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Anthropology

Asking Questions About Humanity

Human beings are one of the world's most adaptable animals. Evolutionary history has endowed our species with certain common physical characteristics, instincts, and practices that have helped us to survive, even thrive, in every conceivable terrestrial environment. Yet no group of people is exactly like another, and as a species we exhibit tremendous variations across groups—variations in our adaptations to the environment, physical appearance, language, beliefs, and social organization.

Humans have always encountered groups of people who look different, speak unfamiliar languages, and behave in unexpected or unpredictable ways. Although

Intercultural Interactions. In 1767, Captain Samuel Wallis and his crew were the first Westerners to reach Tahiti. Their first interactions were peaceful and included an exchange of gifts between Wallis and Queen Oberea. The cultural differences between the Tahitians and the English raised many important questions about human differences and similarities, for both parties—the kinds of dynamics that interest anthropologists today.

sometimes hostility and wars break out between groups because of such differences, usually people have found ways to get along, often through trade and alliances. To be effective at establishing strong social and political bonds in spite of human differences has always required that people have a practical understanding of human variation.

Some of history's great travelers and explorers developed that practical understanding, among them the Venetian merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324), the Norman cleric Gerald of Wales (1146–1223), the Flemish Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck (1220–1293), the Moroccan traveler Ibn Batuta (1304–1368), and the Chinese admiral Zheng He (1371–1433). These individuals were all deeply interested in other peoples, and their writings express sophisticated understandings of how and why the groups they encountered looked, acted, worshiped, and spoke as they did (Bartlett 1982; Larner 1999; Menzies 2002; Dreyer 2007; Harvey 2007; Khanmohamadi 2008; Fazioli 2014). Similarly, there is a rich historical legacy of intellectual thought about human variation. The great Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE) wrote in two of his *Analects* some principles for establishing relationships with *yi* [yee], meaning cultural and ethnic outsiders. A generation later, the Greek historian Herodotus (484–425 BCE), in his multi-volume *Histories*, described the diverse peoples and societies he encountered during his travels in Africa, Southwestern Asia, and India, offering a number of possible explanations for the variations he observed across groups.

While all of these individuals were curious about other peoples and at times were quite rigorous in their ways of thinking about human variation, they were not anthropologists as we think of them today. Still, their various studies show that getting along with peoples from different cultures has always been important.

These points lead us to our first question, the question at the heart of this chapter: *What is anthropology, and how is it relevant in today's world?* Embedded in this broader question are the following problems, around which this chapter is organized:



How did anthropology begin?

What do the four subfields of anthropology have in common?

How do anthropologists know what they know?

How do anthropologists put their knowledge to work in the world?

What ethical obligations do anthropologists have?

Anthropology is the study of human beings, their biology, their prehistory and histories, and their dynamic languages, cultures, and social institutions. Anthropology provides a framework for asking questions about and grasping the complexity of human experience, both past and present. Anthropology is about where humans have been, but it also provides knowledge that helps solve human problems today.

How Did Anthropology Begin?

During the nineteenth century, **anthropology** emerged in Europe and North America as an academic discipline devoted to the systematic observation and analysis of human variation. Three key concerns began to emerge by the 1850s that would shape professional anthropology. These were (1) the disruptions of industrialization in Europe and America, (2) the rise of evolutionary theories, and (3) the growing importance of Europe's far-flung colonies and the vast American West with their large indigenous populations whose land, mineral wealth, and labor Europeans and Americans wanted to control.

The Disruptions of Industrialization

Industrialization refers to the economic process of shifting from an agricultural economy to a factory-based one. Industrialization disrupted American and European societies by bringing large numbers of rural people into towns and cities to work in factories. These disruptions raised questions that motivated great social thinkers who later influenced the rise of anthropology as a social scientific discipline, in particular German political economists Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920) and French anthropologist-sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, most people in Western countries were rural farmers. The rise of factory economies changed such basic aspects of life as the range of people individuals encountered and might marry, the activities they spent their days doing, and the role of religion in their lives. In the midst of these upheavals, anthropology developed as a discipline that sought to understand and explain how people organize their communities and how those communities change. It also led scholars to consider how industrialization affected peoples in European colonies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands. Important new questions were posed: Why did these diverse societies organize their lives in the ways they did? Why had the civilizations of China, India, and the Arab world developed social, political, and economic patterns so different from those of Europeans? Asking about how European villages and cities were structured and how they perpetuated their cultures ultimately led to questions about how all sorts of non-Western societies worked as well.

The Theory of Evolution

Evolution refers to the adaptive biological changes organisms make across generations. English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) developed a theory of how different species of plants and animals had evolved from earlier forms. The key mechanism of his evolutionary theory was what he called “natural selection,” a process through which certain inheritable traits are passed along to offspring because they are better suited to the environment.

For Darwin, the question of the origin of species was not a religious one (as many people in his time believed) but an **empirical** one, best answered by observing whether species had changed and whether new species had emerged over time.

Thanks to contemporary geologists, Darwin knew that many early species such as the dinosaurs had suddenly arisen in the geological record, flourished, and then died out. For him, such changes were evidence that the natural environment had selected some species for survival and that extinction was the outcome for those not well suited to changing environments. When Darwin published his groundbreaking work, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859, he experienced a backlash, and rather few scientists accepted Darwin's ideas immediately. But as the century progressed, more and more scholars came to accept the idea of evolution. Today, scientists no longer view biological evolution as controversial, and nearly all anthropologists and biologists accept evolution as the only way to explain the relationship among animal and plant species or why humans have certain physical abilities and characteristics.

Colonial Origins of Cultural Anthropology

Colonialism is the historical practice of more powerful countries claiming possession of less powerful ones. American seizure and domination of Indian lands is a form of colonialism. Overseas, the colonial period flourished from the 1870s until the 1960s, and

whites established mines, fisheries, plantations, and other enterprises using local peoples as inexpensive labor. Colonies enriched the mother countries, often impoverishing the indigenous inhabitants.

