### Chapter 1

**Anthropology and Human Diversity**

## Learning Objectives

The chapter introduces students to the discipline of anthropology, describing its scope, specializations, and the features that make it a unique social science. It presents anthropology’s understanding of human diversity and ways that anthropology helps us to understand human cultures, including our own. After reading Chapter 1, students should be able to:

1. Define anthropology and explain how it differs from other academic disciplines.
2. List what the major subdisciplines of anthropology are.
3. Explain some of the ways in which anthropology is applied both for careers and for general understanding.
4. Discuss and explain the ideas of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.
5. Describe anthropology’s position on race and explain the critical factors that lead the discipline to take such a position.
6. Describe some of the changes in the conditions under which anthropologists work and the ways anthropology has changed as a result.
7. Describe some of the key reasons for studying anthropology.

**Key Terms**

These are the anthropological terms introduced in Chapter 1. Students can write definitions of these terms during class or while studying to see how well they understood the reading.

applied anthropology 9

archaeology 6

artifact 6

biological (or physical) anthropology 4

biopsychological equality 13

cultural anthropology 3

cultural relativism 12

cultural resource management (CRM) 7

culture 7

emic (perspective) 7

ethnocentrism 12

ethnography 7

ethnology 8

etic (perspective) 8

historical linguists 5

holistic/holism 4

human variation 4

indigenous peoples 10

linguistic anthropology 5

paleoanthropology 4

participant observation 7

prehistoric 6

primate 5

racism 12

society 7

### Lecture Outline

1. Goals of Anthropology
   1. The discipline attempts to understand the entirety of human experience.
      1. It studies our species from its ancestral beginnings until now.
      2. It studies human beings all over the earth, in all kinds of physical, political, and social environments.
      3. It studies our relationship with our closest relatives, other primates.
      4. Some anthropologists even study and project the possibilities of the future.
   2. Differences between Anthropology and other subjects.
      1. Human behavior is studied from many perspectives instead of just a Western (ethnocentric) view. This acknowledges that:
      2. Anthropologists employ a **holistic approach**—combining all elements of human biology, history, cultures and the environment together. This is because:
         1. Human behavior cannot be adequately examined by focusing on only one single feature.
         2. Every aspect of human behavior is meaningful and necessary for understanding the entire story of a human community.
         3. Holism separates anthropology from the study of other disciplines.
2. Areas of Specialization in Anthropology.
   1. **Biological or Physical Anthropology** is the study of humankind from a biological perspective.
      1. Human adaptation is biocultural—involving both biological and cultural dimensions.
      2. Physical or Biological Anthropology involves various subfields such as:
         1. **Paleoanthropology** is the study of human origins through the fossil record.
         2. **Human variation** researchers are concerned with the physiological differences among modern humans, which include:
         3. Biological anthropologists are also interested in the evolution of culture.
            1. Our human brain allows for inventing, learning, and using cultural adaptations.
            2. Cultural adaptation has freed humans from the slow process of biological adaptation.
         4. Primatologists study the morphology (physical structure), chemistry, physiology and behavior in humans’ closest animal relatives, the **primates**.
            1. Non-human primates include monkeys and apes.
            2. Primate studies take place in laboratories, zoos, or out in the wild.
   2. **Linguistic Anthropology** is concerned with understanding language and its relation to culture.
      1. Human speech is a complex symbol system and used more extensively than the communication systems of other animals.
      2. Language studies can provide clues into culture by:
         1. Reflecting those things considered important to people through their vocabulary.
         2. Viewing individuals’ use of performance to change and modify the meanings of their words.
         3. Revealing how languages change. **Historical linguists** study how languages have changed and how they are related to each other.
      3. Understanding language helps in the development of communication technology.
   3. **Archaeology** is the study on the reconstruction of past cultures through their material remains.
      1. Many archaeologists study **prehistoric** societies—those with no written records.
      2. Archaeology is the reconstruction of human behavior and culture from **artifacts**—objects made or modified by human beings. These include pottery, tools, or even garbage.
         1. Their principle task is to infer the nature of past human cultures through patterns of artifacts.
         2. Context, location, and precise position of artifacts are critical to interpretation.
      3. Sub-fields within archaeology include:
         1. Urban archaeology—the archaeological investigation of current-day cities.
         2. **Cultural resource management (CRM)** is the protection and management of archaeological, archival, and architectural resources.
   4. **Cultural Anthropology** is the study of:
      1. **Society**—a group of people who depend on one another for survival and well-being.
         1. Traditionally, societies shared a common geographical location.
         2. With modern technology (including transportation and electronic communication), societies increasingly global entities.
      2. **Culture** is the major way in which human beings adapt to their environments and give meaning to their lives. It includes:
         1. Human behavior.
         2. Ideas learned, not genetically inherited.
         3. Material objects produced by a group of people.
      3. Cultural anthropologists attempt to understand culture both as a universal human phenomenon and as a characteristic of a group of people:
         1. They search for general principles underlying all cultures.
         2. They explore the ways that different societies adapt to their environments.
         3. They are interested in the differences of power among cultures and the effect of the individual.
         4. They use the research strategy of **participant observation** – long-term fieldwork gathering data by observing and participating in people’s lives.
      4. Two important aspects of Cultural Anthropology are:
         1. **Ethnography** – description of society or culture.
            1. Description may be **emic**—an examination of what ideas and practices mean to members of a culture.
            2. Description may be **etic**—a Western scientific approach and analysis.
         2. **Ethnology** is the search for general principles or laws that govern cultural phenomena.
      5. Cultural Anthropology includes many different subfields of focus, such as political and legal anthropology, humanistic anthropology, and visual anthropology.
      6. Cultural Anthropologists are interested in documenting and understanding the ways in which cultures change.
      7. Cultural Anthropology is important because it can contribute to public debate and help change public policy.
   5. **Applied anthropologists** develop solutions to present-day social, political, and economic problems in a wide variety of cultural contexts.
      1. Cultural anthropologists contribute to applied anthropology by:
         1. Solving problems of restoration, water management, and agricultural productivity.
         2. Promoting the welfare of tribal and **indigenous people** throughout the world.
         3. Addressing problems of legal and criminal justice systems, and suggesting alternative forms of conflict resolution.
         4. Implementing more effective educational and mental health policies.
         5. Improving healthcare, diet, and disease control.
      2. Archaeologists have contributed to applied anthropology by:
         1. Enabling native populations to gain access to land and other resources that historically belonged to them.
         2. Showing modern people how to design irrigation works and raised field systems, making effective use of the environment, and raising agricultural yields.
      3. Biological anthropologists contribute to applied anthropology by:
         1. Comparing diets of modern people to traditional communities and expanding scientific knowledge of disease.
         2. Using their knowledge of the skeletal system to aid in identifying victims of crime (these specialists are called forensic anthropologists).
      4. Applied anthropologists promote learning of a variety of different understandings present in the world and the social dynamics that underlie culture.
3. Critical Issues in Anthropology
   1. **Ethnocentrism** is judging other cultures from the perspective of one’s own culture.
      1. Ethnocentrism in Western culture has greater consequences than in smaller, less technologically advanced or geographically isolated peoples. This is because:
         1. Advances in technology lead people to believe that industrialized societies are superior to others, especially if there is a strong military force.
         2. People learn to want an abundant amount of consumer goods.
      2. Ethnocentrism does have a positive aspect: it helps hold society together by perpetuating cultural values.
      3. Ethnocentrism can be maladaptive if it prevents building bridges between cultures. It may:
         1. Lead to **racism**—the belief that some human populations are superior to others because of inherited, genetically transmitted characteristics.
         2. Underlie much of the structural inequality that characterizes modern history.
   2. **Cultural relativism** is the notion that a culture should only be understood in terms of its cultural whole.
      1. Cultural relativism is a fundamental research tool for anthropologists:
         1. It is possible to understand cultures without approving of them.
         2. Every culture has a logic that makes sense to its own members.
      2. It shows us that each culture is a design for a particular set of historical circumstances.
      3. It helps us both contribute to the understanding of human diversity and also provides us with a critique of our own society.
   3. Human biological diversity and race show both differences and similarities.
      1. The human species shows extremely low levels of skeletal and blood type diversity.
      2. Peoples from nearer geographical regions tend to share more similarities than peoples further away.
      3. There is a wide diversity in human shapes and colors.
   4. There is no agreed-upon, consistent system of racial classification.
      1. Different cultures construct racial categories differently than Americans.
      2. Franz Boas, one of the founders of American anthropology, argued for **biopsychological equality**—the idea that all human groups have the same biological and mental capabilities.
      3. No group of humans has ever been isolated long enough from another to make it biologically different from other groups.
         1. The selection of traits used in the past to define race is arbitrary and is based solely on visual characteristics and personal preference of the researcher.
         2. There is an inability to describe variation within the human species.
         3. There has been repeated independent emergence of so-called racial characteristics in different populations with no direct genetic relationship.
      4. Variation within socially constructed races presents a problem:
         1. Visible differences in skin color, eye shape, nose shape, and hair texture are frequently used to group people because they are easily perceived.
         2. Individual differences between people are greater than racial differences.
         3. The traits typically used to define races have arisen repeatedly and independently and are a common result of evolution.
      5. The notion that perceived differences between social groups are caused by racial inheritance has no biological validity and must be dismissed.
      6. Anthropology shows us that although racism is an important social fact, the differences among human groups are the result of culture, not biological inheritance or race.
4. Anthropologists and “Natives”
   1. Anthropology’s Western roots are in a colonial past.
      1. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when anthropology was established, powerful nations were in control of those communities in which anthropologists worked.
      2. Often these nations, such as the United States, Britain, and France, subdued traditional peoples within their own borders.
      3. Implications of anthropological research during these times:
         1. Often times, natives did not have a choice but to accept an anthropologist.
         2. Anthropologists did not have to be concerned with the political and economical concerns of the people they were studying.
         3. There was little chance that the anthropologists’ findings would be contested, since natives did not have access to book stores and did not speak European languages.
   2. Conditions today are different for anthropologists.
      1. Increasing numbers of anthropologists come from non-Western nations.
      2. Anthropologists face a reaction and criticism from the audience with whom they study.
      3. Anthropologists today must be sensitive to the political and social implications of their work
   3. They have responded to these challenges in various ways:
      1. They are explicit about the conditions and contexts of their work.
      2. They are also clear about their motivations and the values they bring to their work.
5. Anthropology is now part of a globalized world.
   1. In the early years of anthropology, societies were often depicted as isolated and separate entities, such as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown’s study of the Andaman Islanders.
   2. Today, we understand that we are a connected and interconnected world.
   3. Globalization has affected anthropology in two important ways.
      1. Anthropologists have changed the way they work and write.
         1. They are now more likely to focus on issues of relationship and exchange between a local society and the global world.
         2. They write works that are less descriptive of “whole” cultures, choosing instead to focus on specific concerns.
      2. Anthropologists have often worked with groups that are adversely affected by increased contact with the outside world.
         1. They have become more engaged in social and political action.
         2. They now work more collaboratively with native peoples.
6. Why Study Anthropology?
   1. It is a strong part of a liberal arts curriculum.
   2. As a university discipline, anthropology focuses on understanding other groups of people.
   3. It grapples with the question of what it means to be human.
      1. We know that culture takes a great variety of forms.
      2. It gives us insight into the plasticity of human society.
   4. It provides new and unique ways of thinking about culture.
      1. How can we survive together in the world?
      2. How do we solve extraordinary problems, like poverty, violence, inequality in our society today?
   5. Anthropology provides a unique way to approach global problems.

