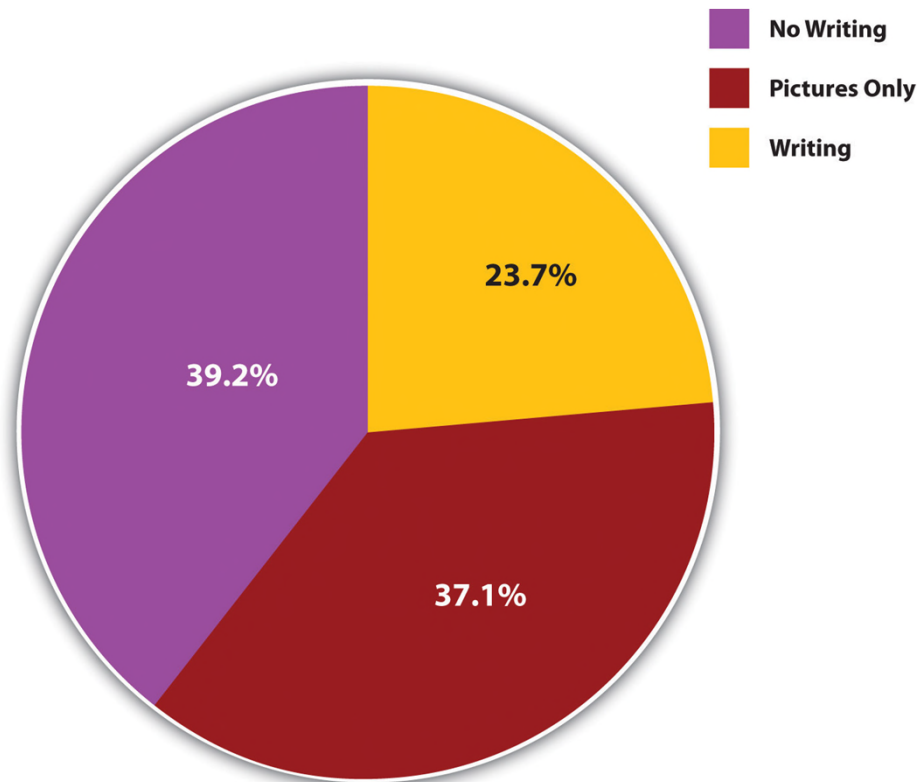
- **Rituals**

- Function in many kinds of societies to:
  - Mark transitions in the life course
  - Transmit the norms of the culture from one generation to the next



Figure 2.1 The Presence of Written Language  
(Percentage of Societies)

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## Table 2.1 Examples of Sexist Terms and Nonsexist Alternatives

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Term	Alternative
Businessman	Businessperson, executive
Fireman	Fire fighter
Chairman	Chair, chairperson
Policeman	Police officer
Mailman	Letter carrier, postal worker
Mankind	Humankind, people
Man-made	Artificial, synthetic
Waitress	Server
He (as generic pronoun)	He or she; he/she; s/he
"A professor should be devoted to his students"	"Professors should be devoted to their students"



Figure 2.2 Percentage of People Who Say They Would Vote for a Qualified African American for President

