

## Chapter 1

# The Essence of Anthropology

### Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn to:

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1. Describe the discipline of anthropology and make connections between each of its four fields.
2. Compare anthropology to the sciences and humanities.
3. Identify the characteristics of anthropological field methods and the ethics of anthropological research.
4. Explain the usefulness of anthropology in light of globalization.

### Lecture Outline

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#### I. The Anthropological Perspective

1. The authors define anthropology as “the study of humankind in all times and places.”
2. Other disciplines focus on humans in one way or another. Anthropology focuses on the interconnections and interdependence of all aspects of the human experience.
3. This broad holistic perspective equips anthropologists to address human nature.
4. Anthropologists seek to apply a holistic perspective, viewing all aspects of culture in the broadest possible context in order to understand their interconnections.
5. Anthropologists attempt to avoid ethnocentrism, a belief that the ways of one’s own culture are the only proper ones.
6. Anthropology has links to many other disciplines and aims at the synthesis of various approaches to the human experience.
7. In addition, until recently Europeans failed to recognize the common humanity they share with others, a recognition essential to the anthropological enterprise.
  - a. A unique cross-cultural and historical perspective distinguishes anthropology from the other social sciences and protects against culture-bound theories of human behavior (those based on the assumptions and values of the researcher’s own culture).
  - b. Anthropology can be seen as a laboratory, or testing ground, for the theories of other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and economics.

#### II. Anthropology and Its Fields

1. Anthropologists tend to specialize in one of four fields, or subdisciplines, of anthropology: cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology, and biological (physical) anthropology.
2. One specialty in anthropology that brings theoretical and applied approaches from both cultural and physical anthropology to the study of human health and disease is medical anthropology.

##### A. Cultural Anthropology

1. An anthropologist may use participant observation to better understand a particular way of life.

2. The ethnographer must observe carefully to understand all parts of a culture – its social, political, economic, and religious practices and institutions, and how these areas relate to each other.
3. Ethnography provides the raw data for ethnology. The ethnology is the branch of cultural anthropology that provides cross-cultural comparisons and theories that explain differences and similarities from group to group.
4. Applied anthropology is the practical use of anthropological knowledge and methods to solve practical problems, often for a specific client.
  - a. Today, anthropologists apply their findings to a variety of contexts ranging from business to education to healthcare. This is applied cultural anthropology.

#### **B. Linguistic Anthropology**

1. Language allows people to create, preserve, and transmit details of their culture from generation to generation.
2. Linguistic anthropology is a branch of anthropology that studies human languages.
  - a. Linguistic anthropologists investigate the structure, history, and relation to social and cultural contexts through language.
  - b. Linguistic anthropology has three main branches: descriptive linguistics, historical linguistics, and language in relation to social and cultural settings. All three yield valuable information about how people communicate and how they understand the world around them.
    - i. Descriptive linguistics involves recording, delineating, and analyzing all the features of a language leading to a deeper understanding of that language.
    - ii. Historical linguistics focuses on all the features of a language at a given moment in time.
    - iii. Linguistic anthropologists may look into the dynamic relationship between language and culture to determine the degree to which they mutually influence each other.
  - c. Linguistic anthropologists apply their research to many areas of life. For example, these anthropologists may assist small ethnic groups in the preservation or revival of languages that have been suppressed by dominant societies. Another example of applied linguistic anthropology is the creation of written forms of languages that previously only existed orally.

#### **C. Archaeology**

1. Archaeology is the study of cultures through the recovery and analysis of material remains and environmental data.
  - a. A number of topical archaeological subspecialties exist including historical archaeology (the study of places for which records exist), bioarchaeology (the study of human remains), contemporary archaeology (studying how people use material currently), applied archaeology (use of data on current cultures, such as landfill excavations to inform concerned parties on modern issues), and culture resource management (concerned with survey and/or excavation of archaeological and historical remains that might be threatened by construction or development).
    - i. Culture resource management is most often tied to government policies for the protection of cultural resources threatened by construction or development.

