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Anthropology and the Study of Culture

outline

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Distinctive Features of Cultural Anthropology

the big questions

- What is anthropology?
- What is cultural anthropology?
- What are distinctive features of cultural anthropology?

anthro current

A Zhuang (zhoo-ANG) girl works in the famously beautiful rice terraces of southern China near its border with Vietnam. The Zhuang number about 18 million, making them the largest ethnic minority in China. In addition to growing tourism in the Zhuang region, it is now a favored retirement destination for elderly Chinese. One major attraction is the quality of the drinking water that comes from natural springs (Lin and Huang 2012). Another is the area's reputation for having many people who live for a long time, including China's oldest person who is 127 years old. An elderly resident comments, "My high blood pressure was brought under control after I spent a month here. I would get epileptic attacks about once in two months, but it never strikes now."

Cannibalism, *Jurassic Park*, hidden treasure, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, ancient prehuman fossils. And the Fountain of Youth in China? The popular impression of anthropology is based mainly on movies and television shows that depict anthropologists as adventurers and heroes. Many anthropologists do have adventures and discover treasures such as ancient pottery, medicinal plants, and jade carvings. But most of their research is not glamorous.

Some anthropologists spend years in difficult physical conditions, searching for the earliest fossils of our ancestors. Others live among people in Silicon Valley, California, and study firsthand how they work and organize family life in a setting permeated by modern technology. Some anthropologists conduct laboratory analyses of the contents of tooth enamel to reveal where an individual once lived. Others study designs on prehistoric pottery to learn what the symbols mean, or observe nonhuman primates such as chimpanzees or orangutans in the wild to learn how they live.

Anthropology is the study of humanity, including prehistoric origins and contemporary human diversity. Compared with other disciplines that study humanity (such as history, psychology, economics, political science, and sociology), anthropology is broader in scope. Anthropology covers a much greater span of time than these disciplines, and it encompasses a broader range of topics.

Introducing Anthropology's Four Fields

In North America, anthropology is divided into four fields (figure 1.1) that focus on separate, but connected, subject matter related to humanity:

- **Biological anthropology** or *physical anthropology*—the study of humans as biological organisms, including evolution and contemporary variation.
- **Archaeology** the study of past human cultures through their material remains.
- **Linguistic anthropology** the study of human communication, including its origins, history, and contemporary variation and change.
- **Cultural anthropology** the study of living peoples and their cultures, including variation and change. **Culture** refers to people's learned and shared behaviors and beliefs.

Some anthropologists argue that a fifth field, applied anthropology, should be added. **Applied anthropology** is the use of anthropological knowledge to prevent or solve problems or to shape and achieve policy goals.

Biological or Physical Anthropology

Biological anthropology encompasses three subfields. The first, *primatology*, is the study of the nonhuman members of the order of mammals called primates, which includes a wide

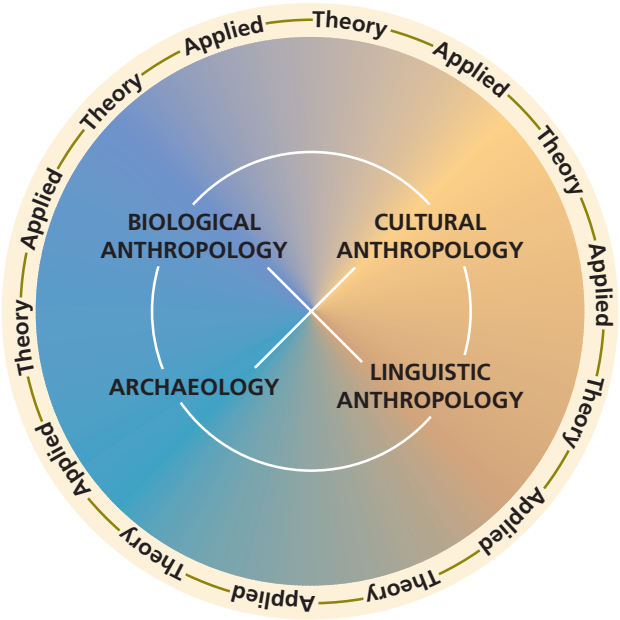

FIGURE 1.1 The Four Fields of Anthropology

anthropology the study of humanity, including its prehistoric origins and contemporary human diversity.

Anthropologists study the entire diversity of humanity, past and present. Cultural anthropologists focus on living people including (BOTTOM) the Dani people, of West Papua, the Indonesian part of the island of New Guinea. This Dani man, holding a stone adze, was photographed in the 1990s. (TOP) Members of a team of anthropologists and students discuss their research project on 20th century Silicon Valley culture.

As you read this chapter, make a list of the kinds of data (information) that anthropologists in the four fields collect during their research.

range of animals from very small, nocturnal creatures to gorillas, the largest members. Primatologists study nonhuman primates in the wild and in captivity. They record and analyze how the animals spend their time, collect and share food, form social groups, rear offspring, develop leadership patterns, and experience and resolve conflicts. Primatologists are alarmed about the decline in numbers, and even the extinction, of nonhuman primate species. Many apply their knowledge to nonhuman primate conservation.

The second subfield is *paleoanthropology*, the study of human evolution on the basis of the fossil record. Paleoanthropologists search for fossils to increase the amount of evidence related to the way human evolution occurred.

The third subfield is the study of *contemporary human biological variation*. Anthropologists working in this area seek to explain differences in the biological makeup and behavior

biological anthropology the study of humans as biological organisms, including evolution and contemporary variation.

archaeology the study of past human cultures through their material remains.

linguistic anthropology the study of human communication, including its origins, history, and contemporary variation and change.

cultural anthropology the study of living peoples and their cultures, including variation and change.

culture people's learned and shared behaviors and beliefs.

applied anthropology the use of anthropological knowledge to prevent or solve problems or to shape and achieve policy goals.

Maya people watch as forensic anthropologist Francisco de León conducts an exhumation of more than 50 bodies in a highland Guatemalan village in 1997.

Are courses in forensic anthropology offered at your school?

of contemporary humans. They study such biological factors as DNA within and across populations, body size and shape, human nutrition and disease, and human growth and development.

Archaeology

Archaeology means, literally, the "study of the old," but "the old" is limited to human culture. Therefore, the time depth of archaeology goes back only to the beginnings of *Homo sapiens*, between 300,000 and 160,000 years ago, when they first emerged in Africa. Archaeology encompasses two major areas: *prehistoric archaeology*, which concerns the human past before written records, and *historical archaeology*, which deals with the human past in societies that have written documents. Prehistoric archaeologists often identify themselves with broad geographic regions, studying, for example, Old World archaeology (Africa, Europe, and Asia) or New World archaeology (North, Central, and South America).

Another set of specialties within archaeology is based on the context in which the archaeology takes place. For example, *underwater archaeology* is the study of submerged archaeological sites. Underwater archaeological sites may be from either prehistoric or historic times. Some prehistoric sites include early human settlements in parts of Europe, such as household sites discovered in Switzerland that were once near lakes but are now submerged.

The archaeology of the recent past is an important research direction. *Industrial archaeology* focuses on social change during and since the Industrial Revolution. It is especially active in Great Britain, home of the Industrial Revolution. There, industrial archaeologists study such topics as the

Underwater archaeology is a special focus of some archaeologists. Stephen Lubkemann, trained as both a cultural anthropologist and an underwater archaeologist, documents the remains of the hull of DRTO-036, a vessel that wrecked in the Dry Tortugas in the mid-nineteenth century. The vessel lies within Dry Tortugas National Park in the Florida Keys.

You can access UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of Underwater Heritage on the Internet.

Iron Bridge, England, is an important site of industrial archaeology. Considered the "birthplace of industry," the site includes the world's first iron bridge and remains of factories, furnaces, and canals.

Take a virtual tour of the site by going to http://www.ironbridge.org.uk/.

design of iron bridges, the growth and distribution of china potteries, miners' housing, and cotton mills. Industrial archaeologists seek to conserve industrial sites, which are more likely to be neglected or destroyed than are sites that have natural beauty or cultural glamour attached to them.

An example of the *archaeology of contemporary life* is the "Garbage Project" conducted by archaeologists at the University of Arizona at Tucson (Rathje and Murphy 1992). They have excavated part of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island, near New York City. It is one of the largest human-made structures in North America. Excavation of pop-top can tabs, disposable diapers, cosmetics containers, and telephone books reveals much about recent consumption patterns and how they affect the environment. One surprising finding is that the kinds of garbage people often blame for filling up landfills, such as fast-food packaging and disposable diapers, cause less serious problems than paper. Newspaper is a major culprit because of sheer quantity. This information can improve recycling efforts worldwide.

Linguistic Anthropology

Linguistic anthropology is devoted to the study of communication, mainly (but not exclusively) among humans. Linguistic anthropology has three subfields: *historical linguistics*, the study of language change over time and how languages are related; *descriptive linguistics,* or structural linguistics, the study of how contemporary languages differ in terms of their formal structure; and *sociolinguistics,* the study of the relationships among social variation, social context, and linguistic variation, including nonverbal communication.