Colonized peoples everywhere had different cultures and customs, and their actions often seemed baffling to white administrators, a fact that these officials chalked up to their primitive or savage nature. Colonialists justified their actions—both politically and morally—through the **othering** of non-Western peoples, that is, defining colonized peoples as different from, and subordinate to, Europeans in terms of their social, moral, and physical norms (Said 1978). At the same time, early anthropologists were developing new social scientific methods of studying non-Western societies, primarily to inform colonial officials how to govern and control such different peoples.



Figure 1.1 The Salvage Paradigm. Efforts to document indigenous cultures “before they disappeared” motivated anthropologists and others—including well-known American photographer Edward S. Curtis, who took this picture of an Apsaroke mother and child in 1908—to record the ways of traditional people.

Most Europeans and Americans expected their colonial subjects to die out, leading to the urgent collection of information about tribal societies before it was too late. Well into the 1920s, anthropologists pursued an approach known as the **salvage paradigm**, which held that it was important to observe indigenous ways of life, interview elders, and assemble collections of objects made and used by indigenous peoples because their traditions would soon disappear (Figure 1.1). Of course, today we know that while some Indian tribes, especially along the East Coast of North America, largely died out, many other groups have survived and grown in population. But these Native American cultures have had to adjust and adapt to the changing American landscape.

Anthropology as a Global Discipline

By the end of the nineteenth century, anthropology was an international discipline, whose practitioners were mainly based in Western Europe and the United States. Although they had some shared concerns, anthropologists in particular countries developed specific national traditions, studying distinct problems and developing their own styles of thought. Throughout the twentieth century, anthropology began to emerge in many other non-European countries as well. Many students in colonial territories had attended European and American universities, where they learned anthropology, and in many cases these students brought anthropology back home. In these countries, anthropology often focuses on practical problems of national development and on documenting the minority societies found within the country's borders. Today, anthropology is a global discipline with practitioners in dozens of countries asking many different kinds of questions about humanity.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY

Can you think of something you do at your college or university that feels “natural” but is probably done somewhat differently at another college? Consider, for example, how your experiences in high school classes may have led you to expect something different from your college classes.

What Do the Four Subfields of Anthropology Have in Common?

Anthropology has traditionally been divided into four subfields: cultural anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology (Figure 1.2).

Cultural anthropology focuses on the social lives of living communities. Until the 1970s, most cultural anthropologists conducted research in

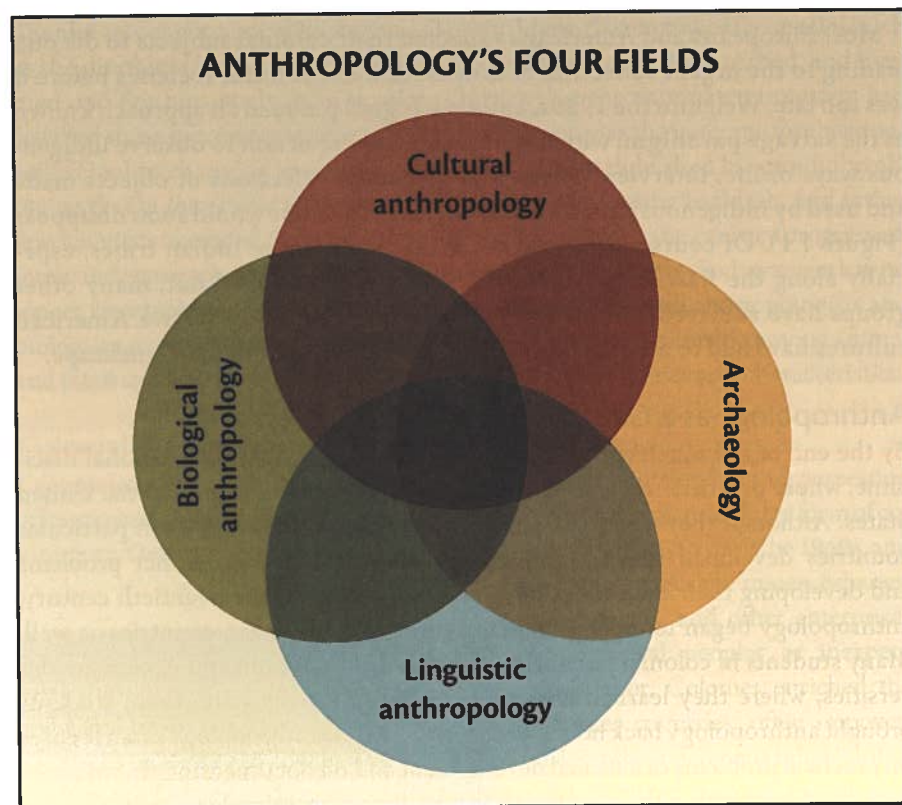


Figure 1.2 Anthropology's Four Fields.

non-Western communities, spending a year or two of fieldwork observing social life. They learned the local language and studied broad aspects of the community, such as people's economic transactions, religious rituals, political organization, and families, seeking to understand how these distinct domains influenced each other. In recent decades, they have come to focus on more specific issues in the communities they study, such as how and why religious conflicts occur, how environmental changes affect agricultural production, and how economic interactions create or maintain social inequalities. Today, anthropologists are as likely to study modern institutions, occupational groups, ethnic minorities, or the role of computer technology or advertising in their own cultures as they are to study cultures outside their own.

Archaeology studies past cultures by excavating sites where people lived, worked, farmed, or conducted some other activity. Prehistoric archaeologists study prehistory (life before written records), trying to understand how people lived before they had domesticated plants and animals, as well as patterns of trade and warfare between ancient settlements. Prehistoric archaeologists are especially interested in the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture, and

the rise of cities and states. Another branch of archaeology is *historical archaeology*, which studies the material remains of societies that also left behind written and oral histories. Focusing primarily on the past 500 years, historical archaeology supplements what we know about a community or society with studies of recent historical migrations and cultural shifts.