#### **D. Biological Anthropology**

1. Physical or biological anthropology focuses on humans as biological organisms, examining human evolution and contemporary human variation.
  - a. Molecular anthropology, or the study of genes and genetic relationships, is another vital component of physical anthropology.
  - b. Paleoanthropologists study human origins.
  - c. Primatology concerns itself with research on living and fossil primates to help understand the unique characteristics of human nature.

- d. Another specialty of physical anthropologists is the study of human growth, adaptation, and variation.
- e. Forensic anthropology is a field of applied physical anthropology that specializes in the identification of human skeletal remains for legal purposes.

### **III. Anthropology, Science, and the Humanities**

- 1. Anthropologists often consider themselves to be among the most scientific and humane of the humanities.
- 2. Anthropologists are committed to the idea that in order to fully understand a culture, one must experience it rather than just observe it. The inclusion of participant observation in their fieldwork is an important component.
- 3. Anthropology is an empirical social science based on observations or information taken in through the senses and verified by others in a qualitative or quantitative manner.
- 4. Scientific investigation consists of posing a hypothesis and eventually developing a theory that best accounts for the phenomena observed.
- 5. Scientific opinion is actively debated and changes over time.
- 6. For anthropology, the science model has a great deal of appeal but many problems as well.
- 7. By encompassing elements of both science and humanities models, anthropology is able to utilize a diverse set of methods that make its investigation unique from other disciplines.

### **IV. Doing Anthropology in the Field**

- 1. Fieldwork is characteristic of all the anthropological subdisciplines.
- 2. It requires the researcher to step out of his or her comfort zone and experience circumstances that are sometimes unfamiliar and unsettling, which may result in culture shock.
- 3. It also leads to personal rewards such as friendship as well as professional accomplishments in the pursuit of vital information.

### **V. Questions of Ethics**

- 1. Because of the kinds of research pursued by anthropologists, ethical questions often arise.
- 2. In recent years, debates have arisen concerning the potential ethical breaches that may occur if anthropologists work for corporations or undertake classified contract work for the military.
- 3. To overcome these possible ethical breaches, closer work with the local community is encouraged.
- 4. Foremost among these is the duty of the anthropologist to the people he/she studies, which may sometimes conflict with the discipline's imperative of collecting and publishing information.

### **VI. Anthropology and Globalization**

- 1. Because of anthropology's commitment to holism, it is in a good position to aid in the resolution of contemporary problems as well as to contribute to knowledge per se.
- 2. The authors conclude this chapter with a discussion of globalization, the worldwide interconnectedness consisting of the rapid global movement of natural resources, trade goods, human labor, finance capital, information, and infectious diseases.

## Features with Discussion Topics and Homework Assignments

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- A. Visual Counterpoint—Sleeping Habits Across Cultures:** This visual inset contrasts a typical American infant's sleeping pattern (infant sleeping alone in a crib) with a mother sleeping together with an infant in Chakradharpur, India (co-sleeping).
1. **Homework assignment:** Ask students to research the described benefits and detriments of these two types of sleeping patterns, to collect notes on their research, and to prepare to discuss them in class. Debate the topic in class by assigning students to act as spokesmen for each of the sleeping patterns. Debrief the debate by discussing this as well as other examples of cultural practices that may be present in a society yet where research indicates it is not the norm.
- B. Biocultural Connection—Picturing Pesticides:** This biocultural connection focuses on pesticide use. Anthropologist Elizabeth Guillet and colleagues from the Technological Institute of Sonora in Obregon, Mexico compared the effects of pesticides on human development between two communities of Yaqui Indians. Children in a more-exposed farming community showed less ability to excel at normal childhood activities such as jumping, memory games, and drawing activities when compared to a less-exposed ranching community. The study emphasized that higher levels of pesticide use would likely have the same detrimental effects around the globe.
1. **Discussion:** Ask students to outline other potential studies of pesticide use around the world. What are some other contexts within which such studies could be carried out?
- C. Anthropologists of Note—Franz Boas, Matilda Coxe Stephenson:** This article describes the pioneering accomplishments of two anthropologists. It was through the work of Boas that anthropology courses became common on college campuses. Through his work, he strived to promote anthropology as a means to combat hate and prejudice in the world. Stephenson did fieldwork among the Zuni and was one of the first women to hold a full-time position in science. Both Boas and Stephenson were also pioneers in the field of visual anthropology.
1. **Homework assignment:** Have students prepare a poster highlighting one of the pioneers of anthropology. The poster should list their major accomplishments and describe how their work contributed to the field of anthropology.
- D. Anthropology Applied—Forensic Anthropology: Voices for the Dead:** This inset describes the field of forensic anthropology and discusses the work of Mercedes Doretti, Michael Blakey and especially Clyde C. Snow, who studied forensic remains related to the Battle of Little Big Horn and identified the Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele. He recently aided in identifying the “disappeared” in Argentina. The text also discusses the work of teams sent to identify remains in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Rwanda as well as the African Burial Ground Project.
1. **Homework assignment:** Ask students to research the work of a forensic anthropologist, and to then write a paper detailing the information that was gained. How did the research add to the information already available from historians? Did it serve to change the information that was available?
- E. Original Study—Whispers from the Ice:** This story not only summarizes the journey of an archaeological dig but also highlights the importance of scientists and local communities working together for the benefit of both. After a summer rainstorm exposed part of a prehistoric village near the modern community of Barrow, Alaska, scientists and local Inupiat people worked together during the excavation process and on guidelines for handling sensitive tribal remains. The main human finding was the skeleton of a girl dated to AD 1200. Compromises were made as to how to

