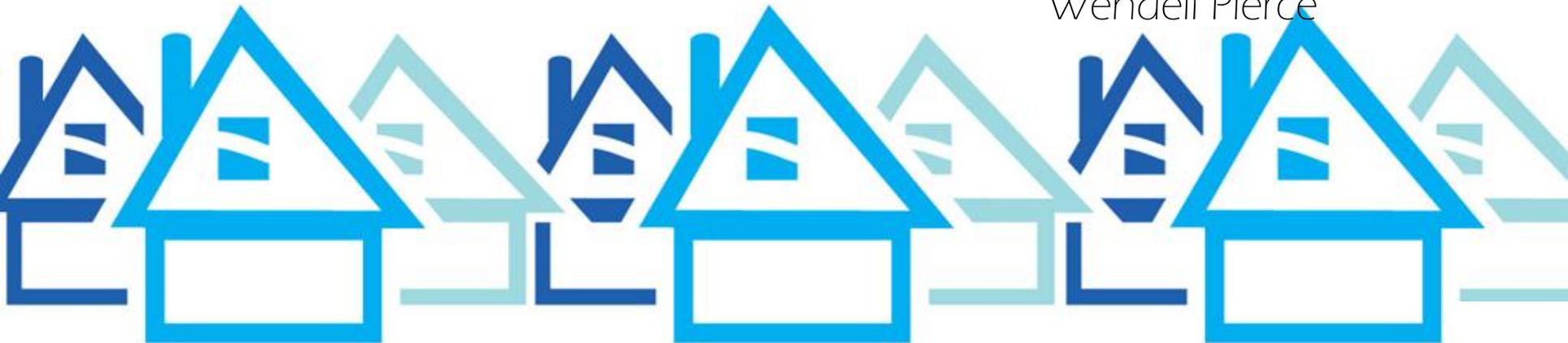




# Culture Part I

Culture is the intersection of people and life itself. It's how we deal with life, love, death, birth, disappointment ... all of that is expressed in culture.

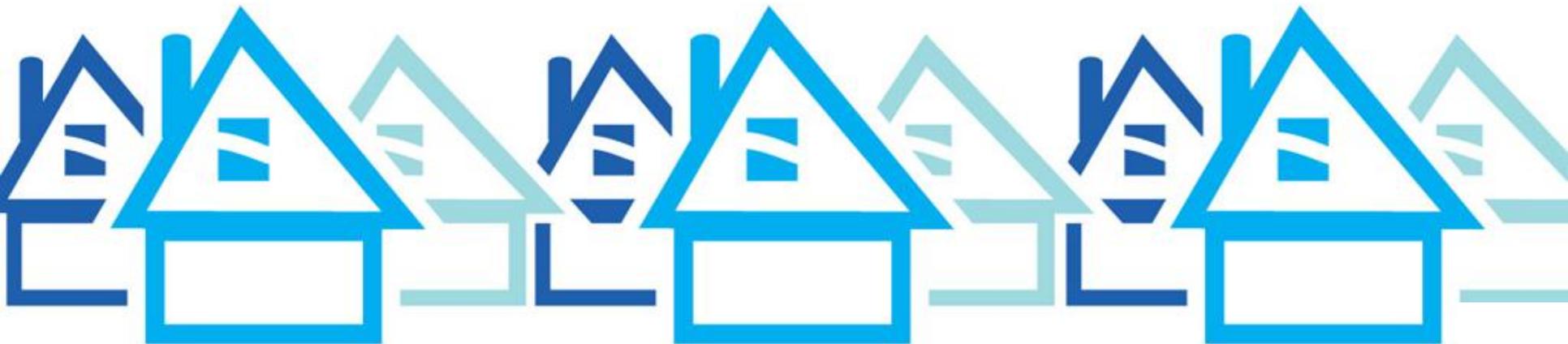
Wendell Pierce





# The Social Construction of Reality

- Many people manifest a firm belief that (1) seeing is believing and (2) knowledge consists of a series of irrefutable facts.
- But **perception** (how we see things) and **knowledge** (what we know about things) are socially constructed and so are problematic.
- A large part of the sociological perspective involves understanding that perception and knowledge are **social constructs**.