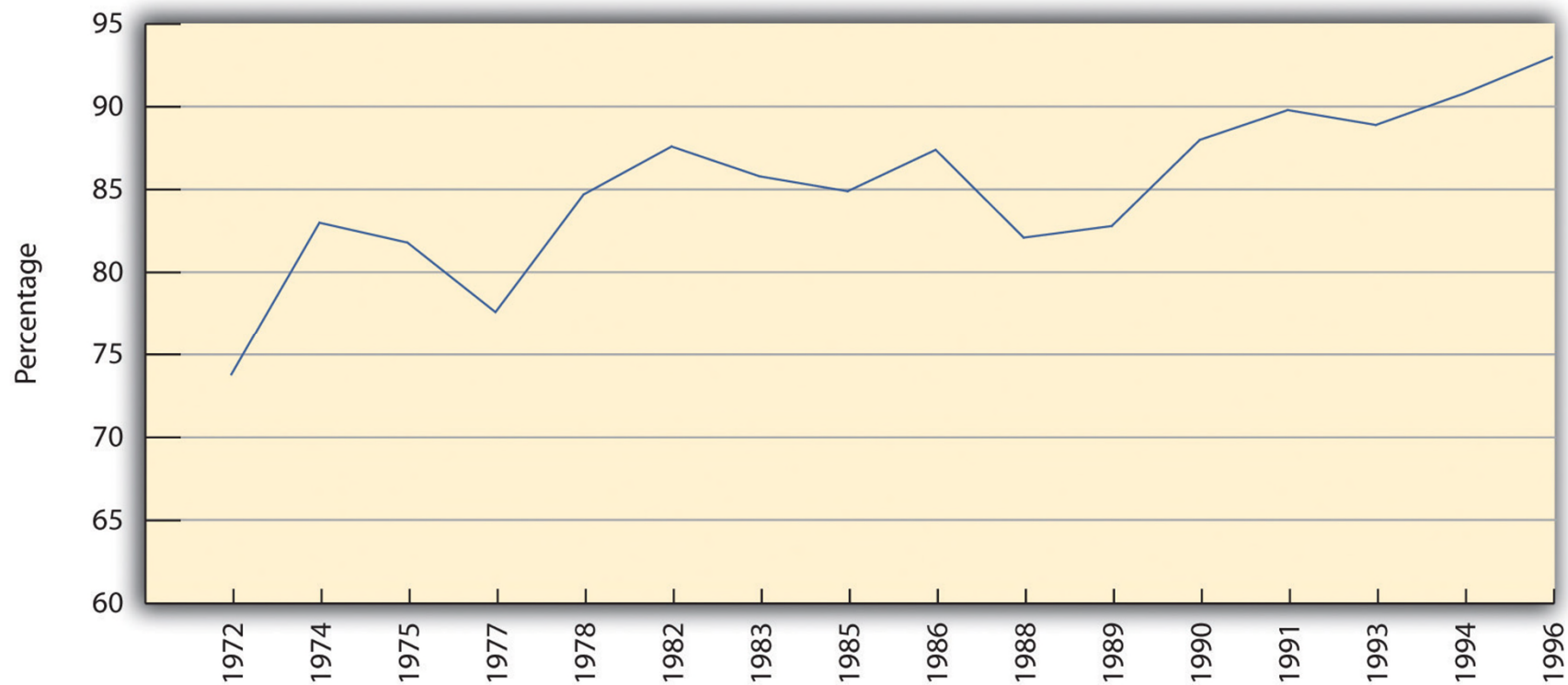