Biological anthropology (also called physical anthropology) focuses on the biological aspects of the human species, past and present, along with those of our closest relatives, the nonhuman primates (apes, monkeys, and related species). A mainstay of biological anthropology has been the attempt to uncover human fossils and reconstruct the pathways of human evolution. By the 1950s and 1960s, biological anthropologists expanded into the study of human health and disease and began to look at the nonhuman primates (especially monkeys and apes) to determine what is part of our basic primate biology and what comes with culture. Biological anthropology is currently a field with many specializations; in addition to evolution, health and disease, and primate behavior, researchers also study human genetics, the impact of social stress on the body, and human diet and nutrition.

Linguistic anthropology studies how people communicate with one another through language, and how language use shapes group membership and identity. Linguistic anthropologists also look at how language helps people organize their cultural beliefs and ideologies. These anthropologists have traditionally studied the categories that indigenous people use in their own languages, attempting to understand how they classify parts of their social and natural worlds in unique ways.

Anthropology is by nature an interdisciplinary discipline. Its subfields cross into many other academic disciplines across the social and natural sciences. Cultural anthropologists, for example, often draw on sociological and psychological approaches, as well as historical and economic data. Most archaeologists need to understand the principles of geology, including how rock layers form over time and techniques used to date artifacts. Biological anthropology draws heavily on morphology (which deals with the form and structure of organisms), cellular biology, and genetics.

One thing that keeps such diverse subfields together is a shared history. In the early twentieth century, anthropology became organized into the four subfields we know today, from a shared evolutionary perspective. Archaeologists and cultural anthropologists, especially in North America, generally see themselves as asking similar kinds of questions about human cultures. Another reason for the persistence of the four-field approach is that anthropologists share certain fundamental approaches and concepts, which they agree are important for making sense of humanity's complexity. These include culture, cultural relativism, diversity, change, and holism.

Culture

Imagine how people would react to you if the next time you went to the university bookstore to buy your textbooks you tried to haggle at the cash register. Or if the

next time you had a cold you explained to your friends that your sickness was caused by a witch's spell. In both cases most people would think you are crazy. But in many societies throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, and other regions, a lot of ordinary people would think you are crazy for *not* haggling or for *not* explaining your misfortunes as the workings of a witch.

Every human group has particular rules of behavior and a common set of explanations about how the world works. Within the community, these behaviors and explanations feel totally natural, which is to say, self-evident and necessary. People who behave differently are strange, wrong, maybe even evil. Yet what feels natural to one group may seem totally arbitrary to another. In anthropology, the term **culture** refers to the taken-for-granted notions, rules, moralities, and behaviors within a social group that feel natural and suggest the way things should be. The idea of culture is one of anthropology's most important contributions to knowledge.

Anthropologists believe that people have culture in two senses: the general and the particular. Culture in the general sense refers to humans' possession of a generalized capacity, even necessity, to create, share, and pass on their understandings of things through culture. Culture in the particular sense refers to the fact that people live their lives within particular cultures, or ways of life. In Chapter 2, we explore the concept of culture more deeply, but here it is important to know that when anthropologists use the term *culture* they are nearly always referring to ideas about the world and ways of interacting in society or in the environment in predictable and expected ways.

Cultural Relativism

Anthropologists carry with them basic assumptions about how the world works and what is right or wrong, and these assumptions typically become apparent when one is studying a culture that makes completely different assumptions. One possible response to the gap in understanding that comes with being in another culture is **ethnocentrism**, assuming one's own way of doing things is correct, while simply dismissing other people's assumptions as wrong or ignorant. Such a position would render the attempt to understand other cultures meaningless, and it can lead to bigotry and intolerance. To avoid such negative outcomes, anthropologists have traditionally emphasized **cultural relativism**, the moral and intellectual principle that one should seek to understand cultures on their own terms and withhold judgment about seemingly strange or exotic beliefs and practices.

Human Diversity

Another of anthropology's major contributions to knowledge has been to describe and explain human **diversity**, the sheer variety of ways of being human around the world. When anthropologists talk about diversity, they mean something different from the popular usage of the term in the United States, which typically

refers to different kinds of art, cuisine, dress, or dance, as well as to differences among various racial and ethnic groups.

Defined anthropologically, *diversity* refers to multiplicity and variety, which is not the same as mere difference. Within multiplicity and variety, there is both difference *and* similarity. This idea of diversity-as-multiplicity can shed light on the cultural effects of globalization. People now drink Coca-Cola, wear Levi's jeans, and watch CNN all over the world, leading many observers to believe that the diversity of human cultures is in decline because more people are participating in a global economy. Yet cultural differences do not just disappear. In fact, globalization creates many new opportunities for cultural diversity—differences *and* similarities—to thrive.

An example drawn from the southern Mexican state of Chiapas illustrates this point (Figure 1.3). In Chiapas, some indigenous people have adapted Coca-Cola for use in their religious and community ceremonies. For many generations Tzotzil Mayas [*tso-tseel my-ahs*] in the community of San Juan Chamula used alcoholic drinks, particularly fermented corn drinks and distilled sugar cane liquor, in their public and religious rites (Nash 2007). To create these rites, traditional Mayan religious leaders blended Catholic and indigenous traditions, combining Catholicism's celebration of saints' days with the Mayan belief that consuming intoxicating spirits helps individuals access sacred powers. Alcoholism, however, became a severe problem, and beginning in the 1940s many Mayas began converting to Protestant sects that ban alcohol, eroding the power of traditional religious leaders. In the 1980s these leaders began substituting Coca-Cola for alcoholic drinks in ceremonies. Some leaders gained great personal wealth as distributors of Coca-Cola, deepening socioeconomic class divisions in the community (Nash 2007). But community members incorporated Coca-Cola into their ritual lives easily, accepting the notion that the soft drink's bubbles have powers once associated with alcohol, for example, the ability to help individuals belch out bad spirits residing in their bodies (M. Thomas 2008).