# The Social Construction of Reality

- If culture, norms, codes of behavior, perception, knowledge and etc are all socially constructed, why are they socially constructed like *this* (whatever *this* is)?
- Any given reality is a collection of beliefs and expectations bound by time, space and location.
- All actions can be understood only in a social environment.
- Meanings and rules of conduct differ immensely in their specific contexts.





# What is culture?

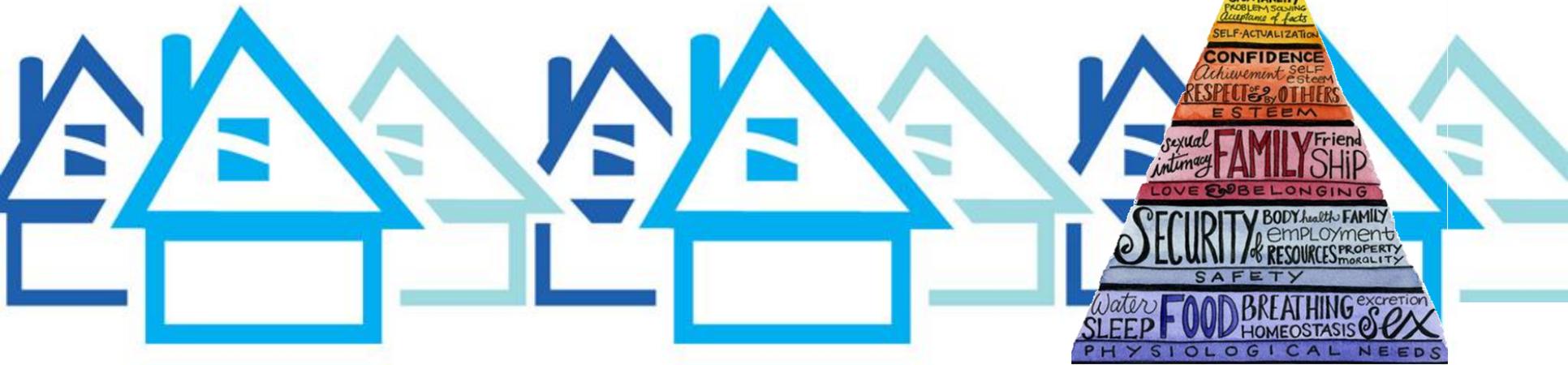
- ...knowledge, language, beliefs, values, norms, customs, behavior, artifacts passed from one generation to the next in a human group or society
  - not fine arts or intellectual taste
- totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behavior





# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid.
- Maslow stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others.
- Our most basic need is for physical survival, the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on.





# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- According to Maslow's theory...
  - Humans are motivated by a hierarchy of needs.
  - More basic needs must be more or less met (rather than all or none) prior to higher needs.
  - The order of needs is not rigid but instead may be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences.
  - Most behavior is multi-motivated, that is, simultaneously determined by more than one basic need.





# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

It is important to note that Maslow's 5-stage model was expanded to include cognitive and aesthetic needs and later transcendence needs. For simplicity's sake, we're working with the basic model.

self-actualization needs

esteem needs

belongingness and love needs

safety needs

biological and physiological needs





# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

achieving one's full potential,  
including creativity

achievement, mastery,  
prestige, recognition,  
respect, freedom

friends, family, lover, intimate  
relationships, community,  
acceptance, connections

security, stability, freedom from fear,  
employment, health, property, order, law