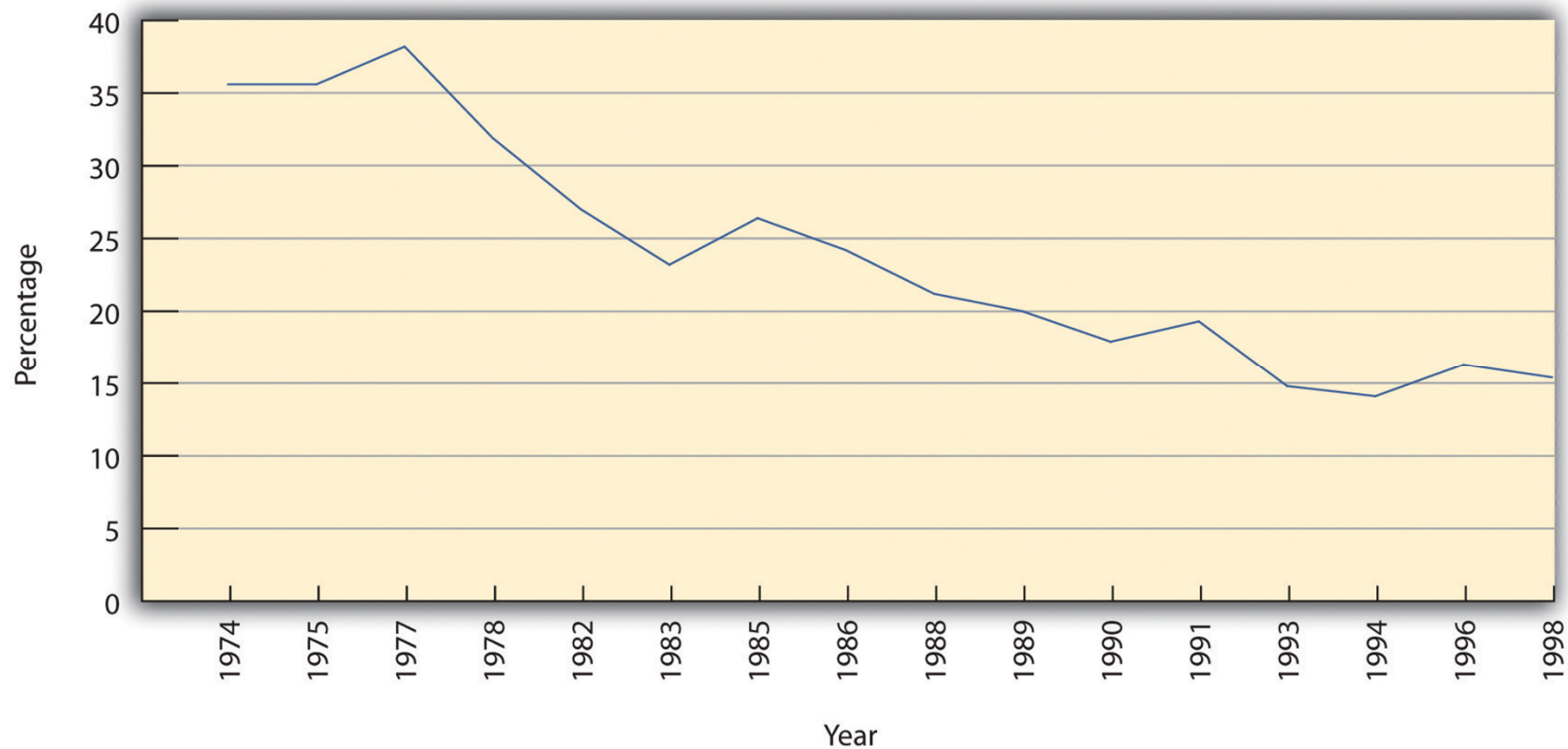