Linguistic anthropologists are studying important current issues as discussed in Chapter 11. First,they study language in everyday use, or discourse, and how it relates to power structures at local, regional, and international levels (Duranti 1997a). Second, they look at the role of information technology in communication, including the Internet, social media such as Facebook, and cell phones. Third is attention to the increasingly rapid extinction of indigenous languages and what can be done about it.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is the study of contemporary people and their cultures. The term *culture* refers to people's learned and shared behaviors and beliefs. Cultural anthropology considers variations and similarities across cultures, and how cultures change over time. Cultural anthropologists learn about culture by spending a long time, typically a year or more, living with the people they study (see Chapter 3).

Prominent areas of specialization in cultural anthropology include economic anthropology, psychological anthropology, medical anthropology, political anthropology, and international development anthropology.

Applied Anthropology: Separate Field or Cross-Cutting Focus?

In the United States, applied anthropology emerged during and after World War II. Its first concern was with improving the lives of contemporary peoples and their needs, so it was more closely associated with cultural anthropology than with the other three fields.

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Many anthropologists feel that applied anthropology should be considered a fifth field of anthropology, standing on its own. Many others think that the application of knowledge to solve problems, just like theory, should be part of each field (see Figure 1.1). The latter is

anthropology works

Delivering Health Care in Rural Haiti

Journalist Tracy Kidder's book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World* (2003), is an inspiring story about an inspiring person: Paul Farmer. Farmer earned a Ph.D. in anthropology and a degree in medicine from Harvard University. His training in cultural anthropology and medicine is a powerful prescription for providing health care to the poor.

In his first book, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (1992), he wrote about the coming of HIV/AIDS to Haiti and a rural community's attempt to understand and cope with this devastating new disease. He also describes how the wider world mistakenly blamed Haiti for being the source of the disease. In addition to his scholarly publications, Farmer is an influential health practitioner and activist. As one of the co-founders of Partners in Health, he has helped heal thousands of people. In 2009, Farmer was named U.S. deputy special envoy to Haiti. Since the earthquake in January 2010, he has worked tirelessly to alleviate suffering in Haiti.

Farmer focuses attention on poverty and social justice as primary causes of health problems worldwide. This position has shaken the very foundations of Western medicine.

A woman cares for her sick child while he receives treatment for cholera at a cholera clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 2011. Cholera has affected more than 450,000 people in this country of 10 million, or nearly 5 percent of the population, and it has killed more than 6,000.

In my undergraduate cultural anthropology class, when I ask who has heard of Paul Farmer, many hands shoot up. Of these students, most have read *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. A few have heard him speak. This level of awareness of Farmer's contributions to health and anthropology prompted me to create a label that captures Farmer's inspirational role: the Paul Farmer Effect (PFE). This label refers to the Pied Piper role he plays for students: they want to follow his lead; they want to be a Paul Farmer. Students are choosing courses and selecting majors and minors to help them achieve that goal.

I began to notice the PFE about five years ago, and it is still growing. Because of the PFE, more students each year combine their academic interests in anthropology, global health, and international affairs. These students are beginning to graduate and are going on to pursue humanitarian careers. Thanks to Paul Farmer and the PFE, they are more powerfully informed to make the world a better place.

the author's position, and, therefore, many examples of applied anthropology appear throughout this book.

Applied anthropology connects all four fields of anthropology, for example:

- Archaeologists are employed in *cultural resource management (CRM)*, assessing the presence of possible archaeological remains before construction projects, such as roads and buildings, can proceed.
- Biological anthropologists are employed as *forensic anthropologists*, participating in criminal investigations through laboratory work identifying bodily remains. Others work in non-human primate conservation, helping to protect their habitats and survival.
- Linguistic anthropologists consult with educational institutions about how to improve standardized tests for bilingual populations and conduct policy research for governments.
- Cultural anthropologists apply their knowledge to poverty reduction, education, health care, international business, and conflict prevention and resolution (see Anthropology Works throughout this book for examples).

Introducing Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is devoted to studying human cultures worldwide, both their similarities and differences. Cultural anthropology makes "the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Spiro 1990). It teaches us to look at ourselves from the "outside" as a somewhat "strange" culture. A compelling example of making the familiar strange is the

case of the Nacirema (nah-see-RAY-muh), a "culture" first described in 1956:

> The Nacirema are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and the Tarahumara of Mexico, and the Carib and the Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, though tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a culture hero, Notgnihsaw, who is otherwise known for two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the Spirit of Truth resided (415).

The anthropologist goes on to describe the Nacirema's intense focus on the human body. He provides a detailed account of a daily ritual performed within the home in a specially constructed shrine area:

> The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. . . . Beneath the charm box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablution. (1965: 415–416)

If you do not recognize this tribe, try spelling its name backwards. (*Note:* Please forgive Miner for his use of the masculine pronoun in describing Nacirema society; his writings are several decades old.)

Highlights in the History of Cultural Anthropology

The beginning of cultural anthropology goes back to writers such as Herodotus (fifth century BCE; note: BCE stands for *Before the Common Era*, a secular transformation of BC, or *Before Christ*), Marco Polo (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), and Ibn Khaldun (fourteenth century), who traveled extensively and wrote reports about cultures they encountered. More recent conceptual roots are found in writers of the French Enlightenment, such as the philosopher Montesquieu, who wrote in the first half of the eighteenth century. His book *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748 [1949], discussed the temperament, appearance, and government of various peoples around the world. He thought that different climates caused cultural variations.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the discovery of the principles of biological evolution by Charles Darwin and others offered for the first time a scientific explanation for human origins. Biological evolution says that early forms evolve into later forms through the process of natural selection, whereby the most biologically fit organisms survive to reproduce while those that are less fit die out. According to Darwin's model, continuous progress toward increasing fitness occurs through struggle among competing organisms.

The concept of evolution was important in the thinking of early cultural anthropologists. The most important founding figures of cultural anthropology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Sir Edward Tylor and Sir James Frazer in England and Lewis Henry Morgan in the United States (see Figure 1.2 on page 10). They developed a model of cultural evolution whereby all cultures evolve from lower to higher forms over time. This view placed non-Western peoples at a "primitive" stage and Euro-American culture as "civilization." It assumed that non-Western cultures would either catch up to the level of Western civilization or die out.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a major figure in modern cultural anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century, established a theoretical approach called **functionalism**. It says that a culture is similar to a biological organism: the parts work together to support the operation of the whole. Religion and family organization, for example, contribute to the functioning of the whole culture. Franz Boas is considered the founder of North American cultural anthropology (see photo on page 11). Born in Germany and educated in physics and geography, he came to the United States in 1887 (Patterson 2001:46ff). He brought with him a skepticism toward Western science gained from a year's study with the Inuit, the indigenous people of Baffin Island, Canada (see Map 3.4). He learned from the Inuit that people in different cultures may have different perceptions of even basic physical substances, such as "water." Boas came to recognize the individuality and validity of different cultures. He introduced the concept of **cultural relativism**, or the view that each culture must be understood in terms of the values and ideas of that culture and not be judged by the standards of another. According to Boas, no culture is "better" than any other, a view that contrasted markedly with that of the nineteenth-century cultural evolutionists.

Margaret Mead, the most famous student of Boas (see photo on page 11), contributed to understanding how culture,

functionalism the theory that a culture is similar to a biological organism, in which parts work to support the operation and maintenance of the whole.

cultural relativism the perspective that each culture must be understood in terms of the values and ideas of that culture and not judged by the standards of another culture.

FIGURE 1.2 Key Contributors to Euro-American Cultural Anthropology

Late Nineteenth Century	
Sir Edward Tylor	First definition of culture, armchair anthropology
Sir James Frazer	Comparative study of religion, armchair anthropology
Lewis Henry Morgan	Insider's view, cultural evolution, comparative method
Early Twentieth Century	
Bronislaw Malinowski	Functionalism, holism, participant observation
Franz Boas	Cultural relativism, historical particularism, advocacy
Margaret Mead	Personality and culture, cultural constructionism, public anthropology
Ruth Benedict	Personality and culture, national character studies
Zora Neale Hurston	African American, women's roles, ethnographic novels
Mid- and Late Twentieth Century and Early Twenty-First Century	
Claude Lévi-Strauss	Symbolic analysis, French structuralism
Beatrice Medicine	Native American anthropology
Eleanor Leacock	Anthropology of colonialism and indigenous peoples
Marvin Harris	Cultural materialism, comparison, theory building
Mary Douglas	Symbolic anthropology
Michelle Rosaldo	Feminist anthropology
Clifford Geertz	Interpretive anthropology, thick description of local culture
Laura Nader	Legal anthropology, "studying up"
George Marcus	Critique of culture, critique of cultural anthropology
Gilbert Herdt	Gay anthropology
Nancy Scheper-Hughes	Critical medical anthropology
Leith Mullings	Anti-racist anthropology
Sally Engle Merry	Globalization and human rights
Lila Abu-Lughod	Gender politics, politics of memory