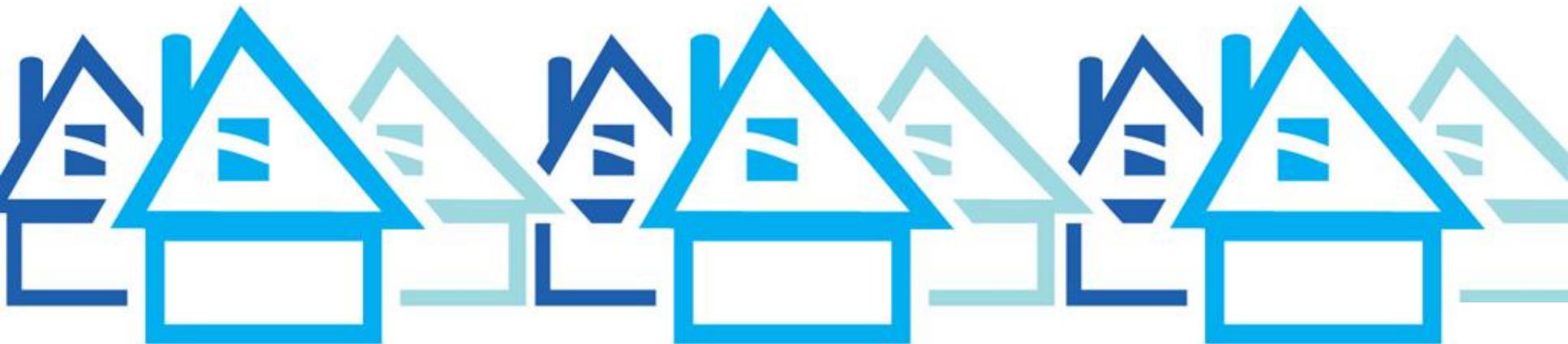
air, food, water, shelter, warmth, sleep, sex





# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- The needs described in Maslow's theory appear to be universal.
- Culture helps us meet these needs. In cultures all over the world the fulfillment of Maslow's proposed needs correlates with happiness.





# Material Culture vs. Nonmaterial Culture

- Sociologists divide culture into two parts: material and non-material.
- **Material culture** consists of man-made technical and material objects such as tools, implements, furniture, automobiles, books, buildings, dams, printing presses, telephones, televisions, tractors, technology, etc.
- **Nonmaterial culture** consists of internal intangible and abstract objects, including customs, tradition, habits, manners, attitudes, beliefs, language, literature, art, law, religion, etc.





# Material Culture vs. Nonmaterial Culture

- Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked and *physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas.*
- A bus pass is a material object but represents a form of nonmaterial culture, acceptance of paying for transportation.
- Clothing, hairstyles and jewelry are part of material culture. The appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for certain events reflects nonmaterial culture.
- A school building belongs to material culture. Teaching methods and educational standards are part of nonmaterial culture.





# Material Culture

- ...physical, tangible (see, touch) or technological stuff that members of a society make, use and share
- Material culture refers to the physical objects, resources and spaces that people use to define their culture.
  - raw materials → technology → stuff
- **artifact**: anything created by humans which gives information about the culture of its creator and users
- **technology**: the application of knowledge, techniques and tools to adapt and control physical environments and material resources to satisfy wants and needs





# Material Culture

- Physical aspects of a culture help to define its members' behaviors and perceptions.
- Computers are a vital aspect of material culture in the US. Students must learn to use computers to survive in college and business.
- Young adults in the Yanomamo society in the Amazon must learn to make weapons and hunt.





# Material Culture

- The following 5 photographs show images of families from 5 cultures in front of their dwellings with all (or nearly all) of their possessions, the artifacts of their material culture.
- What do you notice about people's possessions and how they are placed in the following photographs?
- How are these possessions linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs?





# Material Culture: China



Photos by: Peter Menzel 2004 /menzelphoto.com





# Material Culture: India





# Material Culture: Japan





# Material Culture: Mali





# Material Culture: United States





# Nonmaterial Culture

- ...nonphysical ideas that people have about their culture, including beliefs, values, rules of behavior, norms, morals, philosophies, language, patterns of communication, organizations, family patterns, institutions, etc
- For instance, the non-material cultural concept of *religion* consists of a set of ideas and beliefs about God, worship, morals and ethics. These beliefs determine how the culture responds to its religious topics, issues and events.