Figure 2.3 Percentage of People Who Agree Women Should Take Care of Running Their Homes





# The Elements of Culture

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- **Values**

- Involves judgments of what is:
  - Good or bad
  - Desirable or undesirable

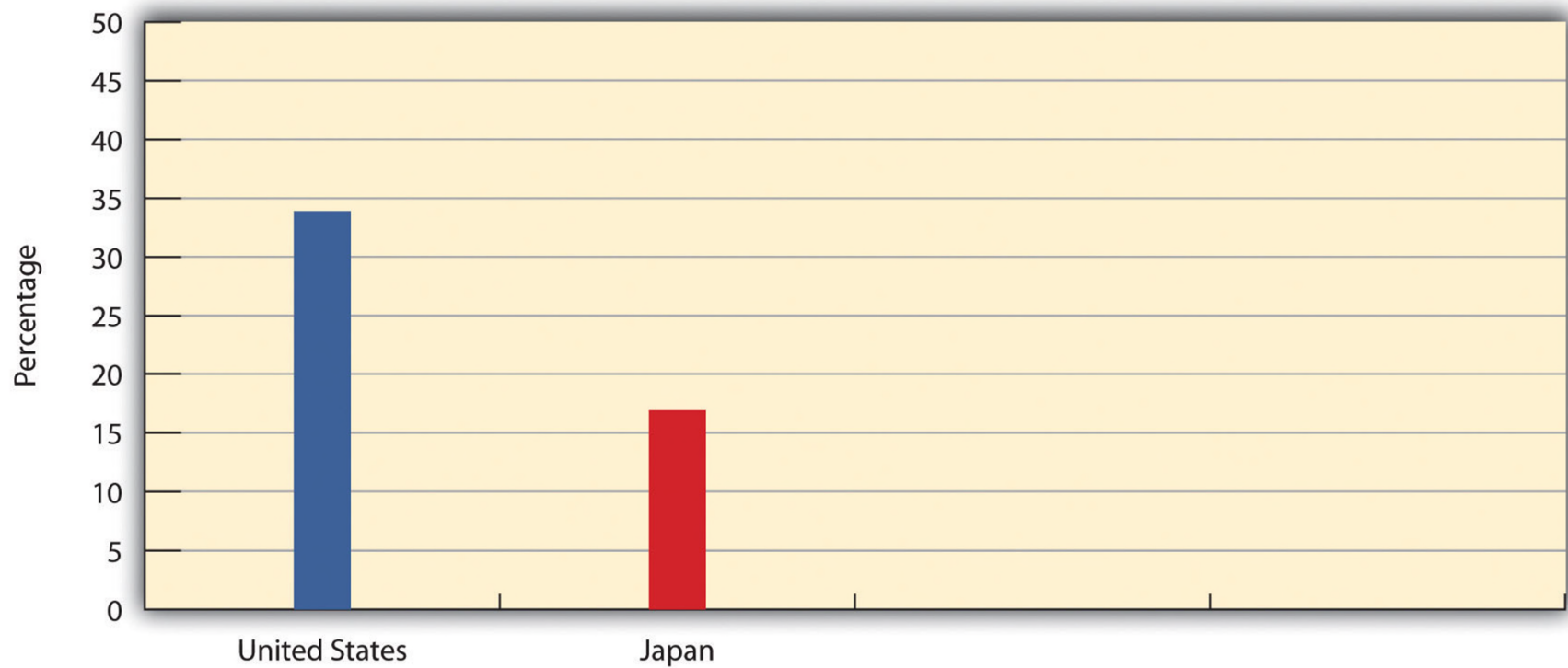
- **Artifacts**

- Society's material culture
- Technological development has played an important role in creating today's artifacts