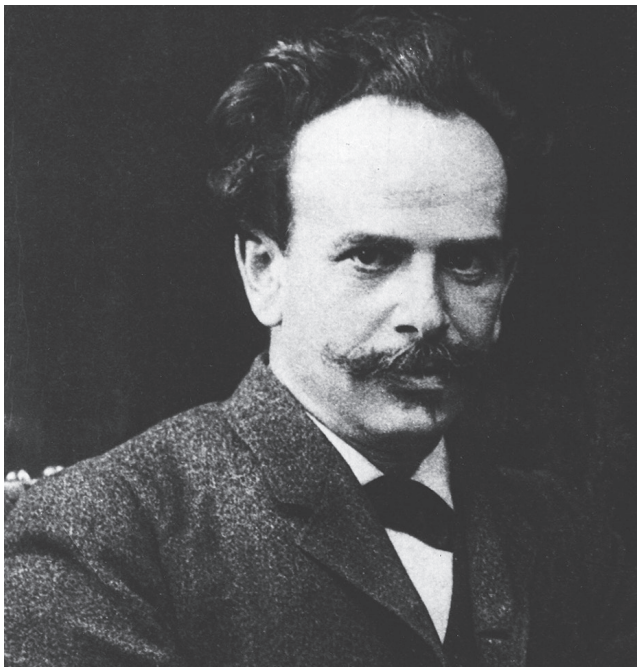
specifically child-rearing, shapes personality and gender roles. Her writings had wide influence on U.S. child-care patterns in the 1950s. Mead was thus an early *public anthropologist* who took seriously the importance of bringing cultural anthropology knowledge to the general public in order to create positive social change.

Following World War II, cultural anthropology expanded substantially in terms of the number of trained anthropologists and departments of anthropology in colleges and universities. Along with this growth came increased theoretical diversity. Several anthropologists developed theories of culture based on environmental factors. They suggested that similar environments (for example, deserts or tropical rainforests or mountains) would predictably lead to the emergence of similar cultures.

At this time, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was developing a different theoretical perspective, known as *French structuralism*. He maintained that the best way to understand a culture is to collect its myths and stories and analyze the underlying themes in them. French structuralism inspired the development of *symbolic anthropology*, or the study of culture as a system of meanings, which was especially prominent in the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In the 1960s, Marxist theory emerged in anthropology, stating the importance of people's access to the means of livelihood. It inspired the emergence of a new theoretical school in the United States called **cultural materialism**. Cultural materialism is an approach to studying culture by emphasizing the material aspects of life, especially the natural environment and how people make a living. Also arising in the 1960s was the theoretical position referred to as **interpretive anthropology**, or *interpretivism*. This perspective developed from both U.S. symbolic anthropology and French structural anthropology. It says that understanding culture should focus on what people think about, their ideas, and the symbols and meanings that are important to them. These two positions are discussed in more detail later in this section.

Since the 1990s, two other theoretical directions have gained prominence. Both are influenced by *postmodernism*, an intellectual pursuit that asks whether modernity is truly progress and questions such aspects of modernism as the scientific method, urbanization, technological change, and mass communication. The first theory is termed **structurism** (the author coined this term), the view that powerful structures such as economics, politics, and media shape cultures, influencing how people behave and think, even when they do not realize it.



Two giants in the history of anthropology. (LEFT) Franz Boas emphasized the four-field approach and the principle of cultural relativism. (RIGHT) Margaret Mead, a student of Boas at Columbia University, moved the Boasian legacy forward by her pioneering research on the cultural construction of personality and gender. She is the woman in the center.

The second theory emphasizes human **agency**, or free will, and the power of individuals to create and change culture by acting against structures.

Three Debates

Three debates in anthropology go to the heart of basic questions of why people differ and are similar across cultures, why they behave and think the way they do, and how anthropologists should proceed to understand these questions. The first debate engages biological anthropology with cultural anthropology. The second and third are debates specifically within cultural anthropology.

Biological Determinism Versus Cultural Constructionism **Biological determinism** seeks to explain people's behavior and thinking by considering biological factors such as people's genes and hormones. Thus, biological determinists search for the gene or hormone that contributes to behavior such as homicide, alcoholism, or adolescent stress. They also examine cultural practices in terms of how they contribute to the *reproductive success of the species*, that is, how they contribute to the gene pool of subsequent generations by boosting the number of surviving offspring produced. In this view, behaviors and ideas that have reproductive advantages are more likely than others to be passed on to future generations. Biological determinists, for example, explain why human males apparently have "better" spatial skills than females. They say that these differences are the result of evolutionary selection because males with "better" spatial skills would have an advantage in securing both food and mates. Males with "better" spatial skills impregnate more females and have more offspring with "better" spatial skills.

Cultural constructionism, in contrast, maintains that human behavior and ideas are best explained as products of culturally shaped learning. In terms of the example of "better" male spatial skills, cultural constructionists would provide evidence that such skills are passed on culturally through learning, not genes. They would say that parents and teachers

cultural materialism or a political economy approach, takes material aspects of life, such as the environment, natural resources, and mode of livelihood, as shaping other aspects of life, including power relations, social organization, and ideology.

interpretive anthropology or a symbolic approach, seeks to understand culture by studying what people think about, their ideas, and the meanings that are important to them.

structurism a theoretical position concerning human behavior and ideas that says large forces such as the economy, social and political organization, and the media shape what people do and think.

agency the ability of humans to make choices and exercise free will even within dominating structures.

biological determinism a theory that explains human behavior and ideas as shaped mainly by biological features such as genes and hormones.

cultural constructionism a theory that explains human behavior and ideas as shaped mainly by learning.

socialize boys and girls differently in spatial skills and are more likely to promote learning of certain kinds of spatial skills among boys.

Though recognizing the role of biological factors such as genes and hormones, anthropologists who favor cultural construction and learning as an explanation for behaviors such as homicide and alcoholism point to childhood experiences and family roles as being perhaps even more important than genes or hormones. Most cultural anthropologists are cultural constructionists, but some connect biology and culture in their work.

Interpretive Anthropology Versus Cultural Materialism Interpretive anthropology, or interpretivism, focuses on understanding culture by studying what people think about, their explanations of their lives, and the symbols that are important to them. For example, in understanding the dietary habits of Hindus, interpretivists ask why Hindus do not eat beef. Hindus point to their religious beliefs, where cows are sacred and it is a sin to kill and eat them. Interpretivists accept this explanation as sufficient.

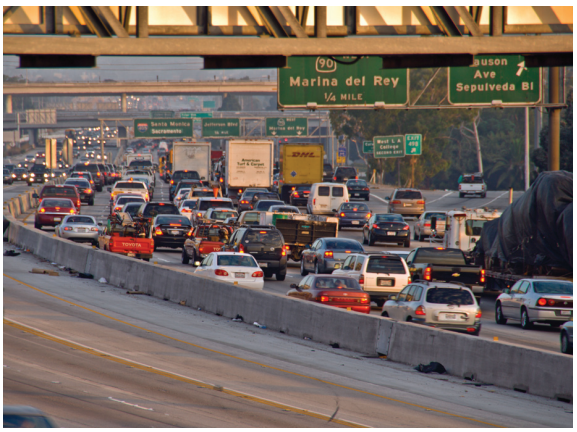
Cultural materialism attempts to learn about culture by first examining the material aspects of life: the natural environment and how people make a living within particular environments. Cultural materialists believe that these basic facts of life shape culture, even though people may not realize it. They use a three-level model to explain culture. The bottom level is *infrastructure*, a term that refers to basic material factors such as natural resources, the economy, and population. According to this model, infrastructure tends to shape the other two domains of culture: *structure* (social organization, kinship, and political organization) and *superstructure* (ideas, values, and beliefs). This book's chapters are organized roughly in terms of these three categories, but with the recognition that the layers are not neat and tidy but have interconnections.

A cultural materialist explanation for the taboo on killing cows and eating beef involves the fact that cattle in India play a more important role alive than dead or carved into steaks (Harris 1974). The many cattle wandering the streets of Indian cities and villages look useless to Westerners. A closer analysis, however, shows that the seemingly useless population of bovines serves many useful functions. Ambling along, they eat paper trash and other edible refuse. Their excrement is "brown gold," useful as fertilizer or, when mixed with straw and formed into dried patties, as cooking fuel. Most important, farmers use cattle to plow fields. Cultural materialists take into account Hindu beliefs about the sacred meaning of cattle, but they see its relationship to the material value of cattle as symbolic protection, keeping these extremely useful animals out of the meat factory.

Some cultural anthropologists are strong interpretivists, whereas some are strong cultural materialists. Many combine the best of both views.

Individual Agency Versus Structurism This debate concerns the question of how much individual will, or agency, affects the way people behave and think, compared with the power of forces, or *structures*, that are beyond individual control. Western philosophical thought gives much emphasis to the role of agency, the ability of individuals to make choices and exercise free will. In contrast, structurism emphasizes that free choice is an illusion because choices are structured by larger forces such as the economy, social and political organization, and media.

A prime example is the study of poverty. Those who emphasize agency focus their research on how individuals attempt to act as agents, even in situations of extreme poverty, in order to change their situation as best they can. Structurists, by contrast, would emphasize that the poor are trapped by large and powerful forces. They would describe how the political economy and other forces provide little room for agency for those at the bottom. An increasing number of cultural anthropologists seek to blend a structural perspective with attention to agency.