Here is a powerful example of diversity-as-multiplicity: globalization has brought changes to San Juan Chamula that resemble conditions in many other places around the globe, but Mayas have imposed their own meanings on the soft drink, using it in ways that reinforce some of their own distinctive cultural traditions.



Figure 1.3 A Coca-Cola Distributor in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico.

Change

As the previous example about globalization and Coca-Cola demonstrates, our world is dynamic and constantly changing. Anthropologists in each subfield are specialists in studying human change. For example:

- *Cultural anthropologists* study topics as diverse as how and why religious change happens; what happens when a dominant economic system like capitalism is incorporated into a traditional economy; and how and why political violence can erupt in societies experiencing rapid social change.
- *Archaeologists* study the effects of environmental change on past societies; how changes in material culture reflect ongoing social, economic, and political changes; and how complex state societies were formed and disintegrated.
- *Biological anthropologists* study the processes of human evolution, and how our bodies and genetic make-up change in relation to environmental changes, migration, diseases, and other dynamics.
- *Linguistic anthropologists* study how new languages are formed when different languages come together, and how social changes, such as changes in gender relations, are reflected in and emerge from how people communicate with each other.

Some of these changes, particularly changes in cultural practices, can emerge over a few years or a generation or two. Others, like changes in human biology, can take many generations and are imperceptible to most living observers. Americans, for example, have gotten considerably taller than we were in colonial times, probably because of changes in diet. But this fact is largely unnoticed by modern Americans unless we tour colonial houses from the 1700s, where the doors are not nearly as tall as those of today.

Anthropology also mirrors the changing world in which it is practiced. As new topics, issues, and problems emerge, anthropologists study things they would not have studied several decades before. Today, for example, archaeologists may study municipal garbage dumps to understand what people actually consume and throw away. Cultural and linguistic anthropologists may explore how people create new forms of communication and community in cyberspace. Biological anthropologists specializing in primate behaviors may design studies to aid wild-life conservation officials.

Moreover, the face of anthropology has changed in recent decades. Once a discipline dominated by white European and American men, anthropology is increasingly practiced by women and members of many ethnic and racial minority groups. In the United States today, in fact, women constitute the majority of professional anthropologists. Around the world, decolonization has brought once excluded indigenous peoples and minorities into universities, where many have studied anthropology, further expanding the kinds of backgrounds and perspectives represented in the global discipline.

Holism

In bringing together the study of human biology, prehistory, language, and social life under one disciplinary roof, anthropology offers powerful conceptual tools for understanding the entire context of human experience. The effort to synthesize these distinct approaches and findings into a single comprehensive explanation is called **holism**. American anthropology has strived to be the most holistic, a legacy of German-born Franz Boas, long considered the founder of American anthropology.

In the discipline's early years, it was possible for individuals like Boas and his students to work in all four subfields, because the body of anthropological knowledge was so small. But within several decades, the expansion of the discipline and increasing specialization within its branches forced anthropologists to concentrate on a single subfield and topics within subfields, a continuing trend today. In the face of specialization, anthropology has struggled to retain its holistic focus.

And yet many anthropologists are deeply dedicated to holism, citing its ability to explain complex issues that no single subfield, much less any other social science, could explain as effectively (Parkin and Ulijaszek 2007). But how do anthropologists actually come to know what they know? We turn to this issue in the next section.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY

Can you suggest ways that you may learn how people in your town or city view college students from your campus?

How Do Anthropologists Know What They Know?

Anthropology employs a wide variety of methodologies, or systematic strategies for collecting and analyzing data. Some of these methodologies are similar to those found in other natural and social sciences, including methods that involve the creation of statistics and even the use of mathematical models to explain things. Other methods aimed at describing different cultures are more closely allied with the humanities.

The Scientific Method in Anthropology

Anthropology often uses the **scientific method**, the most basic pattern of scientific research. The scientific method starts with the observation of a fact, a verifiable truth. Next follows the construction of a hypothesis, which is a testable explanation for the fact. Then that hypothesis is tested with experiments, further observations, or measurements. If the data (the information the tests produce) show that the hypothesis is wrong, the scientist develops a new hypothesis and then tests it. If the new tests and the data they produce seem to support the hypothesis, the scientist writes up a description of what he or she did and found, and shares it with other scientists. Other scientists then attempt to reproduce those tests or devise new ones, with a goal of disproving the hypothesis (Figure 1.4).