Figure 2.4 Percentage of People Who Think Competition Is Very Beneficial





# The Elements of Culture

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- What distinguishes America from other nations?
  - The American culture extols the rights of the individual and promotes competition in the business and sports worlds and in other areas of life
    - Work ethic
    - Individualism



Figure 2.5 Percentage of People Who Take a Great Deal of Pride in Their Work

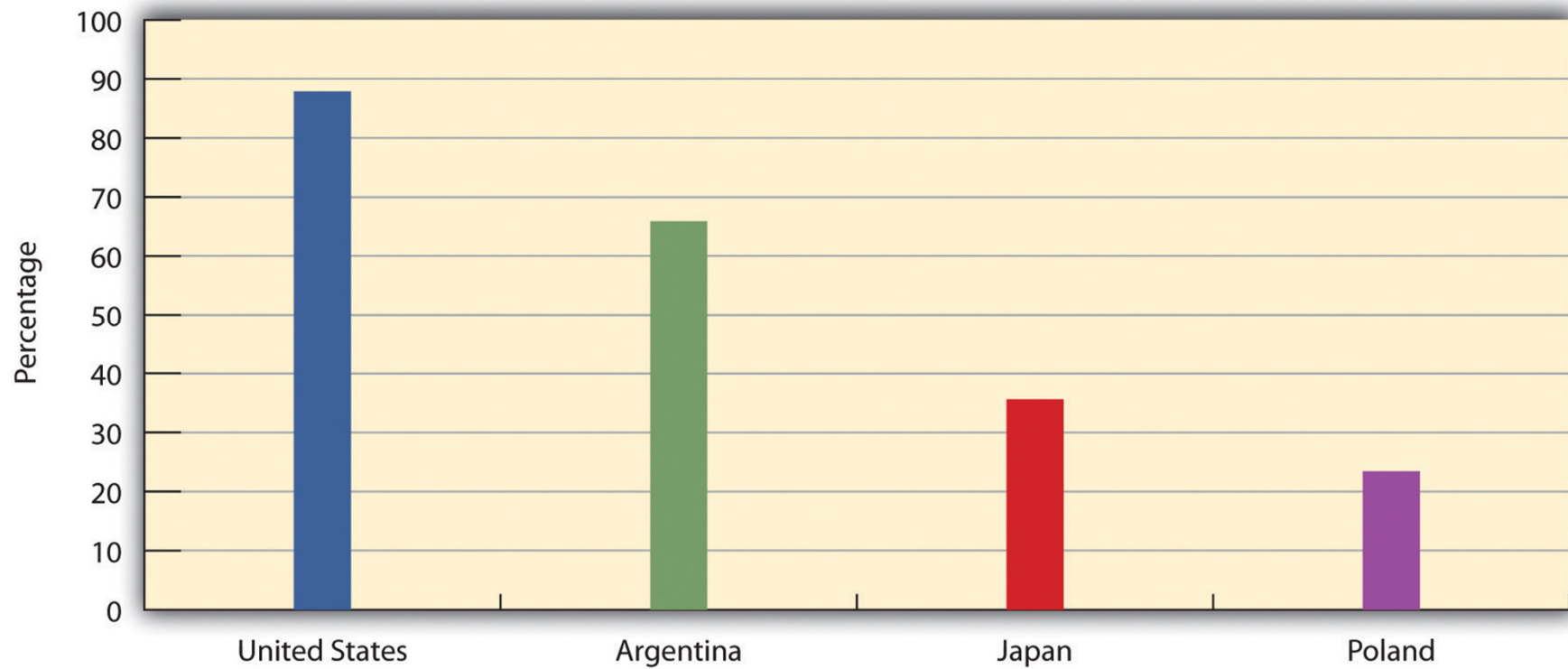




Figure 2.6 Percentage of People Who Think Hard Work Brings Success

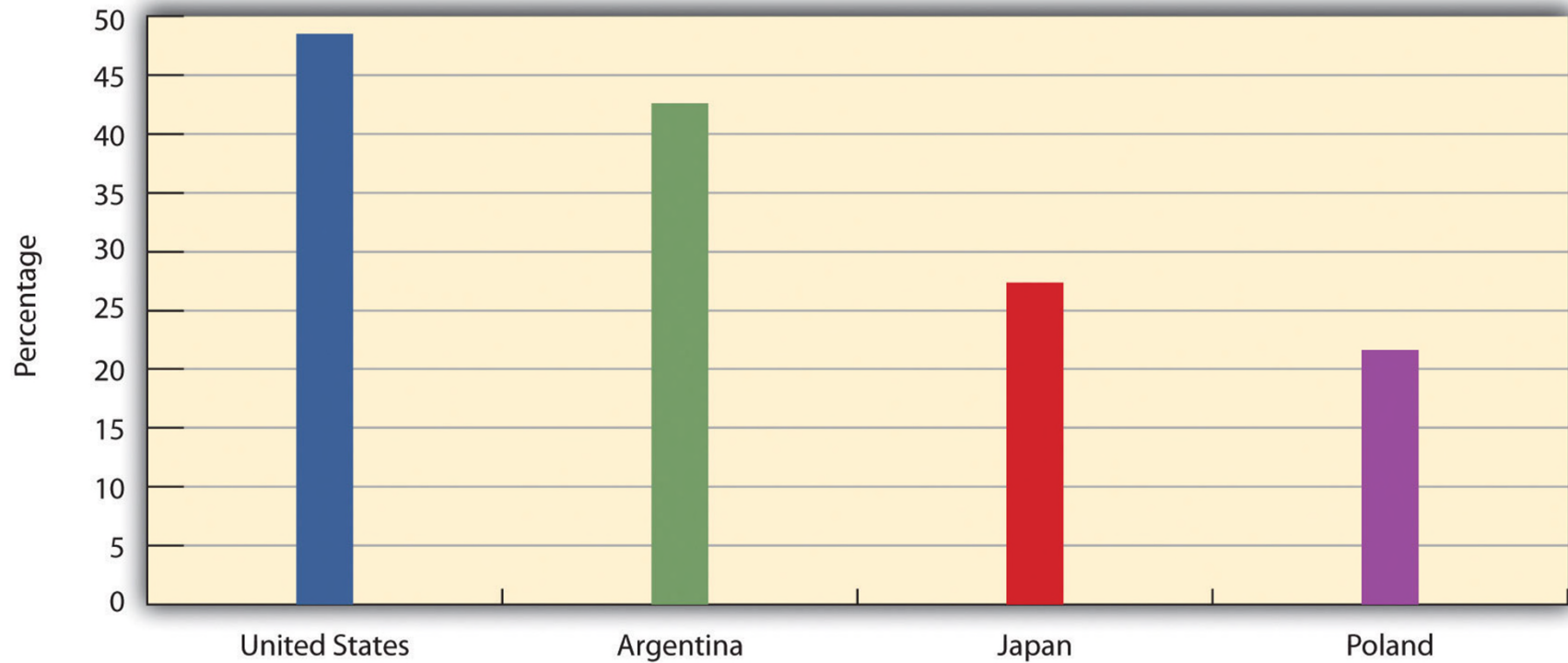




Figure 2.7 Percentage of People Who Attribute Poverty to Laziness and Lack of Willpower