honor the Inupiat ancestor as well as gain valuable scientific information on her life and community.

1. **Homework assignment:** Have students locate another article that describes a similar process of an archaeological dig whereby scientists and local communities worked together. Summarize the process and discuss the challenges faced by the scientists involved.

**F. Globalscape—Safe Harbor?** Anthropology provides an important perspective on how local and global issues become intertwined. The Myanmar government represses its minority of Rohingya Muslims and state officials provide no path to citizenship for the group. The refugees fled to Bangladesh and many later wished to travel to Thailand and beyond for work. This local Myanmar event enabled human smugglers to promise safe passage for large sums of money, some of whom simply took the cash and left the refugees with nothing. As the Thai government cracked down on these human smugglers, the Rohingya began showing up on the shores of other countries. The local issue quickly became global and therefore demanded international solutions.

1. **Discussion:** What sorts of policies can the United Nations, NGOs, and/or nation-states develop to deal with this issue? What would be the main challenge facing those wanting to help such refugees?

## In-Class Projects and Activities

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1. **Question Around:** In class, using their textbook and/or notes, have students write 10 questions (plus answers) that they can pose to their classmates regarding the material in the chapter. Students must then go around the classroom and ask the questions, each to a different classmate. If a student answers the question right, he/she signs the student's paper, and then reciprocates by asking his/her question. If the answer is wrong, he/she must find the answer to the question from the text or notes before moving on. Students complete the activity by asking all 10 of their questions and having other students correctly answer their questions. This activity works well as an end-of-the-chapter review or to review a more difficult concept that has been covered in class.
2. **Interview an Anthropologist:** Have students come to class with an article or reading regarding an anthropologist of their choice. In class, have students read their article and take notes regarding their anthropologists' major accomplishments, their field of study, any challenges that they encountered, and other interesting details. In addition, have each student write 5–10 interview questions to ask another anthropologist. In pairs, have students take turns interviewing each other by asking the questions that they developed and answering from the list of interesting details that they gleaned from their reading. As time allows, students can interview more than one "anthropologist" and/or volunteer to be interviewed in front of the class.
3. **Garbage Science:** Have students practice the scientific method in class by investigating garbage from the school or home. The instructor may want to consider bringing in appropriate garbage from a variety of locations. Students should practice the steps of the scientific method by developing hypotheses (tentative explanations or hunches) regarding what they might find in the garbage. They should then develop a strategy for collecting this data from the garbage, as well as recording the results and analyzing their findings. From their evidence, they can come up with a theory based on their findings. The class may then discuss how their procedure was different or similar from the strategies of anthropologists.
4. **Classroom Fieldwork:** In class, have students practice some of the methods of fieldwork by having them view an ethnographic film, make observations, and record their results. Part way through the viewing, stop the film and discuss the strategies that the students are using to record

data. Ask them to share their challenges as well as any methods that they find are successful. What patterns have students seen thus far? Do they find themselves focusing on one area and neglecting observations in another? Consider having students move their places in the room. While they will still be viewing the same screen, this may show them how even a simple change in environment can affect their observations. Continue the movie, asking the students to continue their observations and data recording. At the end of the movie, discuss any patterns that the students saw reflected in the film. How did they find their experience: easy, difficult, or challenging? How do they feel their experience would differ if they were watching the people depicted in the movie in real life rather than on a movie screen? How did their experience differ from that of an anthropologist doing fieldwork?