An urban scene in India (LEFT) and in the United States (RIGHT) showing two patterns of traffic congestion.

With growing aspirations of people worldwide to own a car, what do you think urban planners need to consider in the immediate future and for ten years from now?

Colombian anthropologist Patricia Tovar (center) at an anthropology conference in Colombia. In Central and South America, applied anthropology is an integral part of cultural anthropology.

Changing Perspectives

Cultural anthropology continues to be rethought and refashioned. Several new theoretical perspectives have transformed and enriched the field. *Feminist anthropology* is a perspective that emphasizes the need to study female roles and gender-based inequality. Early feminist anthropologists, starting in the 1970s, realized that anthropology had overlooked women. To address this gap, feminist anthropologists undertook research that explicitly focused on women and girls, half of the world's people. A related area is *gay and lesbian anthropology*, or *queer anthropology*, a perspective that emphasizes the need to study gay people's cultures and discrimination based on sexual identity and preferences. This book presents findings from these areas.

In North American anthropology, African American, Latino, and Native American anthropologists are increasing in number and visibility. Yet, anthropology in North America and Europe remains one of the "whitest" professions (Shanklin 2000). Some steps for moving the discipline toward being more inclusive include (Mullings 2005):

- Examine and recognize anthropology's history of racism.
- Work to increase the diversity of professors, researchers, staff, and students in the discipline.
- Teach about racism in anthropology classes and textbooks.

Worldwide, non-Western anthropologists are questioning the dominance of Euro-American anthropology, and they are offering new perspectives (Kuwayama 2004). Their work provides useful critiques of anthropology as a largely Western-defined discipline and promises to lead it in new directions in the future.

The Concept of Culture

Although cultural anthropologists are united in the study of *culture*, the question of how to define it has been debated for decades. This section discusses definitions of culture, characteristics of culture, and bases for cultural identity.

Definitions of Culture Culture is the core concept in cultural anthropology, so it might seem likely that cultural anthropologists would agree about what it is. In the 1950s, an effort to collect definitions of culture produced 164 different ones (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). Since then, no one has tried to count the number of definitions of culture used by anthropologists.

British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor proposed the first definition in 1871. He stated, "Culture, or civilization . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:81). The phrase "that complex whole" has been the most durable feature of his definition.

In contemporary cultural anthropology, the cultural materialists and the interpretive anthropologists support two different definitions of culture. Cultural materialist Marvin Harris says, "A culture is the total socially acquired lifeway or life-style of a group of people. It consists of the patterned repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of society" (1975:144). In contrast, Clifford Geertz, speaking for the interpretivists, believes that

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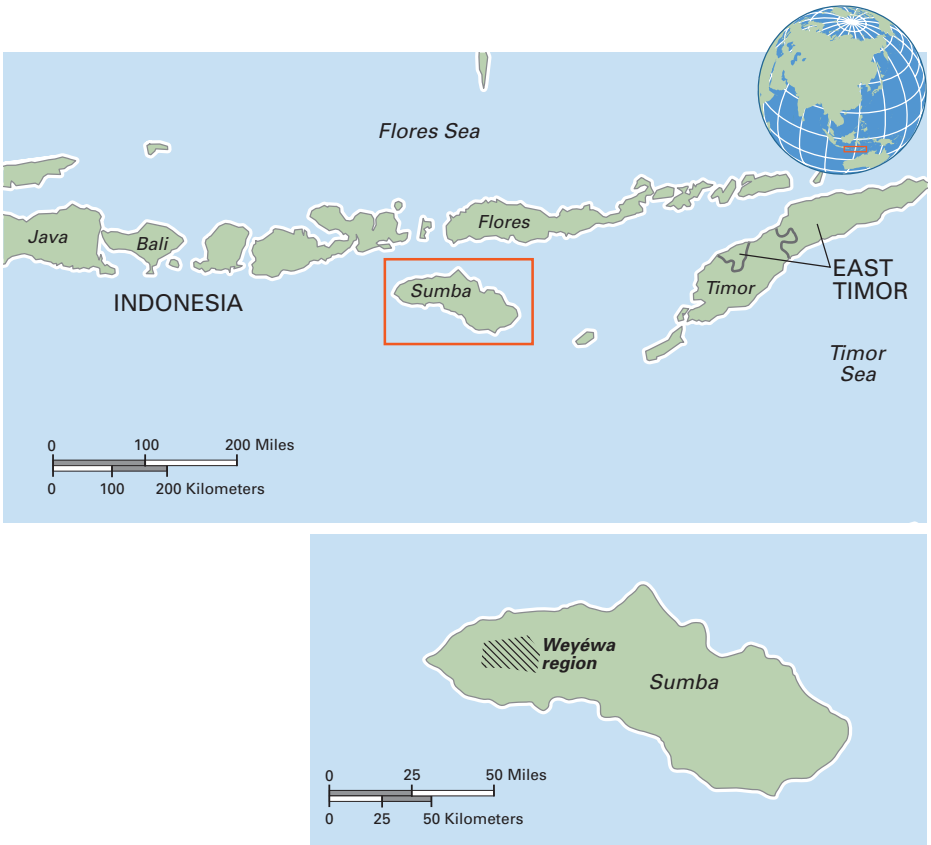
MAP 1.1 Weyéwa Region in Indonesia

Sumba, one of Indonesia's many islands, is 75 miles long. The Weyéwa people number about 85,000 and live in small settlements on grassy plateaus in the western part of the island. They grow rice, maize, and millet, and they raise water buffaloes and pigs.



culture consists of symbols, motivations, moods, and thoughts and does not include behavior as a part of culture. This book defines culture as learned and shared behavior and beliefs, a definition broader than Geertz's.

Culture exists among all human beings. Some anthropologists refer to this universal concept of culture as *Culture* with a capital *C*. Culture also exists in a more specific way. The term **microculture**, or local culture, refers to distinct patterns of learned and shared behavior and ideas found in local regions and among particular groups. Microcultures are based on ethnicity, gender, age, and more.

Characteristics of Culture

Understanding of the complex concept of culture can be gained by looking at its characteristics.

Culture Is Not the Same as Nature The relationship between nature and culture is of great interest to cultural anthropologists in their quest to understand people's behavior and thinking. This book emphasizes the importance of culture.

A good way to see how culture diverges from, and shapes, nature is to consider basic natural demands of life within different cultural contexts. Universal human functions that everyone must perform to stay alive are eating, drinking, sleeping, and eliminating. Given the primary importance of these four functions in supporting a human being's life, it seems logical that people would fulfill them in similar ways everywhere. But that is not the case.

Eating Culture shapes what people eat, how they eat, when they eat, and the meanings of food and eating. Culture also defines foods that are acceptable and unacceptable. In China, most people think that cheese is disgusting, but in France, most people love cheese. Throughout China, pork is a widely favored meat. The religions of Judaism and Islam, in contrast, forbid the consumption of pork. In many cultures where gathering wild plant foods, hunting, and fishing are important, people value the freshness of food. They would consider a package of frozen food on a grocery store shelf as way past its time.

Perceptions of taste vary dramatically. Western researchers have defined four supposedly universal taste categories: sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. Cross-cultural research disproves these categories as universals. A prominent East Asian flavor, not on the Western list, is *umami*, or savoriness. To add even more complexity, the Weyéwa (wuh-YAY-wuh) people of the highlands of Sumba, Indonesia (see Map 1.1), define seven categories of taste: sour, sweet, salty, bitter, tart, bland, and pungent (Kuipers 1991).

How to eat is also an important aspect of food behavior. The proper way to eat is one of the first things a person needs to learn when living in a foreign culture. Dining rules

microculture a distinct pattern of learned and shared behavior and thinking found within a larger culture.

Ethiopian women dining at an Ethiopian restaurant. The main meal consists of several meat and vegetable dishes, cooked with distinctive spices and laid out on injera bread, a soft, flat bread that is torn into small pieces and used to wrap bits of meat and vegetables. The entire meal can be eaten without utensils.

How does this dining scene resemble or differ from a recent meal that you have had in a restaurant?

in India require using only the right hand. The left hand is considered polluted because it is used for personal cleansing after elimination. A person's clean right hand is the preferred eating utensil. Silverware that has been touched by others, even if it has been washed, is considered unclean. In some cultures, it is important to eat only from one's own plate, whereas in others, eating from a shared central platter is considered proper.

Another area of cultural variation involves who is responsible for cooking and serving food. In many cultures, domestic cooking is women's responsibility, but cooking for public feasts is more often something that men do. Power issues may arise about who cooks what for whom (see Think Like an Anthropologist).

Drinking Cross-cultural variations related to drinking are also complex. Every culture defines the appropriate substances to drink, when to drink and with whom, and the meanings of the beverages and drinking occasions. French culture allows for the consumption of relatively large amounts of table wine with family meals, including lunch. In the United States, water is generally served and consumed during family meals. In India, water is served and consumed at the end of the meal. Around the world, different categories of people drink different beverages. In cultures where alcoholic beverages are consumed, men tend to consume more than women.