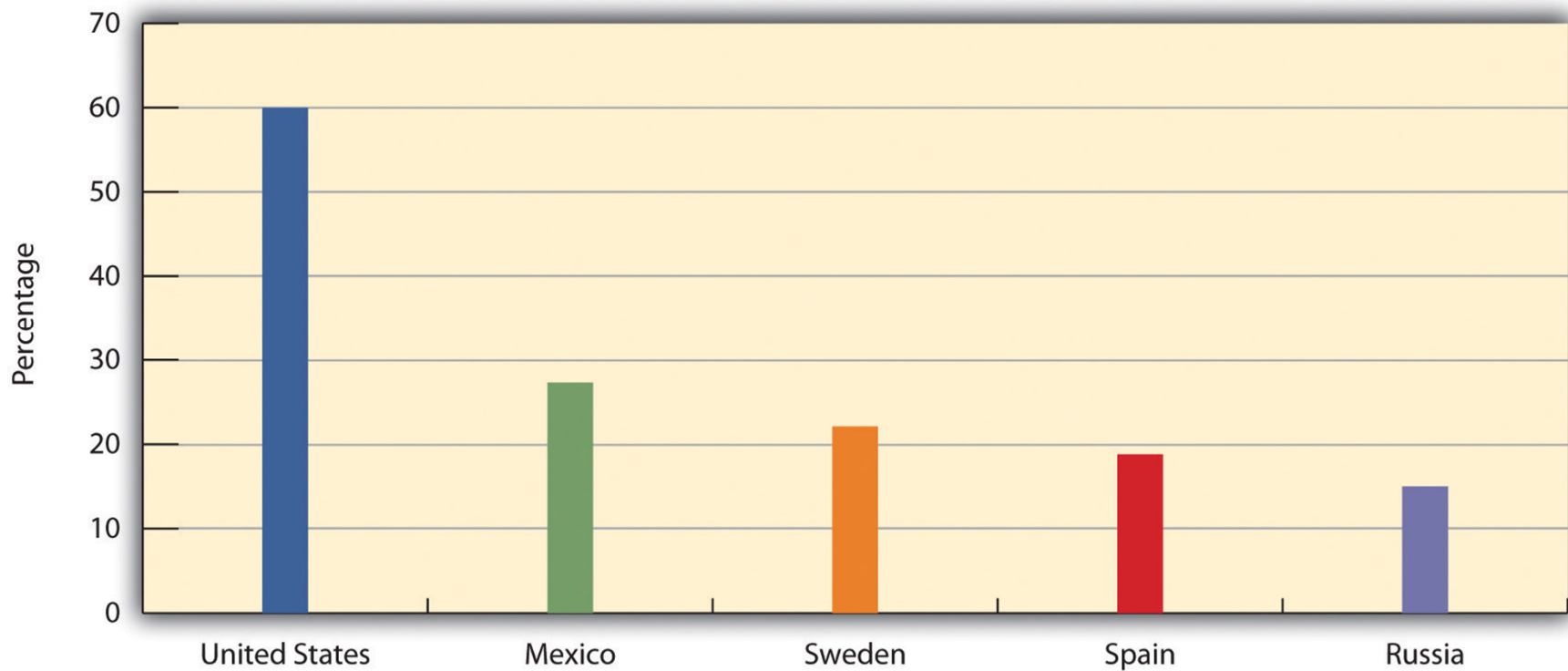
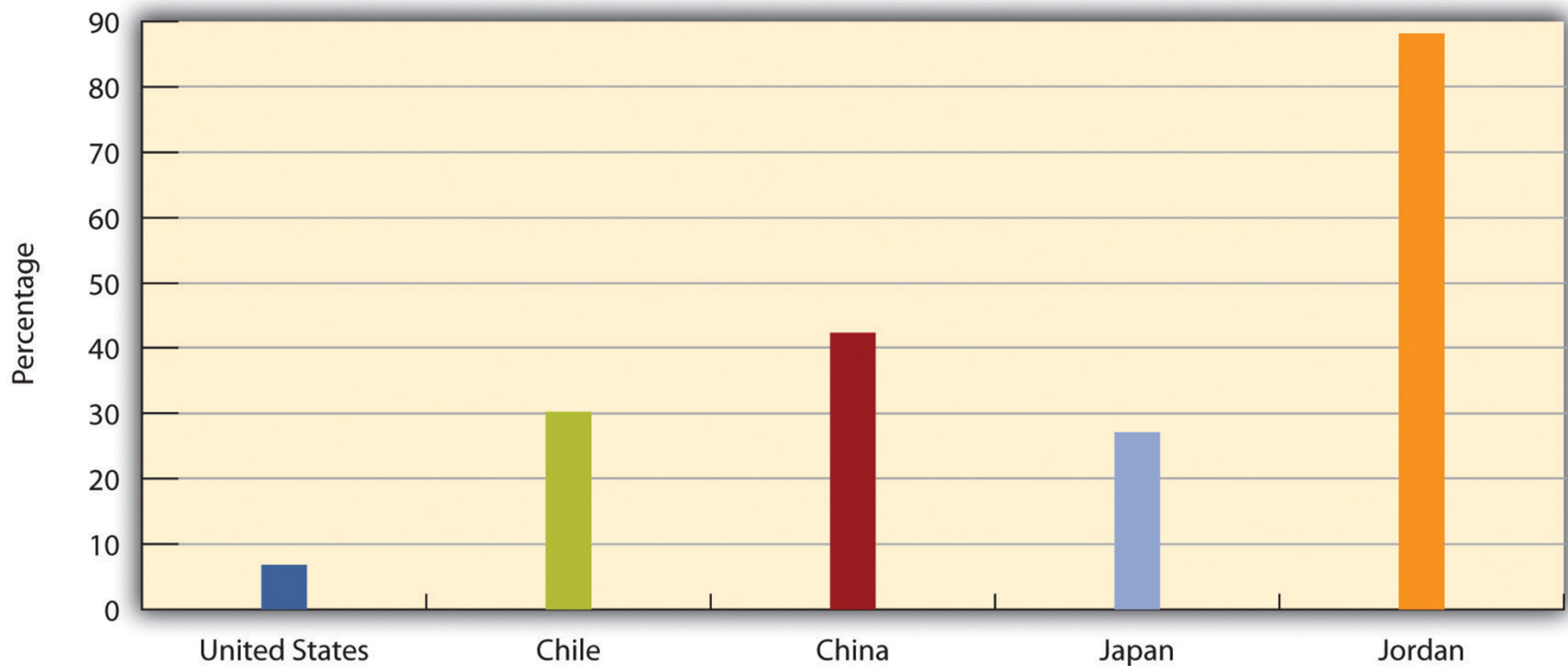