# Nonmaterial Culture

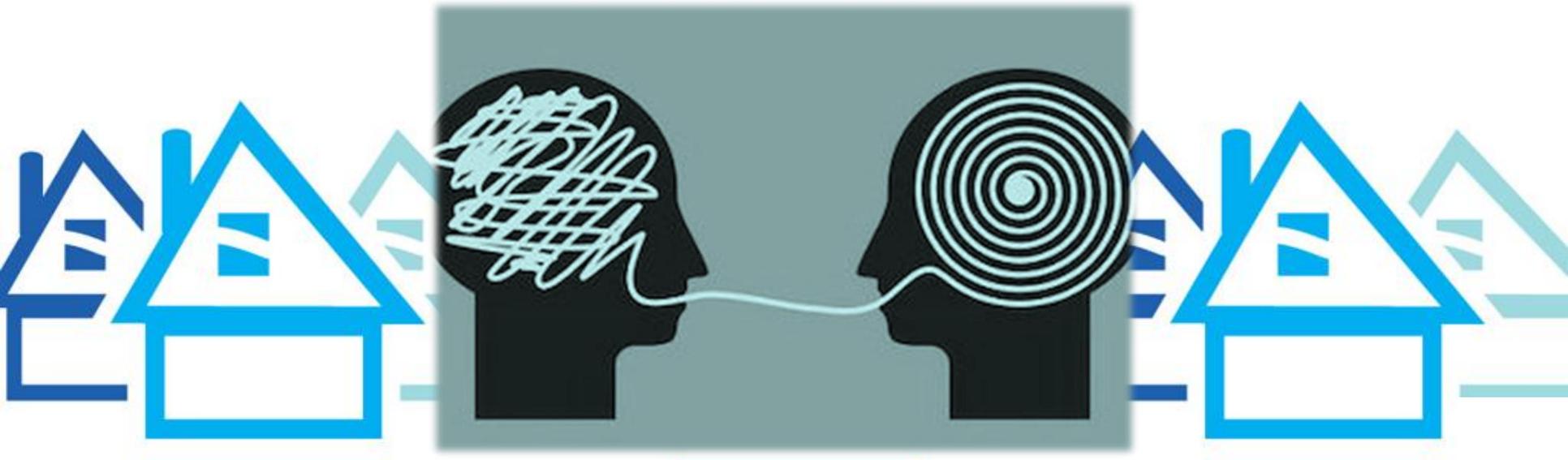
- ...abstract or intangible human creations of society that influence people's behavior
- Culture regulates behavior.
- When considering non-material culture, sociologists refer to several processes that a culture uses to shape its members' thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- Four of the most important of these are symbols, language, values and norms.





# Nonmaterial Culture

- **symbols**: anything that meaningfully represents something else
- **language**: a set of symbols that expresses ideas and enables people to think and communicate with one another
- **values**: collective ideas about what is right or wrong, good or bad, and desirable or undesirable in a particular culture
- **norms**: established rules of behavior or standards of conduct





# Nonmaterial Culture: Symbols

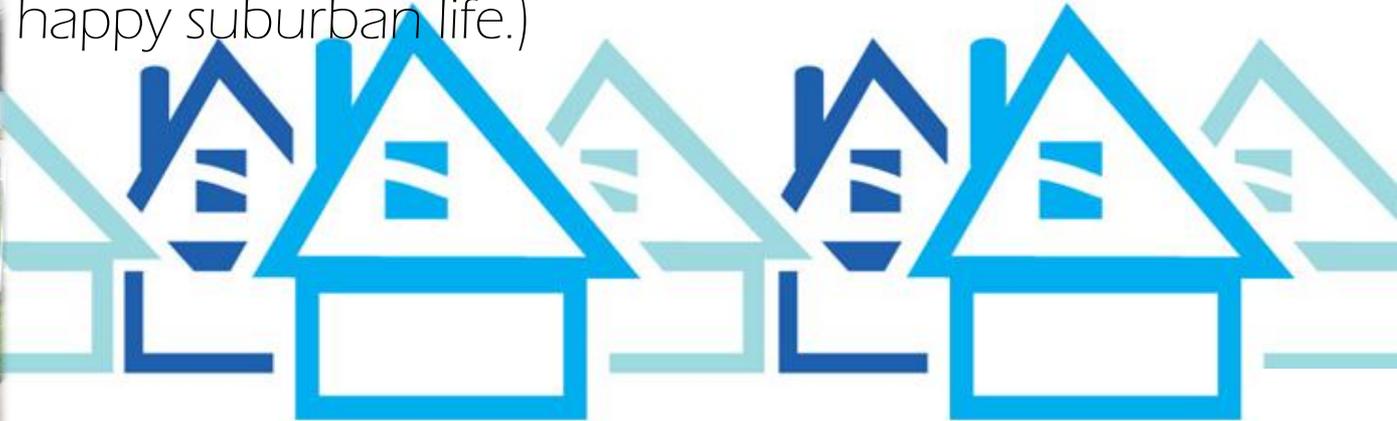
- ...cultural representations of reality ... a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life
- Symbols form as a culture grows.
- As a representation, a symbol's meaning is neither instinctive nor automatic. The culture's members must interpret and, over time, reinterpret the symbol.





