ANTH 205: CULTURES OF THE WORLD - PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE



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Cultures of the World: Perspectives on Culture

Crystal Scheib

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Licensing

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction to Anthropology

Learning Objectives

- Identify the four subfields of anthropology and describe the kinds of research projects associated with each subfield.
- Describe how anthropology developed from early explorations of the world through the professionalization of the discipline in the 19th century.
- Explain how the perspectives of holism, cultural relativism, comparison, and fieldwork, as well as both scientific and humanistic tendencies, make anthropology a unique discipline.
- Evaluate the ways in which anthropology can be used to address current social, political, and economic issues.

1.1: What is Anthropology?
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Image: Bagabo Musicians. Philippine Reservation, Department of Anthropology, 1904 World's Fair, 1904, by Jessie Tarbox Beals under Public Domain.

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1.1: What is Anthropology?

Derived from Greek, the word *anthropos* means “human” and “logy” refers to the “study of.” Quite literally, anthropology is the study of humanity. It is the study of everything and anything that makes us human.[1] From cultures, to languages, to material remains and human evolution, anthropologists examine every dimension of humanity by asking compelling questions like: How did we come to be human and who are our ancestors? Why do people look and act so differently throughout the world? What do we all have in common? How have we changed culturally and biologically over time? What factors influence diverse human beliefs and behaviors throughout the world?

You may notice that these questions are very broad. Indeed, anthropology is an expansive field of study. It is comprised of four subfields that in the United States include cultural anthropology, archaeology, biological (or physical) anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. Together, the subfields provide a multi-faceted picture of the human condition. Applied anthropology is another area of specialization within or between the anthropological subfields. It aims to solve specific practical problems in collaboration with governmental, non-profit, and community organizations as well as businesses and corporations.

It is important to note that in other parts of the world, anthropology is structured differently. For instance, in the United Kingdom and many European countries, the subfield of cultural anthropology is referred to as social (or socio-cultural) anthropology. Archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology are frequently considered to be part of different disciplines. In some countries, like Mexico, anthropology tends to focus on the cultural and indigenous heritage of groups within the country rather than on comparative research. In Canada, some university anthropology departments mirror the British social anthropology model by combining sociology and anthropology. As noted above, in the United States and most commonly in Canada, anthropology is organized as a four-field discipline.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THINKING

Imagine you are living several thousand years ago. Maybe you are a wife and mother of three children. Maybe you are a young man eager to start your own family. Maybe you are a prominent religious leader, or maybe you are a respected healer. Your family has, for as long as people can remember, lived the way you do. You learned to act, eat, hunt, talk, pray, and live the way you do from your parents, your extended family, and your small community. Suddenly, you encounter a new group of people who have a different way of living, speak strangely, and eat in an unusual manner. They have a different way of addressing the supernatural and caring for their sick. What do you make of these differences? These are the questions that have faced people for tens of thousands of years as human groups have moved around and settled in different parts of the world.

One of the first examples of someone who attempted to systematically study and document cultural differences is Zhang Qian (164 BC – 113 BC). Born in the second century BCE in Hanzhong, China, Zhang was a military officer who was assigned by Emperor Wu of Han to travel through Central Asia, going as far as what is today Uzbekistan. He spent more than twenty-five years traveling and recording his observations of the peoples and cultures of Central Asia (Wood 2004). The Emperor used this information to establish new relationships and cultural connections with China’s neighbors to the West. Zhang discovered many of the trade routes used in the Silk Road and introduced several new cultural ideas, including Buddhism, into Chinese culture. Zhang Qian is still celebrated today in China as an important diplomat and pioneer of the silk road.