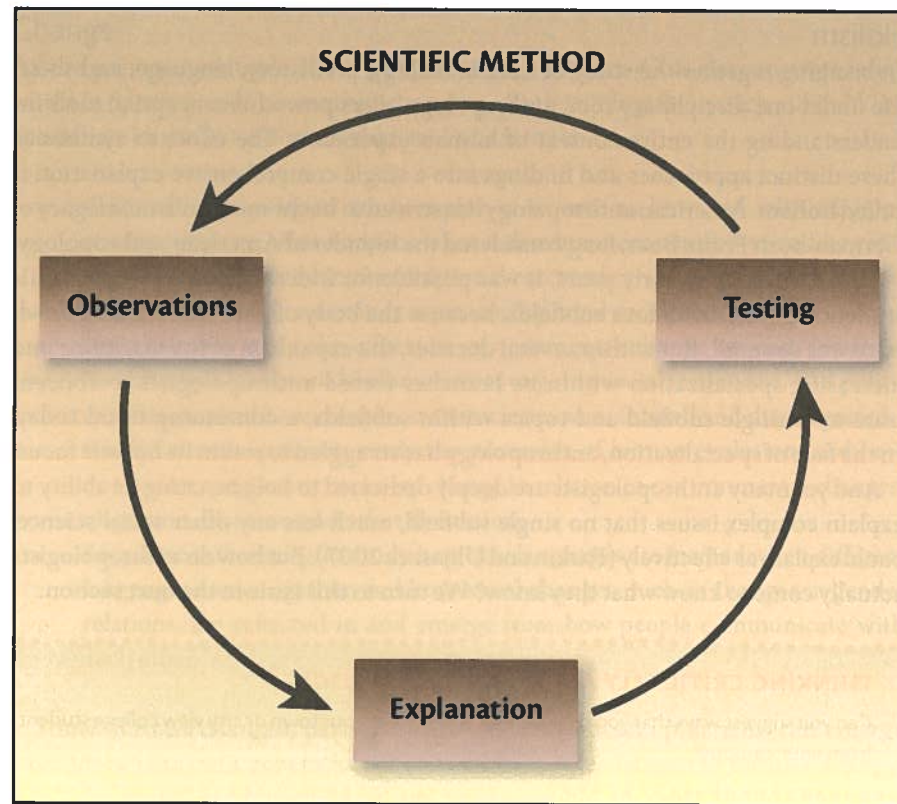


Figure 1.4 The Scientific Method. The process is circular, not linear.

Note that this way of doing things is a method, not the pursuit of ultimate truths. Its goal is to devise, test, and disprove hypotheses. Life's big questions—"Why are we here?"—are *not* the goal of science. At best, science can provide a reasonable degree of certainty only about more limited questions—"How did our species develop the traits we now have?" Scientists regularly disagree among themselves. Researchers with differing backgrounds and orientations ask different types of questions and look at data in different ways. Scientists tend to see such debates as beneficial to the practice of science because the more questions asked, the more observations made, and the more tests conducted, the more knowledge is produced.

THEORIES GUIDE RESEARCH

Theories, which are tested and repeatedly supported hypotheses, are key elements of the scientific method. A **theory** not only explains things, it also helps guide research by focusing the researcher's questions and making the findings meaningful. While many Americans assume that a theory is some wild hunch or guess, when scientists use the term *theory*, they mean a carefully constructed hypothesis that has repeatedly been tested and retested. There is rarely any guessing involved.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Building and testing hypotheses and theories require data. Anthropology's subfields employ a number of techniques for gathering and processing data. Some of these techniques use **quantitative methods**, which classify features of a phenomenon, count or measure them, and construct mathematical and statistical models to explain what is observed. Most quantitative research takes place in the subfields of biological anthropology and archaeology, although some cultural and linguistic anthropologists use quantitative techniques as well.

As an illustration of quantitative research, consider the work of Agustín Fuentes, a biological anthropologist at the University of Notre Dame with whom we have co-authored another book (Welsch, Vivanco, and Fuentes 2017). His research examines the nature of human-monkey interactions, and how, when, and why diseases get passed between these species. Fuentes and his team observe monkeys and humans interacting in Bali, Singapore, and Gibraltar. In each location they record quantitative details about the interactions and people's rates of contact with monkeys. They take blood or fecal samples from both the monkeys and the humans, analyzing them for pathogens and parasites. All these variables are considered independently and then compared statistically to see what patterns emerge. Fuentes has discovered that human-monkey interactions vary depending on the species of monkey, human cultural patterns, gender differences in humans, and sex differences in the monkeys (Fuentes 2007).

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Anthropologists also employ **qualitative methods**, in which the aim is to produce an in-depth and detailed description of social behaviors and beliefs. Qualitative research involves interviews with and observations of people. Research data come in the form of words, images, or objects. In contrast with quantitative methods, qualitative research does not typically use research instruments like surveys or questionnaires. The research instrument is the researcher himself or herself, whose subjective perceptions and impressions of the subject matter also become the basis for knowledge. The **ethnographic method**, which involves prolonged and intensive observation of and participation in the life of a community, is a qualitative methodology and is a hallmark of cultural anthropology.

Luis Vivanco, one of this book's authors, is a cultural anthropologist who uses qualitative methods to ask how global environmentalism changes people's relationships with nature in Latin America. In one of his projects, he conducted more than twenty months of research in Monteverde, Costa Rica, a rural community bordering a tropical cloud forest and renowned worldwide as a site of conservation and ecotourism. He interviewed and observed local farmers, environmental activists, ecotourists, and scientists, usually on multiple occasions and in public



Figure 1.5 Monteverde Bus. In his research on environmentalism in Costa Rica, Luis Vivanco explored the social dynamics of ecotourism. This focus led him to spend a lot of time among ecotourists, such as the ones shown here arriving in Monteverde by bus.

settings (Figure 1.5). He collected newspaper clippings and reports from local environmental groups and took pictures of people doing things. His fieldnotes, recordings, images, documents, and personal experiences with environmentalists and farmers have helped him understand environmentalism to be a complex arena of social conflict where people struggle not just over how to protect nature, but also over how to deal with rapid social changes caused by globalization (Vivanco 2006).

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

Unlike other scientists, anthropologists do not conduct experiments or make predictions. Instead, anthropologists use the **comparative method** (Kaplan and Manners 1972:42–43). The comparative method allows anthropologists to derive insights from careful comparisons of two or more cultures or societies.

The research of this book's other author, cultural anthropologist Robert Welsch, illustrates how anthropologists can use the comparative method. Welsch has conducted extended ethnographic research both in Papua New Guinea and in Indonesia (Welsch 2006). One of his projects made use of comparative research strategies to understand the social and religious meanings of masks and carved objects in three societies along the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea. To conduct his comparative study, Welsch studied museum collections, pored over published and unpublished accounts of the people who collected the masks, and interviewed older villagers about their traditional practices.

He learned that although these three societies used the same kinds of objects, their differing decorative styles expressed differences in the social purposes for which each society used these same objects.

When Anthropology Is Not a Science: Interpreting Cultures

Not all anthropologists characterize what they do as science. Describing other people and interpreting their actions require an understanding of their inner lives and beliefs that no scientific methodology can grasp.