# Nonmaterial Culture: Symbols

- People who share a culture often attach a specific meaning to an object, gesture, sound or image. That imbued meaning transforms it into a widely recognized symbol in that culture.
- There are **symbols that cross cultural boundaries** (the cross as a symbol of Christianity).
- Some **symbols have meaning only to a particular culture**. (In US culture, a white picket fence is a widely recognized symbol for a successful and happy suburban life.)





# Nonmaterial Culture: Symbols

- Symbols occur in different forms: verbal or nonverbal, written or unwritten.
- They can be anything that conveys a meaning, such as words on the page, drawings, pictures and gestures.
- Clothing, homes, cars and other consumer items are symbols that imply a certain level of social status.
- Symbols are learned just as we learn other forms of language.





# Nonmaterial Culture: Language

- Perhaps the most powerful of all human symbols is **language**: a system of verbal and sometimes written representations that are culturally specific and convey meaning about the world.
- Language is an important source of **continuity and identity** in a culture.
  - The French-speaking residents of Canadian Quebec refuse to speak English (Canada's primary language) for fear of losing their cultural identity.
  - In the US, immigrants provide much resistance to making English the official national language.





# Nonmaterial Culture: Language

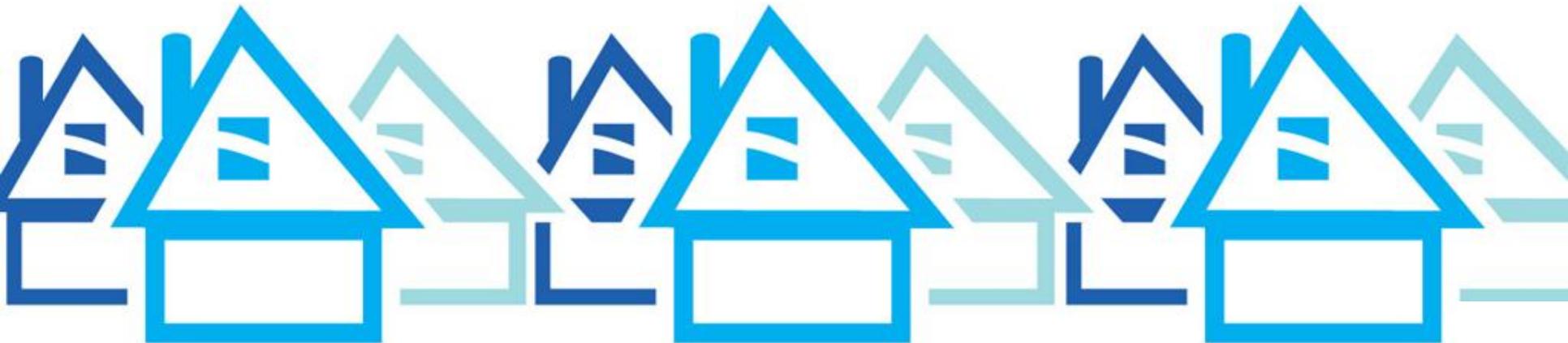
- language...
- allows human experience to be cumulative
- provides social or shared past
- provides social or shared future
- allows shared perspective
- allows complex, shared, goal-directed behavior
- includes speech, written characters, numerals, symbols, gestures and expressions of nonverbal communication





# Nonmaterial Culture: Language

- In the 1930s, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf proposed that languages influence perceptions.
- While the **Sapir-Whorf (or linguistic relativity) hypothesis** is controversial, it suggests that a person will more likely perceive differences when he or she possesses words or concepts to describe the differences.





# Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

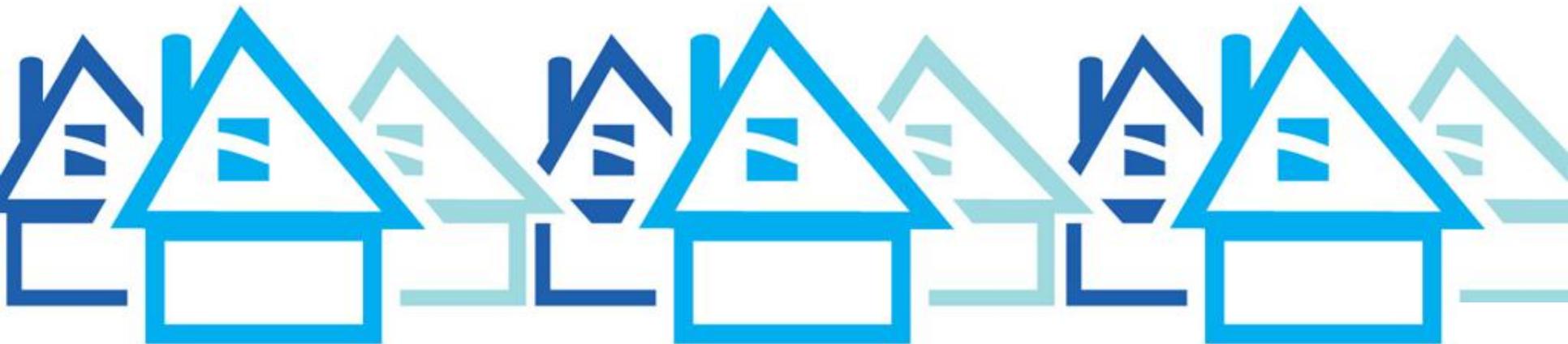
- Sapir-Whorf reverses common sense.
  - Language precedes thought.
  - Language is not a given.
  - Language is culturally determined.
- Language has embedded within it ways of looking at the world.
- Individual languages produce different and distinct realities for those who speak them.





# Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

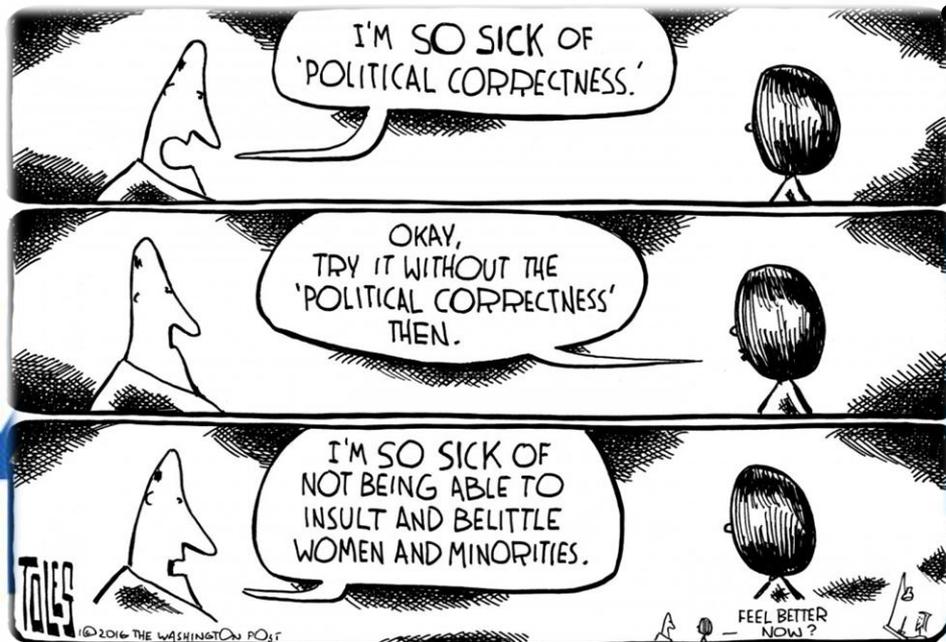
- We perceive the world in terms of our own language.
- The reality we experience is unique to our own language.
- Those who speak other languages perceive the world differently, according to their own languages.
- Terms for specific phenomena in languages often do not have precise counterparts in other languages.





# Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- **euphemism**: an inoffensive expression that is substituted for one that may be offensive
- expression that seeks to avoid being offensive
- used in order to be polite and as a means to soften the impact of words that might be more offensive



• Are our perceptions of some phenomenon as either positive or negative to some degree a result of the particular words we use to describe them?