5. **Healing from Home:** Have students consider home remedies that are popular in their own home or culture. An example might be eating chicken soup when you have a cold. In groups, have students brainstorm as many home remedies or practices as they can. Then have them discuss the validity of these practices and whether they continue today because of sound scientific facts or are based on cultural traditions. Do any of these practices have no scientific basis yet still continue? Are any of them harmful?

## Key Terms

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Anthropology (p. 3)  
 Applied anthropology (p. 5)  
 Archaeology (p. 10)  
 Bioarchaeology (p. 11)  
 Biocultural (p. 12)  
 Biological anthropology (p. 12)  
 Cultural anthropology (p. 6)  
 Cultural resource management (p. 12)  
 Culture (p. 6)  
 Culture-bound (p. 4)  
 Doctrine (p. 15)  
 Empirical (p. 15)  
 Ethnocentrism (p. 3)  
 Ethnography (p. 6)  
 Ethnology (p. 6)  
 Fieldwork (p. 6)  
 Forensic anthropology (p. 13)  
 Globalization (p. 21)  
 Historical archaeology (p. 10)  
 Holistic perspective (p. 3)  
 Hypothesis (p. 15)  
 Linguistic anthropology (p. 9)  
 Medical anthropology (p. 6)  
 Molecular anthropology (p. 12)  
 Nation (p. 22)  
 Paleoanthropology (p. 12)  
 Participant observation (p. 6)  
 Physical anthropology (p. 11)  
 Primatology (p. 12)

State (p. 22)  
Theory (p. 15)

## Applying Anthropology

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**Breaking News in Anthropology:** The field of anthropology is experiencing a new vigor as the expertise of anthropologists is recognized in the resolution of world problems. Ask students to look at recent newspaper and magazine articles for news related to topics in this chapter. Encourage them to think about how anthropologists might contribute to our understanding of these current events. Have them choose three issues and write a three- to five-page essay suggesting how anthropological knowledge might be applied. A useful site for finding news articles is the following:  
[http://www.sciencedaily.com/news/fossils\\_ruins/anthropology/](http://www.sciencedaily.com/news/fossils_ruins/anthropology/)

**From the Other's Perspective:** The anthropological literature contains many accounts of ethnographers whose diaries, journals, and fieldnotes describe the Western academic's experience of other cultures. Less is known, however, about the ways in which others react to and interpret the presence of an anthropologist or other stranger. Imagine that you have a very curious guest from another society visiting your family. What events would you take her to? What sorts of questions would you probably ask her? What kinds of information would you *not* want to share, at least at first? Are there times you would want privacy? How would you lead your lives if your guest decided to stay for a year? How much stress would this create for your family, and how do you think you would deal with it once you made a decision to let her stay?

**Using Anthropology in Everyday Life:** Ask students to write a one-page paper about their plans for the future, considering the following questions: Are you likely to interact with people who come from different backgrounds (or genders or sexual orientations) than your own? Do you plan to travel or live outside your hometown, state, or country? As a teacher, will you be working with students whose first language is not English? As a contractor or engineer, will you have to comply with federal laws regarding archaeological sites? As a lawyer or law enforcement official, will you need to know about forensic anthropology? Discuss as specifically as possible how anthropological knowledge might help you successfully understand and interact with your students, clients, patients, employers, or employees.

**Famous Anthropologists:** Have students choose anthropologists and research their basic life stories. In a small class, these could be presented to make students aware of the great range of activities covered under the rubric of anthropology.