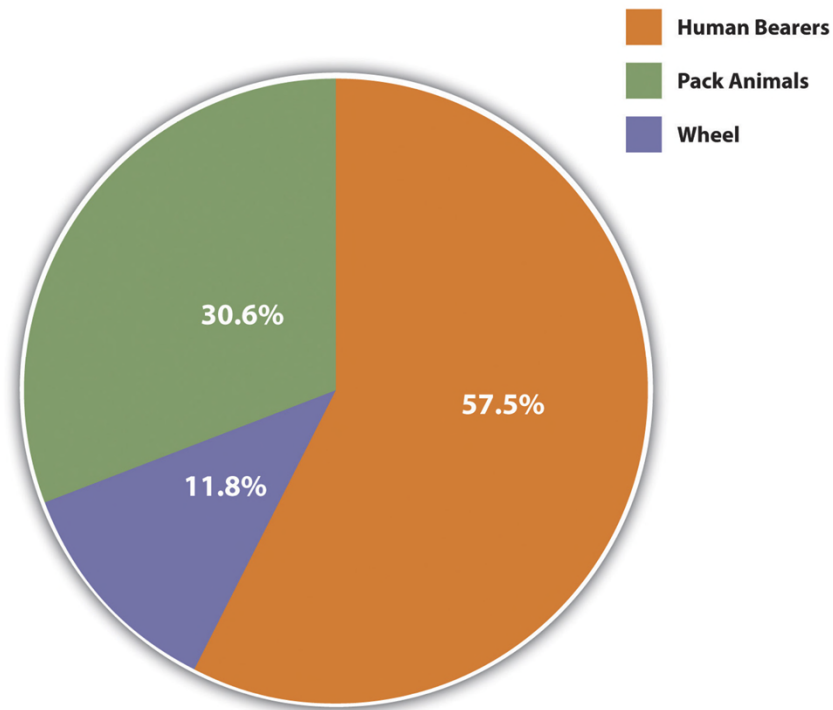
Figure 2.8 Percentage of People Who Agree That Men Have More Right to a Job Than Women When Jobs Are Scarce





## Figure 2.9 Primary Means of Moving Heavy Loads

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# Cultural Diversity

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## Learning Objectives

1. Define subculture and counterculture and give one example of each.
2. Distinguish cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.



# Cultural Diversity

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- **Subculture:** A smaller culture within a larger culture with distinctive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting
  - Example — The Amish in the United States
- **Counterculture:** A subculture whose norms and values directly oppose those of the larger culture
  - Example — The survivalists in the United States



# Cultural Diversity

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## **Cultural relativism**

- The belief that no culture's norms, values, or practices are superior or inferior to those of any other culture.

## **Ethnocentrism**

- The tendency to judge another culture by the standards of our own, and the belief that our own culture is superior to another culture.



# The Development of Modern Society

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## Learning Objectives

- List the major types of societies that have been distinguished according to their economies and technologies.
- Explain why social development produced greater gender and wealth inequality.