These days most cultural anthropologists disregard the scientific ideal of the researcher's detachment from his or her subject of study: the belief that researchers should not talk about what they feel and experience, or how their emotions and experiences influence what they learn (Fabian 2001). The work of American anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (b. 1941), who studied head-hunting in a Filipino society called the Ilongot [*Ill-lahn-goht*], illustrates this point of view. When Rosaldo (1989) asked the Ilongots to explain why they take heads, they said that when a loved one dies, their grief turns to rage, and the only way to vent that rage and get on with life is to take the head of a traditional enemy. Rosaldo initially dismissed this explanation, assuming there had to be a "deeper" purpose, such as creating group cohesion or allowing young men to prove their worthiness for marriage by showing they could kill an enemy.

Then Rosaldo's wife, Shelly, also an anthropologist, died in an accident during fieldwork in the Philippines, and his own devastating loss generated a similar combination of grief and rage. While he was adjusting to Shelly's death, Rosaldo could grasp emotionally what the Ilongot were getting at. Dealing with the death opened his eyes to the force of emotions in social life, something he and most other anthropologists had never really considered. Rosaldo (1989) realized that his training as an anthropologist, which emphasized scientific detachment, accounted for his initial dismissal of Ilongot notions of head-hunting. He concluded that his other interpretations of head-hunting were not wrong, they just gave him an incomplete picture of why the Ilongot did it. He also concluded that ethnographic knowledge is an open-ended process; as the ethnographer's own life experiences and knowledge change, so do his or her insights into other cultures.

But anthropologists do not just try to understand the world of culture and other human concerns, they also intervene in it in practical ways, which is an issue we explore next.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY

How might you use a comparative perspective when visiting another country while on vacation? Consider the cultural contexts you have experienced and how these might provide a comparative framework for experiencing a novel society and culture.

How Do Anthropologists Put Their Knowledge to Work in the World?

Anthropological research is relevant and useful for addressing many social problems. At some point in their careers, most anthropologists get involved in work with practical, real-world concerns, applying their research skills and knowledge to the creation or implementation of policies, the management of social programs, the conduct of legal proceedings, or even the design of consumer products.

Applied and Practicing Anthropology

Practical applications are such an important component of anthropology that some anthropologists consider them the “fifth subfield.” These practical applications include those of **applied anthropology**, anthropological research commissioned to serve an organization’s needs, and those of **practicing anthropology**, the broadest category of anthropological work, in which the anthropologist not only performs research but also gets involved in the design, implementation, and management of some organization, process, or product. Under both labels, anthropologists have effectively put their discipline to work addressing difficult social, health, and educational problems, as the following snapshots demonstrate.

MARY AMUYUNZU-NYAMONGO: BRINGING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO HEALTH PROGRAMS IN KENYA

Like many other anthropologists, Kenyan anthropologist Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo (Figure 1.6) works on pressing social and health problems

confronting her country. One of the many problems she has studied is the lack of detailed knowledge of local communities that is necessary to make health programs work. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo collected local knowledge from insights about people’s health beliefs and practices through qualitative research. For example, during a campaign to control mosquito-borne illness in a coastal village,



Figure 1.6 Cultural Anthropologist Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo.

government officials wanted to conduct blood screenings to identify levels of infection. They told school children to tell their parents to get screened, which failed. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo knew that in this culture, male heads of households control decision-making. She organized a meeting where the issue of screenings was introduced to them. Once these men became involved, the screenings became successful (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo 2006).

DAVINA TWO BEARS: APPLIED ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE NAVAJO RESERVATION

Because archaeologists often encounter burials when they excavate prehistoric Indian sites, American Indian communities have often found themselves at odds with archaeologists over the question of what to do with the human remains uncovered. Some Indians object to any excavation at all. But the work of Navajo archaeologist Davina Two Bears (2006; Figure 1.7) runs counter to the expectations many people may have about the inherent tensions between Indians and archaeologists. For several years now, she has worked with the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department, which emerged in 1988 from the Navajo Nation Cultural Resource Management Program. As both an archaeologist and a cultural resource management professional for the Navajo tribe, she advises on potential damage to archaeological sites that might be caused by road construction or building projects. Two Bears uses her archaeological training to prevent damage to ancient sites, which many Navajo people view as deserving great respect. Two Bears identifies and records the locations and characteristics of sites. When proposed projects would damage archaeological sites, Two Bears and her colleagues try to identify alternative locations. She feels that although she has been professionally trained, her work is more an extension of what Navajos have always done in protecting their ancestors and their ancestors’ special sites.



Figure 1.7 Archaeologist Davina Two Bears.

JAMES MCKENNA: THE NATURALNESS OF CO-SLEEPING

In much of the Western world, it is considered “healthy” for an infant to sleep in a crib, alone, for long stretches during the night. When a baby wakes frequently or wants to sleep alongside the parents, many see the child as too dependent. In our society we also have many deaths from sudden infant death syndrome



Figure 1.8 Biological Anthropologist James McKenna.

healthy development of human babies. His work shows that co-sleeping assists the infant's development and dramatically reduces the risk of SIDS.

MARYBETH NEVINS: SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

There are an estimated 6,800 languages spoken in the world today, but many experts expect a great number of them to be gone within the next century. Many



Figure 1.9 Linguistic Anthropologist Marybeth Nevins.

(SIDS) in which infants die in the night for unknown reasons. Biological anthropologist James McKenna (1996; Figure 1.8) and his colleagues developed an explanation for how and why many SIDS deaths occur in the United States. Through intensive studies of sleeping mothers and infants around the planet, McKenna found that the frequent stirring of young infants, nursing, and the carbon dioxide and oxygen mix created by bodies close together are important aspects of the

linguistic anthropologists have begun to work directly in efforts to protect and maintain endangered languages. One of those is Marybeth Nevins (Figure 1.9), who conducts research in Arizona on the Fort Apache reservation and with the Susanville Indian Rancheria in California. Nevins observes that there is no "proper" way of preserving something as complex as a language, and she suggests that linguists should approach their efforts as

open-ended exchanges with members of a language community. The goal is not to come in as "superheroes" to save a language, but to support efforts that keep the language in use and relevant to community life. This approach is driven by the value of "sustainability" as opposed to "revitalization" or "preservation."