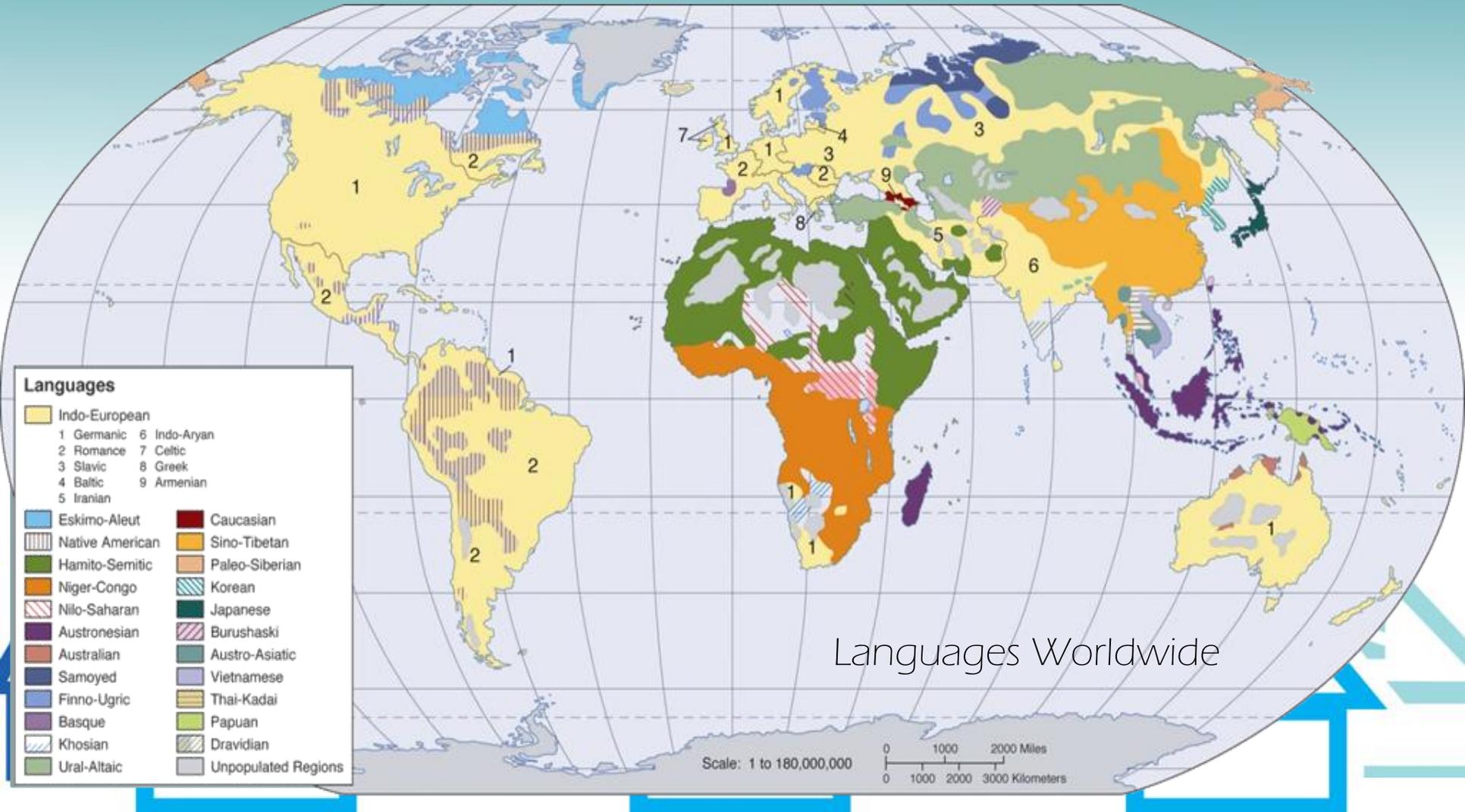
# Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- Does SWH imply that people have the power to change reality by changing their symbols?
  - What happened, for example, when Americans started using words such as *African American* rather than *Negro*?
- Can certain words be used to control and subjugate members of certain groups in society?
- Can certain words be used to mislead and cover up?
- What about words that are stigmatizing?
- What about the language of war?
- What about the language of corporate America?





# Nonmaterial Culture: Language





continued in  
CULTURE PART II