**Popular Perceptions of Anthropology:** Ask students to think about movies they have seen and novels they have read that concern anthropologists. How are they portrayed? How do popular characterizations match or conflict with what students have learned about anthropology in this chapter? Have them ask three acquaintances what they think anthropology is; what is the greatest source of misconceptions about anthropology?

**Anthropology and Colonialism:** Your text points out that Europeans came into contact with many previously unknown peoples as they sought to extend their economic and political domination to all parts of the globe. Have students discuss this linkage, raising the question of how this may have affected the manner in which anthropology developed and the problems it faces today. (As examples, see Talal Asad's *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* [Humanities Press, 1973] and George Stocking's *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge* [University of Wisconsin, 1994].)

**Introduction to Journal Literature:** Most academic disciplines have key journals in which scholars report on current research and discuss new ideas. A primary journal of anthropology in the United States is the *American Anthropologist*. However, many other journals are dedicated to the study of anthropology and its various subfields. Have students spend a few hours in the library finding out what anthropology journals are available and compiling a list of them, noting briefly their general scope and where they can be found. Alternately, if your library has good online anthropology journals available, have students research a topic using these as sources.

**Anthropology Websites:** Have students go to the website of the American Anthropological Association (<http://www.aaanet.org>) and write a short paper on the diversity of interests found among professionals in the field. How many specialized groups do they find listed? What surprised them, if anything, about the range of topics or concerns covered by anthropology?

Have students access the above site and write a short paper on the American Anthropological Association's Statement on Ethics. What are the main points emphasized? Why are ethical concerns particularly important in anthropology?

Have students look at the American Anthropological Association's statement on race and summarize it in their own words. How do these ideas differ from popular perceptions of race among people they know?

## Other Resources

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### Films:

"Anthropologists at Work" (1993, 36 min.) is an excellent fast-paced video showing practicing anthropologists in all four subfields of anthropology. It is produced by the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) and can be purchased from the American Anthropological Association.

"First Contact" (1983, 54 min.), available through Filmmakers Library, is a classic and disturbing film about the first contact of indigenous peoples of New Guinea with Australian prospectors. It can be tied into a discussion of how anthropology developed along with European expansion.

"The Shackles of Tradition" (Strangers Abroad series, 52 min.) deals with the life of Franz Boas, "the father of American anthropology"; other films in this series are on Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer, William Rivers, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard. Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences.

"Shahira: Nomads of the Sudan" (1993, 52 min.) examines a female Muslim anthropologist who goes through her own trials and tribulations to do an ethnographic study of the Shahira pastoralists.

### Additional Readings:

For more background on the origins of anthropological thinking and its relationship to the intellectual and political conditions of the Enlightenment, see Margaret Hodgen's *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), Marvin Harris's *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (Crowell, 1968), Jacob Pandian's

*Anthropology and the Western Tradition* (Waveland Press, 1985), Bernard McGrane's *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (Columbia University Press, 1989), and the series by George Stocking (University of Wisconsin Press, 1980s and 1990s). More recent works on theory include Robert Borofsky, ed., *Assessing Cultural Anthropology* (McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994); Robert Layton, *An Introduction to Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Henrietta L. Moore, *Anthropological Theory Today* (Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000).

### **Complementary Perspectives:**

For students without substantial background in the sciences, it might be useful to go into a bit more depth on the hypothesis-testing framework. The role of induction, deduction, falsifiability, and so on can help students understand the difference between science and nonscience, which can be important in later discussions of creationism and evolution and in understanding recent theoretical challenges to the science model in anthropology. Presentation of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) might be helpful here, too.

It should be noted that the authors are restrained in their claims for the scientific status of anthropology. In line with current discussion about the humanistic quality of much anthropological thought and research, the authors propose the hypothesis-testing framework as one way to produce useful insights without denying the complementarity of other approaches. Following the recent emphasis on dialogue in the construction of cultural understanding, they bring the element of discussion into the definition of ethnology, for example. Since students continuing on in anthropology will be exposed to these kinds of ideas in further coursework, it is important to point out these features of the 15th edition explicitly. In addition, students coming to introductory anthropology from humanities fields will appreciate being alerted to the possibility of both humanistic and scientific inquiry within the field of anthropology.