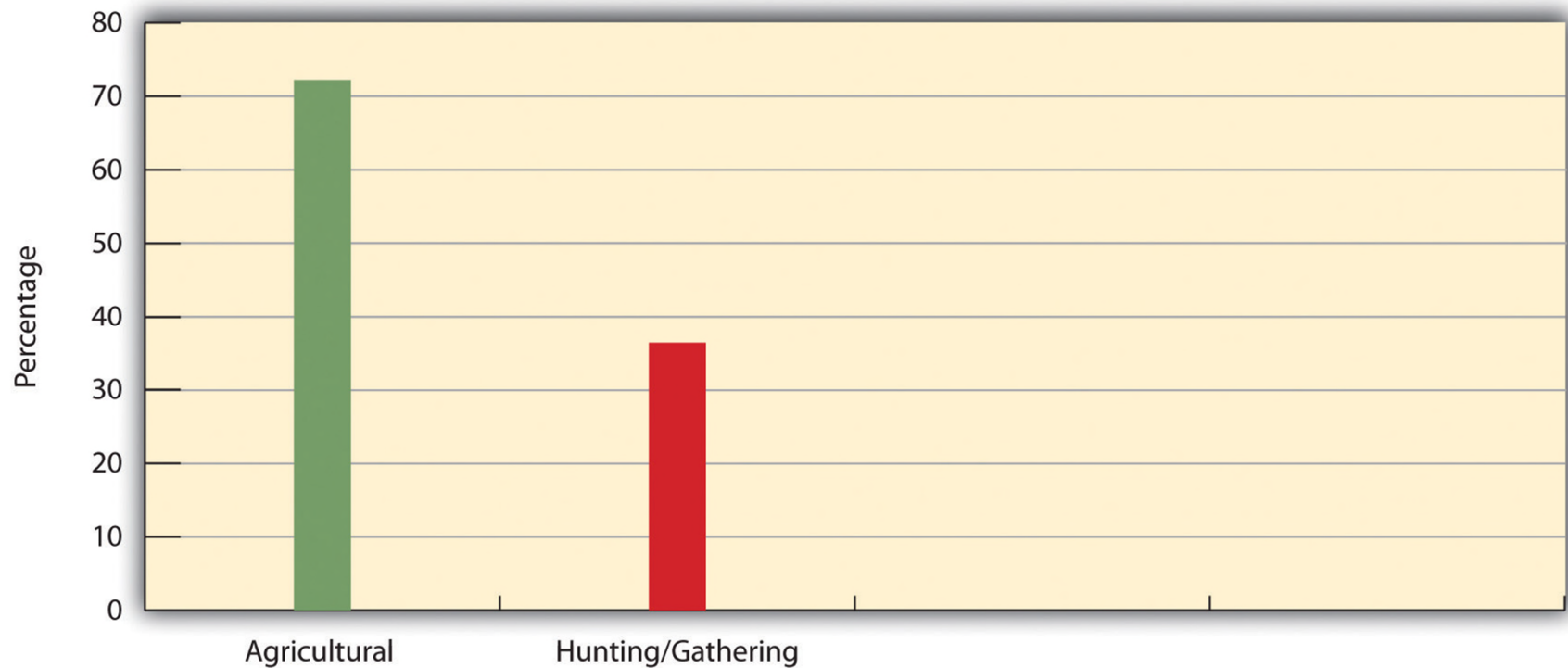


## Table 2.2 Summary of Societal Development

Type of society	Key characteristics
Hunting-and-gathering	These are small, simple societies in which people hunt and gather food. Because all people in these societies have few possessions, the societies are fairly egalitarian, and the degree of inequality is very low.
Horticultural and pastoral	Horticultural and pastoral societies are larger than hunting-and-gathering societies. Horticultural societies grow crops with simple tools, while pastoral societies raise livestock. Both types of societies are wealthier than hunting-and-gathering societies, and they also have more inequality and greater conflict than hunting-and-gathering societies.
Agricultural	These societies grow great numbers of crops, thanks to the use of plows, oxen, and other devices. Compared to horticultural and pastoral societies, they are wealthier and have a higher degree of conflict and of inequality.
Industrial	Industrial societies feature factories and machines. They are wealthier than agricultural societies and have a greater sense of individualism and a somewhat lower degree of inequality that still remains substantial.
Postindustrial	These societies feature information technology and service jobs. Higher education is especially important in these societies for economic success.



Figure 2.10 Type of Society and Presence of Cultural Belief That Men Should Dominate Women





## Key Terms

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- **Culture**
- **Sociobiology**
- **Eugenics**
- **Nonmaterial culture**
- **Material culture**
- **Symbols**
- **Gestures**
- **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**
- **Norms**
- **Formal norms**
- **Informal norms**
- **Rituals**
- **Values**
- **Artifacts**
- **Cultural diversity**
- **Subculture**
- **Counterculture**
- **Cultural relativism**





## Key Terms

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- **Ethnocentrism**
- **Hunting-and-gathering societies**
- **Horticultural societies**
- **Pastoral societies**
- **Agricultural societies**
- **Industrial societies**
- **Postindustrial societies**