**Student Activities and Assignments**

1. Have students examine their own classroom/university environment as a global community: invite students to share their experiences of traveling outside of their communities and encountering individuals who are culturally different. Discuss why culture matters in our world today and how anthropology can strengthen our understandings of each other.
2. Discuss ways that ethnocentrism both detracts from and also enhances our day-to-day lives. Consider a world in which there was no ethnocentrism. What kinds of advantages and disadvantages would you expect to find?
3. Using the “Ethnography” inset in the chapter on “The Nacirema,” encourage students to think of other ways that their own culture might seem “exotic” and “strange” to someone first encountering it.
4. Explore the impact and importance of race as a social construct. Choose either the classroom or well-documented group (such as our current Congress) and ask students to classify and group members according to a set of criteria that they develop. Invite them to consider race as one of the variables, but not the only one. What other types of groupings emerge when we look at a large community? Are there classifications that are constructive? What is the purpose of classifying individuals in a group, and could society function just as well without these?
5. Anthropology is a holistic discipline. Do follow-up research on each of the four subfields and present an overview of anthropology as a “story” of the human species from earliest evolution through the diversity in our world today. Students should demonstrate how each of the four subfields contributes to our understanding of our species.

**Media Suggestions**

**(Films)**

1. Donkey without a Tail**.** 2006. 30 minutes. A film by Sergio Bloch. Distributed by Filmmakers Library. This film follows the lives of five trash collectors (called “donkeys without a tail” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This occupation actually has roots in the “garrafeiros,” Portuguese immigrants who worked as bottle collectors. The film addresses such topics as culture change, urban development, social status, and globalization.
2. The Adventurers Series**.** 2009.A collection of four films produced, written, and directed by Andrew Gregg, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The four films in this series, “The Last Nomads,” “The Everlasting Oasis,” “A Story Told in Stone,” and “The Lost People of the Baja,” each deal with topics of exploring lesser-known cultures and areas of the world. It covers topics related to the subfields of Cultural Anthropology, Archaeology, and Physical Anthropology.

**(Internet Sites)**

1) The American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress was created in 1976 to preserve and present American folk life. Access their site at [**http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife**](http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife)

a. Describe the ways cultural information is transmitted.

b. Describe specific folklife research projects from your own state.

2) Applied anthropologists use the research techniques of anthropology in practical settings and work in areas that require a practical understanding of human behavior. Learn more about the field by exploring The Society for Applied Anthropology website at[**http://www.sfaa.net/**](http://www.sfaa.net/)

a. Describe the role of the applied anthropologist in solving problems.

b. Describe the ethical and professional responsibilities for applied anthropologists.