Culture often defines the meaning of particular drinks and the style of drinking and serving them. Social drinking—whether the beverage is coffee, beer, or vodka—creates and reinforces bonds. Beer-drinking rituals in U.S. college fraternities are a good example. In an ethnographic film entitled *Salamanders*, filmed at a large university in the northeastern United States, the fraternity brothers run to various "stations" in the fraternity house, downing a beer at each (Hornbein and Hornbein 1992). At one point, a brother chugs a beer, turns with a stagger toward the next station, falls flat on his face, and passes out. The movie documents another drinking ritual in which both young men and women at fraternity parties swallow live salamanders, sometimes two or three at a time, with large gulps of beer. (This practice is now forbidden by law.)

Sleeping Common sense might say that sleep is the one natural function that is not shaped by culture because people tend to do it at least once every 24 hours, everyone shuts their eyes to do it, everyone lies down to do it, and most people sleep at night. Going without sleep for an extended period can lead to insanity and even death.

Sleep might appear to be one of the most "natural" aspects of human behavior. In fact, culture shapes much about sleep in terms of the amount and quality of sleep, the location of sleep, with whom a person sleeps, infant learning of sleeping at night, personal security during sleep, and the value of dreams. (LEFT) Members of a roving girl gang sleep together on the street in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (RIGHT) Employees of a wealthy corporation sleep on its private airbus on a flight from London to Delhi.

Do Internet research on culture, social inequality, and sleep and report on your findings to the class.

think like an anthropologist

Power in the Kitchen

Within a family, cooking food for other members can be a sign of love and devotion. It may carry a message that love and devotion are expected in return. Among Tejano (tay-HAH-no) migrant farm workers in the United States, preparing tamales is a symbol of a woman's commitment to her family and thus of the "good wife" (Williams 1984). The Tejanos are people of Mexican descent who live in Texas. Some of them move to Illinois in the summer, where they are employed as migrant workers.

For Tejanos, tamales are a central cultural identity marker. Tamales contain a rich inner mash of pig's head meat wrapped in corn husks. Making tamales is extremely time consuming, and it is women's work. Typically, several women work together over a few days to do the necessary tasks: buying the pigs' heads, stripping the meat, preparing the stuffing, wrapping the stuffing with the corn husks, and baking or boiling the tamale.

Tamales symbolize and emphasize women's nurturance of their husbands. One elderly woman, at home in Texas for Christmas, made 200 tamales with her daughters-in-law, nieces, and goddaughter. They distributed the tamales to friends, relatives, and local taverns. The effort and expense involved were enormous. But for the women, it was worth it. Through their tamale making, they celebrate the holiday, build ties with people whom they may need to call on for support, and maintain communication with tavern owners so that they will watch over male kin who drink at their bars.

Tejano women also use tamale making as a statement of domestic protest. A woman who is dissatisfied with her husband's behavior will refuse to make tamales, a serious statement on her part. The link between being a good wife and making tamales is strong, so a husband can take his wife's unwillingness to make tamales as grounds for divorce. One young Tejano sued his wife for divorce in Illinois on the grounds that she refused to cook tamales for him, in addition to dancing with other men at fiestas. The judge refused to grant a divorce.

Tamales consist of fried meat and peppers in a cornmeal dough that is encased in cornhusks.

What is a similarly important food item in your cultural world?

food for thought

Provide an example from your microcultural experience about food being used as a way of expressing social solidarity or social protest.

Sleep, however, is at least as much culturally shaped as it is biologically determined. Cultural influences on sleep include the questions of who sleeps with whom, how much sleep a person should have, and why some people have insomnia or what are called sleep disorders. Across cultures, marked variation exists in rules about where infants and children should sleep: with the mother, with both parents, or by themselves in a separate room. Among indigenous peoples of the Amazon region of South America, mothers and babies share the same hammock for many months, and breastfeeding occurs whenever the baby is hungry.

Culture shapes the amount of time a person sleeps. In rural India, women sleep fewer hours than men because they have to get up early to start the fire for the morning meal. In fast-track, corporate North America, "type A" males sleep relatively few hours and are proud of that fact—to sleep too much is to be a wimp. A disorder in Japan called *excessive daytime sleepiness* (*EDS*) is common in Tokyo and other large cities (Doi and Minowa 2003). Excessive sleepiness is correlated with more accidents on the job, more absenteeism, decreased productivity, deteriorated personal and professional relationships, and increased rates of illness and death. Women are almost twice as likely as men to experience EDS, and married women are especially vulnerable.

Eliminating In spite of its basic importance to people everywhere, elimination receives little attention from anthropologists.

The first question is where to eliminate. Differences emerge in the degree to which elimination is a private act or can be done in more or less public areas. In many European cities, public options include street urinals for males but not for

The United Nations seeks to convey a message worldwide that handwashing with soap is an effective way of preventing disease. (LEFT) Women in a village in Bangladesh look out a window beside a poster showing how to wash one's hands properly. (RIGHT) Students participate in an event in the Philippines that teaches children the principles of handwashing with soap to promote hygiene and help prevent an outbreak of swine flu.

Be prepared to discuss how the UN's promotion of handwashing with soap might need to take into account contexts where people do not have access to soap and clean water.

females. In most villages in India, houses do not have interior bathrooms. Instead, early in the morning, groups of women and girls leave the house and head for a certain field, where they squat and chat. Men go to a different area. Everyone carries, in their left hand, a small brass pot full of water with which they splash themselves clean. Think about the ecological advantages: This system adds fertilizer to the fields and leaves no paper litter. Westerners may consider the village practice unclean and unpleasant, but village-dwelling people in India would think that the Western system is unsanitary because using toilet paper does not clean one as well as water does, and they would find the practice of sitting on a toilet less comfortable than squatting.

In many cultures, the products of elimination (urine and feces) are considered polluting and disgusting. Among some groups in Papua New Guinea (Map 1.2), people take great care to bury or otherwise hide their fecal matter for fear that someone will find it and use it for magic against them. A negative assessment of the products of elimination is not universal, however. Among some Native American cultures of the Pacific Northwest region of Canada and the United States, urine, especially women's urine, was believed to have medicinal and cleansing properties and was considered the "water of life" (Furst 1989). In some death rituals, it was sprinkled over the corpse in the hope that it might rejuvenate the deceased. People stored urine in special wooden

MAP 1.2 Papua New Guinea
The Independent State of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, gained its autonomy from Australia in 1975. Mostly mountainous with coastal lowlands, PNG is richly endowed with gold, copper, silver, natural gas, timber, oil, and fisheries. Its population is around 5,700,000. Port Moresby, the capital, has a high rate of HIV/AIDS infection among the working-age population.

In India, a white sari (women's garment) symbolizes widowhood.

What might these women think about the Western custom of a bride wearing white?

boxes for ritual use, including for a baby's first bath. (The urine was mixed with water.)

What about hand-washing practices among people in rich countries? One study investigated fecal bacteria on the hands of 404 commuters in five cities in the United Kingdom (Judah et al. 2010). It found that 28 percent of commuters' hands had fecal bacteria on them, and men were more likely to have fecal bacteria on their hands than women. The researchers are now following up to learn more about hand-washing practices with attention to gender differences.

Culture Is Based on Symbols Our entire lives—from eating breakfast to greeting our friends, making money, creating art, and practicing religion—are based on and organized through symbols. A **symbol** is an object, word, or action with a culturally defined meaning that stands for something else with which it has no necessary or natural relationship. Symbols are arbitrary (bearing no necessary relationship to that which is symbolized), unpredictable, and diverse. Because symbols are arbitrary, it is impossible to predict how a particular culture will symbolize something. Although one might assume that people who are hungry would have an expression for hunger involving the stomach no one could predict that in Hindi, the language of northern India, a colloquial expression for being hungry is saying that "rats are jumping in my stomach." The linguistic history of Barbara—the name of the author of this book—reveals that originally, in the Greek, it referred to people who were outsiders, "barbarians," and, by extension, uncivilized and savage. On top of that, the Greek term referred to such people as "bearded." The symbolic content of the American name Barbara does not immediately convey a sense of beardedness in its current context because symbolic meaning can change. It is through symbols, arbitrary and amazingly rich in their attributions, that culture is shared, stored, and transmitted over time.

Culture Is Learned Because culture is based on symbols that are arbitrary, culture must be learned anew in each context. Cultural learning begins from the moment of birth, if not before. (Some people think that an unborn baby takes in and stores information through sounds heard from the outside world.) A large but unknown amount of people's cultural learning is unconscious, occurring as a normal part of life through observation. Learning in schools, in contrast, is a formal way to acquire culture. Most cultures throughout history have not passed on learning through formal schooling. Instead, children acquire cultural patterns through observation and practice and advice from family members and elder members of the group.

Cultures Are Integrated To state that cultures are internally integrated is to assert the principle of holism. Thus, studying only one or two aspects of culture provides an understanding so limited that it is more likely to be misleading or wrong than are more comprehensive approaches.