These snapshots offer a small sample of the range of ways anthropologists put their discipline to work. As we discuss in the next section, anthropology—whether practical or academic in its orientation—raises important ethical issues.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY

Compare how an anthropologist and an engineer might each approach a problem involving where to situate a bridge or highway in a heavily populated area.

What Ethical Obligations Do Anthropologists Have?

Issues of **ethics**—moral questions about right and wrong and standards of appropriate behavior—are at the heart of anthropology, in two senses. First, anthropologists learn about how and why people in other cultures think and act as they do by researching their moral standards. Anthropologists often find these things out by adjusting themselves to that culture's rules of ethical behavior. Second, doing anthropology itself involves ethical relationships between researchers and others, raising many important and complex issues about the ethical conduct of anthropological research and practice. Ethics in anthropology—the moral principles that guide anthropological conduct—are not just a list of "dos and don'ts." Ethics is organically connected to what it means to be a good anthropologist (Fluehr-Lobban 2003). Here we consider three issues of common ethical concern for all anthropologists: doing no harm, taking responsibility for one's work, and sharing one's findings.

Do No Harm

The Nuremberg trials after World War II revealed that Nazi scientists had conducted harmful experiments on people in concentration camps. Scientists responded by establishing informal ethical codes for dealing with research subjects. But in 1974 abuse of medical research subjects in the United States led Congress to pass a law intended to prevent unethical research with human subjects (Figure 1.10). This new law required all research institutes and universities where research was conducted to establish an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to monitor all human subjects-based research. Medical, scientific, and social science organizations, including anthropological organizations, published codes of ethics that emphasized avoiding harm for people and animals who are the subjects of research.

"Do no harm" continues to be a bedrock principle in anthropology's primary code of ethics, the American Anthropological Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility (see inside front cover). Anthropologists routinely explain to people involved in their research any risks their participation might carry, and



Figure 1.10 Scandal at Tuskegee. Between 1932 and 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service studied syphilis among white and black men. When scientists learned they could treat syphilis with penicillin, they gave the drug to the white men, but not the black men. This abuse precipitated reform in the use of humans as research subjects in the United States.

obtain their “informed consent” to participate. Anthropological publications avoid sharing confidential information and commonly disguise informants’ identities, in case those individuals could be targeted for harm because of what they say.

Take Responsibility for Your Work

The primary ethical responsibility of anthropologists is to the people, species, or artifacts they study. Whether it is a pottery shard, a baboon, or a person, anthropologists are expected to side with their subjects. This does not mean an archaeologist is expected to throw himself or herself in front of a bulldozer to prevent an archaeological site from being destroyed, or that a cultural anthropologist should take up arms in defense of informants threatened by the police or the military. Rather, it means that anthropologists should take whatever action is possible when their subjects are threatened, short of doing something illegal or that would seriously harm themselves or others. Such action might include helping prepare legal paperwork to stop a bulldozer and conserve artifacts.

What complicates this principle is that anthropologists are also responsible to other parties. For example, anthropologists also have responsibilities to inform the public and to the sponsors who fund their research. In “Thinking Like an Anthropologist: Should Anthropologists Take Responsibility for the Influences They Have on the Societies They Study?” we examine yet another dimension of anthropological responsibility.

Thinking Like an Anthropologist

Should Anthropologists Take Responsibility for the Influences They Have on the Societies They Study?

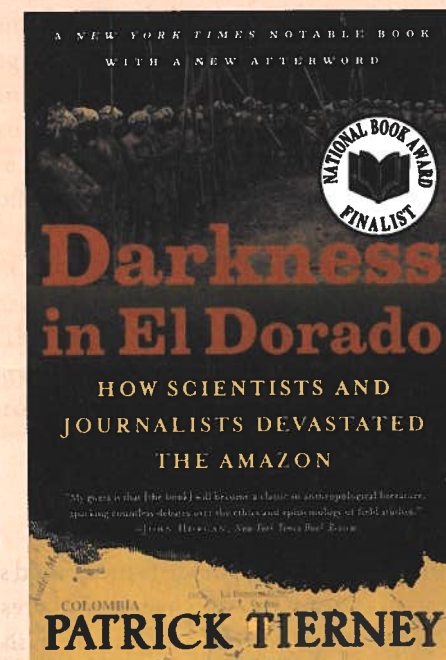
Anthropologists begin their research by asking questions. In this box, we want you to learn how to ask questions as an anthropological researcher. Part One describes a situation and follows up with questions we would ask. Part Two asks you to formulate your own questions based on a different situation.

PART ONE: THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

One of the biggest controversies to rock anthropology in recent decades focused on the work of American anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon with an Amazonian tribe called the Yanomami. Thanks to books and films Chagnon made about them during the 1970s and 1980s, the Yanomami are among the world’s best-known tribal people, and Chagnon himself became somewhat of an academic celebrity. Generations of college students have learned about the aggressive dynamics of Yanomami life, due to Chagnon’s depiction of them as the “fierce people” (Chagnon 1968). But Chagnon’s work has come under intense scrutiny because of claims that it seriously harmed the Yanomami.

The scrutiny began with the work of an investigative journalist named Patrick Tierney who claimed that Western scientists, anthropologists, and medical researchers had abused the Yanomami. In a high-profile book published in 2000—*Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon*—Tierney described how Chagnon had treated the Yanomami in an unethical

manner and distorted his findings about them. Some of Tierney’s claims were proven to be unfounded, but others remain difficult to dismiss. One enduring claim is that Chagnon’s image of the Yanomami as fierce and violent is a crude misrepresentation, more a reflection of Chagnon’s confrontational personal style and belief in the innateness of violence in humans than an accurate representation of the Yanomami. A second is that Chagnon manipulated his data to prove that more violent men had more offspring, which could support his claim that



Tierney's *Darkness in El Dorado*.

continues

Thinking Like an Anthropologist *continued*

violence was genetically programmed. A third is that Chagnon actually exacerbated conflicts by giving away machetes to his friends, provoking even greater violence. Further, according to Tierney, when gold was discovered on Yanomami lands, Chagnon never publicly objected to the use of his work to justify violence against the Yanomami by goldminers.