Consider what would happen if a researcher were to study intertribal warfare in highland Papua New Guinea (see Map 1.2) and focused only on the actual practice of warfare without examining other aspects of culture. A key feature of highland culture is the exchange of pigs at political feasts. To become a political leader, a man must acquire many pigs. Pigs eat yams, which men grow, but pigs are cared for by women. This division of labor means that a man with more than one wife will be able to maintain more pigs and rise politically by giving more feasts. Such feasting enhances an aspiring leader's status and makes his guests indebted to him. With more followers attracted through feasting, a leader can gather forces and wage war on neighboring villages. Success in war brings gains in territory. So far, this example pays attention mainly to economics, politics, and marriage systems. But other aspects of culture are involved, too. Supernatural powers affect the success of warfare. Painting spears and shields with particular designs

symbol an object, word, or action with culturally defined meaning that stands for something else; most symbols are arbitrary.

globalization increased and intensified international ties related to the spread of Western, especially U.S., capitalism that affects all world cultures.

localization the transformation of global culture by local cultures into something new.

class a way of categorizing people on the basis of their economic position in society, usually measured in terms of income or wealth.

is believed to increase their power. At feasts and marriages, body decoration (including paint, shell ornaments, and elaborate feather headdresses) is an important expression of identity and status. Looking at warfare without attention to its wider cultural context yields an incomplete picture.

Cultural integration is relevant to applied anthropologists interested in proposing ways to promote positive change. Years of experience show that introducing programs for change in one aspect of culture without considering their effects in other domains is often detrimental to the welfare and survival of a culture. For example, Western missionaries and colonialists in parts of Southeast Asia banned the practice of head-hunting. This practice was connected to many other aspects of the people's culture, including politics, religion, and psychology. A man's sense of identity depended on the taking of a head. While preventing head-hunting might seem like a good thing, outlawing it had disastrous consequences for the cultures in which it was practiced because of its central importance to the entire culture.

Cultures Interact and Change Cultures interact with each other and change each other through contact such as trade networks, international development projects, telecommunications, education, migration, and tourism. **Globalization**, the process of intense global interconnectedness and movement of goods, information, and people, is a major force of contemporary cultural change. It has gained momentum through recent technological change, especially the boom in information and communication technologies.

Explore
"Hare Krishnas Battle McDonald's in Mauritius"
on **myanthrolab**

Globalization does not spread evenly, and its interactions with, and effects on, local cultures vary substantially from positive change to cultural destruction and extinction. Four models of cultural interaction capture some of the variation (Figure 1.3).

The *clash of civilizations* argument says that the spread of Euro-American capitalism and lifeways throughout the world has created disenchantment, alienation, and resentment among other cultural systems. This model divides the world into the "West and the rest."

The *Westernization* model says that, under the powerful influence of the United States and Europe, the world is becoming culturally homogeneous. A variant of Westernization is *McDonaldization*, a model defined by "fast-food culture," with its principles of mass production, speed, standardization, and impersonal service.

Clash of civilizations	Conflict model
Westernization	Western culture takeover and homogenization model
Hybridization	Blending model
Localization	Local cultural remaking and transformation of global culture

FIGURE 1.3 Four Models of Cultural Interaction

Class	Gender, sexuality
"Race"	Age
Ethnicity, indigeneity	Institution

FIGURE 1.4 Some Bases of Microcultures

Hybridization, also called *syncretism* and *creolization*, occurs when aspects of two or more cultures combine to form something new—a blend. In Japan, for instance, a grandmother might bow in gratitude to an automated banking machine. In the Amazon region and in the Arctic, indigenous people use satellite imagery to map and protect the boundaries of their ancestral lands.

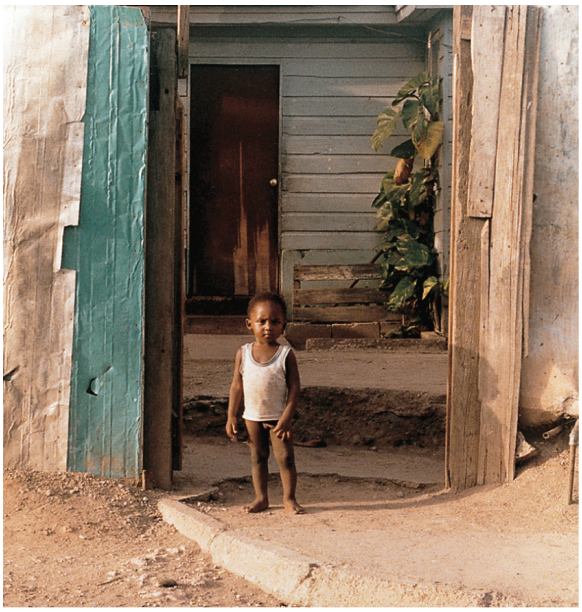
A fourth pattern is **localization**, the transformation of global culture by local microcultures into something new. Localization is happening all around us, all the time. Consider the example of McDonald's restaurants. In many Asian settings, people resist the pattern of eating quickly and insist on leisurely family gatherings (Watson 1997). The McDonald's managers accommodate this preference and alter the pace of service to allow for a slower turnover of tables. In Saudi Arabia, McDonald's provides separate areas for families, including women accompanied by a husband or father or brother, and for single men. Single women cannot enter a McDonald's, but the company does offer delivery services. Examples of localization raise questions about whether Western "mono-culture" is taking over the world and erasing cultural diversity.

Multiple Cultural Worlds

Within large cultures, a variety of microcultures exist, as discussed in this section (Figure 1.4). A particular individual in such a complex situation is likely to be a member of several microcultures. Microcultures may overlap or may be related to each other hierarchically in terms of power, status, and rights.

In discussing microcultures, the contrast between *difference* and *hierarchy* is important. People and groups can be considered different from each other in terms of a particular characteristic, but they may or may not be unequal on the basis of it. For example, people with blue or brown eyes might be recognized as different, but this difference does not entail unequal treatment or status. In other instances, such differences may become the basis for inequality.

Class **Class** is a category based on people's economic position in society, usually measured in terms of income or wealth



A view into the yard of a house in a low-income neighborhood of Kingston, Jamaica. People in these neighborhoods prefer the term "low-income" to "poor."

and exhibited in terms of lifestyle. Class societies may be divided into upper, middle, and lower classes. Separate classes are, for example, the working class (people who trade their labor for wages) and the landowning class (people who own land on which they or others labor). Classes are related in a hierarchical system, with upper classes dominating lower classes. Class struggle, in the classic Marxist view, is inevitable, as those at the top seek to maintain their position while those at the bottom seek to improve theirs. People at the bottom may attempt to improve their class position by gaining access to resources and by adopting aspects of upper-class symbolic behavior, such as speech, dress, and leisure and recreation activities.

Class is a recent social development in human history, extending back in time for only about 10,000 years. It does not exist today in remote local cultures where everyone has equal wealth and sharing food and other resources among the group is expected.

"race" a way of categorizing people into groups on the basis of supposedly homogeneous and largely superficial biological traits such as skin color or hair characteristics.

ethnicity a way of categorizing people on the basis of the shared sense of identity based on history, heritage, language, or culture.

indigenous people people who have a long-standing connection with their home territories that predates colonial or outside societies.

gender a way of classifying people based on their culturally constructed and learned behaviors and ideas as attributed to males, females, or blended genders.

"Race," Ethnicity, and Indigenous Peoples

"Race" refers to groups of people with supposedly homogeneous biological traits. The term "race" is extremely complicated, as it is used in diverse ways in different parts of the world and among different groups of people. Therefore, it makes sense to put the word in quotation marks in order to indicate that it has no single meaning. In South Africa, as in the United States, "race" is defined mainly on the basis of skin color. In pre–twentieth-century China, body hair was the key biological basis for racial classification (Dikötter 1998). The "barbarian" races had more body hair than the "civilized" Chinese people.Chinese writers referred to bearded, male missionaries from Europe as "hairy barbarians." Into the twentieth century, some Chinese anthropologists divided humans into evolutionary stages on the basis of amounts of body hair.

Watch the **Video** "Defining Indigenous People" on **myanthrolab**

Ethnicity refers to a sense of identity among a group based on a sense of a common heritage, language, religion, or other aspect of culture. Examples include African Americans and Italian Americans in the United States, the Croats of Eastern Europe, the Han of China, and the Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda. This sense of identity may be expressed through political movements to gain or protect group rights and recognition or more quietly stated in how one lives one's daily life. Compared with the term "race," "ethnicity" appears to be a more neutral, less stigmatizing term. But it, too, has been, and still is, a basis for discrimination, segregation, and oppression. **Indigenous peoples**, according to guidelines laid down by the United Nations, are defined as groups that have a long-standing connection with their home territories, a connection predating colonial or other societies that prevail in that territory (Sanders 1999). They are typically a numerical minority and often have lost the rights to their original territory. The United Nations distinguishes between indigenous peoples and *minority ethnic groups* such as the Roma, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, and African Americans. The San peoples of Southern Africa, as well as their several subgroups, are an important example of indigenous peoples whose way of life was dramatically affected first by colonialism and now by globalization (see Culturama).

Gender

Gender refers to culturally constructed and learned behaviors and ideas attributed to males, females, or sometimes a blended, or "third," gender. Gender differs from *sex*, which is based on biological markers, such as genitals and hormones, to define categories of male and female. Cultural anthropology shows that a person's biological makeup does not necessarily correspond to gender. Biology directly determines only a few roles and tasks, such as giving birth and nursing infants.

Cross-culturally, gender differences vary from societies in which male and female roles and worlds are similar or overlapping to those in which gender roles are sharply differentiated.

culturama

San Peoples of Southern Africa

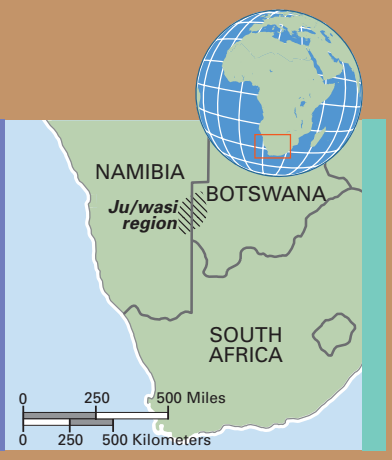
San is a cluster name for many groups of people in southern Africa who speak related languages that have glottal click sounds. Around 2,000 years ago, the San were the only people living in southern Africa, but today they are restricted to scattered locations throughout the region. European colonialists referred to San people as "Bushmen," a derogatory term at the time but one that San people now prefer over what some locals call them. Some San also refer to themselves with the English term "First People."

For many centuries, the San supported themselves through collecting food such as roots and birds' eggs and by hunting eland, giraffe, and other animals. Now, pressure from African governments, farmers, ranchers, game reserves, diamond companies, and international tourism has greatly reduced the San's access to their ancestral land and their ability to survive. Some have been arrested for hunting on what they consider their land.

The Ju/wasi (True People) are a subgroup of San numbering between 10,000 and 15,000 people who live in a region crossing the borders of Namibia and Botswana. As described by Richard Lee in the early 1960s, they were highly mobile food collectors and quite healthy (1979). Today, most have been forced from their homeland and live as poor, urban squatters or in government-built resettlement camps. Many work as farm laborers or in the international tourist industry, serving as guides and producing and selling crafts. Others are unemployed. The living conditions of the San people depend on government policy toward indigenous people in the country where they live.

Transnational advocacy organizations, including the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) and First People of the Kalahari (FPK), are making progress in protecting the rights of San peoples. Recently, WIMSA waged an international legal case with a large pharmaceutical company and succeeded in ensuring that the San receive a portion of the profits from the commercial development of hoodia (*Hoodia gordonia*). Hoodia is extracted from a cactus indigenous to the Kalahari region. An effective appetite suppressant, it is widely available as diet pills, though controversy exists about its efficacy and safety.

Thanks to Alison Brooks, George Washington University, for reviewing this material.



(LEFT) Richard Lee (wearing a shirt) asks Ju/wasi men about food plants of the Kalahari desert. This photograph was taken in 1968. Lee and many other researchers affiliated with the Harvard Kalahari research project learned to speak the Ju/wasi language.

(CENTER) San people eat part of the hoodia cactus when on long treks in the desert because it suppresses hunger and thirst. Now they cultivate it for commercial production in a diet pill sold in rich countries.

MAP 1.3 Ju/wasi Region in Namibia and Botswana

Before country boundaries were drawn, the Ju/wasi ranged freely across their traditional territory (shaded area), depending on the seasonal availability of food and water. Now they must show a passport when crossing from one country to another.

Explore the **San Peoples of Southern Africa** on **myanthrolab**

Explore the "Herbal Answer to Prozac Will Promote San Culture" on **myanthrolab**

Huli men of the Mount Hagen region of highland Papua New Guinea in festive attire for a dance performance.

In much of rural Thailand, men and women are about the same size, their clothing is similar, and their agricultural tasks are complementary and often interchangeable (Potter 1977). In contrast, among many groups in highland New Guinea, extreme gender segregation exists in most aspects of life, including the kinds of food men and women eat (Meigs 1984). The men's house physically and symbolically separates the worlds of men and women. Men engage in rituals that purge them of female substances: nose or penis bleeding, vomiting, tongue scraping, sweating, and eye washing. Men possess sacred flutes, which they parade through the village from time to time. If women dare to look at the flutes, men have the right, by tradition, to kill them.

Age The human life cycle, from birth to old age, takes people through cultural stages for which appropriate behavior and thinking must be learned anew. In many African herding societies, elaborate age categories for males define their roles and status as they move from being boys with few responsibilities and little status, to young men who are warriors and live apart from the rest of the group, to adult men who are allowed to marry, have children, and become respected elders. "The Hill," or the collective members of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, is a highly age-graded microculture (Weatherford 1981). The Hill is a *gerontocracy* (a group ruled by senior members) in which the older politicians dominate younger politicians in terms of amount of time they speak and how much attention their words receive. It may take a junior member between 10 and 20 years to become as effective and powerful as a senior member.

ethnocentrism judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture rather than by the standards of that particular culture.

Institutions *Institutions*, or enduring group settings formed for a particular purpose, have their own characteristic microcultures. Institutions include hospitals, schools and universities, and prisons. Anyone who has entered such an institution has experienced a feeling of strangeness. Until you gain familiarity with the often unwritten cultural rules, you may do things that offend or puzzle people, that fail to get you what you want, and that make you feel marginalized and insecure.

Anthropologists who study educational institutions have shown that schools often replicate and reinforce stereotypes, power relations, and inequalities of the wider society. A study of middle schools in the southwestern Rocky Mountain region of the United States found a situation in which teachers marginalized Mexican immigrant girls (Meador 2005). In this school, Mexican immigrant students are labeled as ESL (English as a second language) students because they are not fluent in English and take special courses designed to improve their English. In addition, the teachers' mental model of a "good student" is a student who is

- motivated to do well in school and gets good grades.
- an athlete.
- popular and has good students as friends.
- comes from a stable family.

It is difficult for many Mexican immigrant children to conform to this image. Mexican immigrant girls, or *Mexicanas*, are especially disadvantaged because most are not interested in, or good at, sports. The few Mexicanas who are motivated to try to get good grades are consistently overlooked by the teachers, who instead call on students who are confident, bright, and popular, and who sit in front of the classroom and raise their hands eagerly.

Absolute cultural relativism	Whatever goes on within a particular culture cannot be questioned or changed by outsiders as that would be ethnocentric.
Critical cultural relativism	Anyone can pose questions about what goes on in various cultures, including their own culture, in terms of how particular practices or beliefs may harm certain members; follows Lévi-Strauss's comment that no society is perfect and that, therefore, all societies may be able to learn from others and improve.

FIGURE 1.5 Cultural Relativism: Two Views

Distinctive Features of Cultural Anthropology

Over the course of its history, cultural anthropology has developed distinctive guiding principles and concepts that emerge from its objectives of understanding and describing different cultures worldwide and how they change. Some of these distinctive aspects have been adopted by other disciplines, and this is something of which cultural anthropology can be proud.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Cultural anthropology has contributed two concepts that are now accepted, and sometimes debated, beyond anthropology. The first is **ethnocentrism**: judging other cultures by the standards of one's own culture rather than by the standards of other cultures. Most people grow up thinking that their culture is *the* way of life and that other ways of life are strange and inferior. Ethnocentrism has fueled centuries of efforts to change "other" people in the world, sometimes through religious missionary work, sometimes in the form of colonial domination.

The opposite of ethnocentrism is cultural relativism, the idea that each culture must be understood in terms of its own values and beliefs and not by the standards of another culture. Cultural relativism assumes that no culture is better than any other. This concept has great merit but also some problems.

One way that some anthropologists have interpreted cultural relativism is *absolute cultural relativism*, which says that whatever goes on in a particular culture must not be questioned or changed because it would be ethnocentric to question any behavior or idea anywhere (Figure 1.5). The position of absolute cultural relativism, however, can lead in dangerous directions. Consider the example of the Holocaust during World War II, in which millions of Jews, Roma, and other minorities in much of Eastern and Western Europe were killed as part of the German Nazis' Aryan supremacy campaign. The absolute cultural relativist position becomes boxed in, logically, to saying that because the Holocaust was undertaken according to the values of the culture, outsiders have no business questioning it. Can anyone feel comfortable with such a position?

Critical cultural relativism offers an alternative view that poses questions about cultural practices and ideas in terms of who accepts them and why, and whom they might be harming or helping. In terms of the Nazi Holocaust, a critical cultural relativist would ask, "Whose culture supported the values that killed millions of people on the grounds of racial purity?" Not the cultures of the Jews, Roma, and other victims. It was the culture of Aryan supremacists, who were just one group among many. In other words, the situation was far more complex than a simple absolute cultural relativist statement suggests. Rather, it was a case of *cultural imperialism*, in which one dominant group claimed supremacy over minority cultures and took actions in its own interests and at the expense of the subjugated cultures. Critical cultural relativism avoids the trap of adopting a homogenized view. It recognizes internal cultural differences: winners and losers, and oppressors and victims. It pays attention to the interests of various power groups. It can illuminate the causes and consequences of recent and contemporary conflicts.