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) responded to these allegations by setting up a task force to examine them, exposing deep divisions among anthropologists. Some anthropologists defended Chagnon, while others feared that Chagnon's unethical research practices and misrepresentations had compromised the integrity of the discipline. In its final report, published in 2002, the AAA task force asserted that Chagnon had indeed represented the Yanomami in harmful ways, and that he had not received informed consent or government permission to do some of his work. In 2005, however, the AAA voted to rescind its previous acceptance of the report, not because of anything in the report itself, but because the AAA had violated its own policy prohibiting the adjudication of ethics violations by getting involved in the first place. Concerns over the lasting

impacts of these allegations on the integrity of the discipline persist even today.

What questions does this situation raise for anthropological researchers?

1. Are anthropologists responsible for how others use their research?
2. Should anthropologists place the welfare of their subjects over the success of their research?
3. Are anthropologists responsible for the negative social impacts of their fieldwork practices and findings?
4. Are there ways of doing research that are mutually beneficial to the anthropologist and the subjects of the research?

PART TWO: ANTHROPOLOGY

STUDENTS AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

As a student of anthropology, you may be confronted with ethical dilemmas about your conflicting responsibilities and the effects of your work. For example, it is possible that you will be asked to conduct basic research, such as studying a club or fraternity on campus, or a social setting or group in the community. You may witness illegal activities—such as alcohol use by a minor, drug dealing, or vandalism. What questions would you ask about this situation as an anthropological researcher? (Sample questions can be found at the end of this chapter.)

Share Your Findings

Historically, anthropologists took blood samples, did long-term ethnographic research, and excavated archaeological sites with little concern for those who might object to these activities, especially in indigenous communities. But during the past several decades, there has been a global sea change in favor of indigenous rights, and nowadays researchers routinely collaborate with native communities affected by their research.

An important ethical question now is who should control anthropological data and knowledge. For cultural anthropologists, the issue of control often relates to questions about who should define the research problem and preserve the data—the anthropologist or the subjects of research. Traditionally, the anthropologist has controlled those things, but communities have increasingly challenged anthropologists to provide them with research skills and information produced by research so they can continue to use them for their benefit after the anthropologist leaves.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY

If you were studying a local Head Start program and observed problems with local funding for the facility, what are ways you might suggest for anthropologists to get involved in helping the organization?

Conclusion

Since the 1850s, anthropologists have been asking questions about and developing perspectives on human societies past and present. Their expertise is on culture, diversity, how and why social change happens, the dynamics of human biology, and the ways people communicate with each other. The four subfields of anthropology—cultural anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology—sometimes come together to offer powerful conceptual tools for understanding the whole context of human experience, an approach called holism. Featuring a range of methodological tools—sophistication with theory, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and the comparative method—anthropology offers highly relevant insight into today's complex world.

But because anthropology deals with people, their bodies, and cultural artifacts that are meaningful to people, nearly everything anthropologists study invokes ethical concerns. Therefore, throughout this book we consider the ethics and application of anthropology research. But let us begin our journey toward an understanding of anthropology with a fuller discussion of the concept of culture.

Key Terms

Anthropology	p. 3	Colonialism	p. 4	Culture	p. 8
Applied anthropology	p. 16	Comparative method	p. 14	Diversity	p. 8
Archaeology	p. 6	Cultural anthropology	p. 5	Empirical	p. 3
Biological anthropology	p. 7	Cultural relativism	p. 8	Ethics	p. 19

Ethnocentrism p. 8	Linguistic anthropology p. 7	Salvage paradigm p. 5
Ethnographic method p. 13	Othering p. 4	Scientific method p. 11
Evolution p. 3	Practicing anthropology p. 16	Theory p. 12
Holism p. 11	Qualitative method p. 13	
Industrialization p. 3	Quantitative method p. 13	

Reviewing the Chapter

CHAPTER SECTION	WHAT WE KNOW	TO BE RESOLVED
How did anthropology begin?	During the nineteenth century, industrialization, evolutionary theory, and colonial contact led to the discipline of understanding how cultures operate and interact.	Anthropologists are still fascinated—and challenged—by the contrasts and changes in culture worldwide as a result of globalization.
What do the four subfields of anthropology have in common?	Anthropologists in all subfields share certain fundamental approaches and concepts, including culture, cultural relativism, diversity, change, and holism.	Some anthropologists continue to debate the idea that the subfields, with their distinct methods and specialized research interests, belong together in the same discipline.
How do anthropologists know what they know?	Anthropology has a strong relationship with the scientific method; all anthropologists use theories, collect data, and analyze those data.	While most cultural anthropologists reject the possibility of a completely objective analysis of human culture, archaeologists and biological anthropologists are thoroughly committed to the scientific method.
How do anthropologists put their knowledge to work in the world?	All four of the subfields have both theoretical and applied aspects. Applied research uses the insights of anthropological theory to solve problems.	Anthropologists continue to disagree about how best to apply their understanding of people from different backgrounds to address human problems.
What ethical obligations do anthropologists have?	Issues of ethics—moral questions about right and wrong and standards of appropriate behavior—are at the heart of anthropology.	Certain ethical issues have no easy resolution, such as what it means to do no harm; how to resolve conflicting responsibilities; or how and with whom to share findings.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO "THINKING LIKE AN ANTHROPOLOGIST"

Use these examples as a guide to answering questions for other "Thinking Like an Anthropologist" boxes in the book.

1. Does withholding information about illegal activities compromise the integrity of the discipline?
2. Would you be obliged to tell your professor everything you've found out through research, or can and should some information be held back?
3. Should loyalty to one's peer group transcend loyalty to one's university, or the discipline of anthropology?
4. How could you protect the identity of your informants?