Many cultural anthropologists seek to *critique* (which means "to probe underlying power interests," not "to offer negative comments," as in the general usage of the term "criticism") the behavior and values of groups from the standpoint of a set of generally agreed-on human rights and values. Two issues emerge in this endeavor. First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to generate a universal list of what all cultures would agree to as good and right. Second, as Claude Lévi-Strauss said, "No society is perfect" (1968:385).

Valuing and Sustaining Diversity

Cultural anthropology's findings come largely from first-hand experience in the field, as described in Chapter 3. The perspectives and on-the-ground knowledge of cultural anthropologists lead directly to their commitment to the importance of valuing and sustaining cultural diversity. Different cultural blueprints for life, around the world, show how people in diverse contexts can adapt to changing situations.

Anthropologists therefore value and are committed to maintaining cultural diversity throughout the world, as part of humanity's rich heritage. Many cultural anthropologists share their expertise and knowledge to support the survival of indigenous peoples and other small-scale groups worldwide.

American Indian dancers at the 13th annual Chumash Inter-tribal Pow Wow in the Santa Ynez Valley, California.

Think of examples in your microculture, or another, of attempts to revitalize or maintain the culture across generations. Are such attempts successful or not, and why?

Explore "Cultural Survival Quarterly" on **myanthrolab**

In the United States, an organization called Cultural Survival helps indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities deal as equals in their interactions with outsiders. Cultural Survival's guiding principle is outlined in the preface of this book. Cultural Survival sponsors programs to help indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities protect and manage their natural environment, claim land rights, and protect their cultural heritage.

Cultural Anthropology Is Relevant to Careers

Some of you reading this book may take only one anthropology course to satisfy a requirement. Others may become interested in the subject matter and take a few more. Some will decide to major or minor in anthropology. Just one course in anthropology may change your way of thinking about the world and your place in it. More than that, anthropology coursework may enhance your ability to get a job.

Majoring in Anthropology An anthropology B.A. is a liberal arts degree. It is not, however, a professional degree, such as a business degree or a degree in physical therapy. It provides a solid education relevant to many career directions that are likely to require further study, such as law, criminal justice, medicine and health services, social services, education, humanitarian assistance, international development programs, and business. Students interested in pursuing a B.A. major in anthropology should know that anthropology is at least as useful as other liberal arts majors for either graduate study or a professional career.

Anthropology has several clear advantages over other liberal arts majors, and employers and graduate schools are increasingly recognizing these features. Cultural anthropology provides knowledge about the world's people and diversity. It offers insights about a variety of specialized research methods. Cross-cultural awareness and communication skills are valuable assets sought by business, government, health-care providers, and nongovernmental organizations.

The recurrent question is this: Will it be possible to get a good job related to anthropology with a B.A. in anthropology? The answer is yes, but it takes planning and hard work. Do the following: Gain expertise in at least one foreign language, study abroad, do service learning during your undergraduate years, and conduct an independent research project and write up the results as a professional report or conference paper. Package these skills on your résumé so that they appear relevant to employers. Do not give up. Good jobs are out there, and coursework and skills in anthropology are increasingly valued.

Anthropology is also an excellent minor. It complements almost any other area of study by adding a cross-cultural perspective. For example, if you are majoring in music, courses about world music will enrich your primary interest. The same applies to subjects such as interior design, psychology, criminal justice, international affairs, economics, political science, and more.

Listen to the **Podcast** "An Anthropologist Walks Into a Bar and Asks, 'Why Is This Joke Funny?'" on **myanthrolab**

Graduate Study in Anthropology Some of you may go on to pursue a master's degree (M.A.) or doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in anthropology. If you do, here is some advice: Be passionate about your interest, but also be aware that a full-time job as a professor or as a professional anthropologist is not easy to get.

To expand your possibilities of getting a good job, it is wise to consider combining a professional skill or degree with your degree program in anthropology, such as a law degree, an M.A. degree in project management, a master of public health (M.P.H.), a certificate in disaster relief, or participation in a training program in conflict prevention and resolution.

Living an Anthropological Life Studying cultural anthropology makes for smart people and people with breadth and flexibility. In North America, college graduates are likely to change careers (not just jobs, but careers) several times in their lives. Because you never know where you are going to end up working, or in what endeavor, it pays to be broadly informed about the world.

Cultural anthropology prompts you to ask original and important questions about the world's people and their relationships with one another, and it helps provide some useful answers. Beyond career value, cultural anthropology will enrich your daily life by increasing your exposure to the world's cultures. When you read a newspaper, you will find several articles that connect with what you have learned in your anthropology classes. You will be able to view your own everyday life as culturally constructed in interesting and meaningful ways. You will be a different person, and you will live a richer life.

1 the big questions revisited

Study and Review on myanthrolab

What is anthropology?

Anthropology is an academic discipline, like history or economics. It comprises four interrelated fields in its attempt to explore all facets of humanity from its origins through the present. Biological or physical anthropology is the study of humans as biological organisms, including their evolution and contemporary variation. Archaeology is the study of past human cultures through their material remains. Linguistic anthropology is the study of human communication, including its origins, history, and contemporary variation and change. Cultural anthropology is the study of living peoples and their cultures, including variation and change. Culture is people's learned and shared behaviors and beliefs.

Each field makes both theoretical and applied contributions. The perspective of this book is that applied anthropology, just like theoretical anthropology, should be an integrated and important part of all four fields, rather than a separate, fifth field. Examples of applied anthropology in the four fields include forensic anthropology, nonhuman primate conservation, global health programs, literacy programs for refugees, and social marketing.

What is cultural anthropology?

Cultural anthropology is the field within general anthropology that focuses on the study of contemporary humans and their cultures. It has several distinctive features that set it apart from the other fields of general anthropology and from other academic disciplines. The concept of cultural relativism, attributed to Franz Boas, is a guiding principle that other disciplines have widely adopted. Cultural anthropology values and works to sustain cultural diversity.

Cultural anthropology has a rich history of theoretical approaches and changing topical focuses. Three important theoretical debates are biological determinism versus cultural constructionism, interpretive anthropology versus cultural materialism, and individual agency versus structurism. Each, in its own way, attempts to understand and explain why people behave and think the way they do and to account for differences and similarities across cultures.

Culture is the key concept of cultural anthropology, and many definitions for it have been proposed throughout the history of anthropology. Many anthropologists define culture as learned and shared behavior and ideas, whereas others equate culture with ideas alone and exclude behavior as a part of culture. It is easier to understand culture by considering its characteristics: Culture is related to nature but is not the same as nature; it is based on symbols and it is learned; cultures are integrated within themselves; and cultures interact with other cultures and change. Four models of cultural interaction involve varying degrees of conflict, blending, and resistance. People participate in cultures of different levels, including local microcultures shaped by such factors as class, "race," ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, age, and institutions.

What are distinctive features of cultural anthropology?

Cultural anthropology has contributed two powerful concepts that have been widely adopted by other disciplines: cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. These principles continue to shape thinking in cultural anthropology.

Knowledge about culture forms "on the ground." Cultural anthropology's findings come largely from firsthand experience in the field. The perspectives and on-the-ground knowledge of cultural anthropologists lead directly to their commitment to the importance of valuing and sustaining cultural diversity. Different cultural blueprints for life, around the world, show how people in diverse climates can adapt to changing situations.

Cultural anthropology can be an important foundation or complement to your career. Coursework in cultural anthropology expands one's awareness of the diversity of the world's cultures and the importance of cross-cultural understanding. Employers in many fields—such as public health, humanitarian aid, law enforcement, business, and education—increasingly value a degree in cultural anthropology. In today's diverse and connected world, being culturally informed and culturally sensitive is essential.

Graduate degrees in cultural anthropology, either at the M.A. or Ph.D. level, are even more likely to lead to professional positions that directly use your anthropological education and skills. Combining graduate coursework in anthropology with a professional degree, such as a master's degree in public health or public administration, or a law degree, is a successful route to a meaningful career outside academia. Cultural anthropology, beyond its career relevance, will enrich your life everyday with its insights.

key concepts

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thinking outside the box

What are your impressions of anthropology? How did you acquire them? Make notes of these impressions and review them at the end of the course.

Think about your everyday drinking patterns and your drinking patterns on special occasions. What beverages do you consume, and with whom, and what are the meanings and wider social implications involved?

Over a week, keep track of how often you wash your hands each day and whether or not you use soap each time. Compare the data from your mini–self-study to those of your classmates. What patterns emerge?

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- Hare Krishnas Battle McDonald's in Mauritius
- Culturama: San Peoples of Southern Africa
- Herbal Answer to Prozac Will Promote San Culture
- Cultural Survival Quarterly

Read on **myanthrolab**

- *Experimental Pretesting of Hand-Washing Interventions in a Natural Setting* by Judah Gaby, Robert Aunger, Wolf-Peter Schmidt, Susan Michie, Stewart Granger, and Val Curtis
- *The Soviet Sausage Renaissance* by Neringa Klumbyte
- *"Child Sacrifice" in Uganda?* by Pat Caplan