Another early traveler of note was Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta, known most widely as Ibn Battuta, (1304-1369). Ibn Battuta was an Amazigh (Berber) Moroccan Muslim scholar. During the fourteenth century, he traveled for a period of nearly thirty years, covering almost the whole of the Islamic world, including parts of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, India, and China. Upon his return to the Kingdom of Morocco, he documented the customs and traditions of the people he encountered in a book called *Tuhfat al-anzar fi gharaaib al-amsar wa ajaaib al-asfar* (*A Gift to those who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling*), a book commonly known as *Al Rihla*, which means “travels” in Arabic (Mackintosh-Smith 2003: ix). This book became part of a genre of Arabic literature that included descriptions of the people and places visited along with commentary about the cultures encountered. Some scholars consider *Al Rihla* to be among the first examples of early pre-anthropological writing.[4]



Figure 1.1.1:Statue of Zhang Qian.
Image courtesy of Judy Wells and Debi Lander.



Figure 1.1.2: An illustration of Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta in Egypt.
From Jules Verne's book "Découverte de la terre" (Discovery of the Earth).

Later, from the 1400s through the1700s, during the so-called "Age of Discovery," Europeans began to explore the world, and then colonize it. Europeans exploited natural resources and human labor in other parts of the world, exerting social and political control over the people they encountered. New trade routes along with the slave trade fueled a growing European empire while forever disrupting previously independent cultures in the Old World. European ethnocentrism—the belief that one's own culture is better than others—was used to justify the subjugation of non-European societies on the alleged basis that these groups were socially and even biologically inferior. Indeed, the emerging anthropological practices of this time were ethnocentric and often supported colonial projects.

As European empires expanded, new ways of understanding the world and its people arose. Beginning in the eighteenth century in Europe, the Age of the Enlightenment was a social and philosophical movement that privileged science, rationality, and experience, while critiquing religious authority. This crucial period of intellectual development planted the seeds for many academic disciplines, including anthropology. It gave ordinary people the capacity to learn the "truth" through observation and experience: *anyone* could ask questions and use rational thought to discover things about the natural and social world.

For example, geologist Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) observed layers of rock and argued that the earth's surface must have changed gradually over long periods of time. He disputed the Young Earth theory, which was popular at the time and used Biblical information to date the earth as only 6,000 years old, Charles Darwin (1809-1882), a naturalist and biologist, observed similarities between fossils and living specimens, leading him to argue that all life is descended from a common ancestor. Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) contemplated the origins of society itself, proposing that people historically had lived in relative isolation until they agreed to form a society in which the government would protect their personal property.



Figure 1.1.3: Charles Darwin in 1854.
Five years before he published The Origin of Species.

These radical ideas about the earth, evolution, and society influenced early social scientists into the nineteenth century. Philosopher and anthropologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), inspired by scientific principles, used biological evolution as a model to understand social evolution. Just as biological life evolved from simple to complex multicellular organisms, he postulated that societies "evolve" to become larger and more complex. Anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) argued that all societies "progress" through the same stages of development: savagery—barbarism—civilization. Societies were classified into these stages based on their family structure, technologies, and methods for acquiring food. So-called "savage" societies, ones that used stone tools and foraged for food, were said to be stalled in their social, mental, and even moral development.

Ethnocentric ideas like Morgan's were challenged by anthropologists in the early twentieth century in both Europe and the United States. During World War I, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), a Polish anthropologist, became stranded on the Trobriand Islands located north of Australia and Papua New Guinea. While there, he started to develop participant-observation fieldwork: the method of immersive, long-term research that cultural anthropologists use today. By living with and observing the Trobriand Islanders, he realized that their culture was not "savage," but was well-suited to fulfill the needs of the people. He developed a theory to explain

human cultural diversity: each culture functions to satisfy the specific biological and psychological needs of its people. While this theory has been critiqued as biological reductionism, it was an early attempt to view other cultures in more open-minded ways.

Around the same time in the United States, Franz Boas (1858-1942), widely regarded as the founder of American anthropology, developed cultural relativism, the view that while cultures differ, they are not better or worse than one another. In his critique of ethnocentric views, Boas insisted that physical and behavioral differences among racial and ethnic groups in the United States were shaped by environmental and social conditions, not biology. In fact, he argued that culture and biology are distinct realms of experience: human behaviors are socially learned, contextual, and flexible, not innate. Further, Boas worked to transform anthropology into a professional and empirical academic discipline that integrated the four subdisciplines of cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology, and biological anthropology.



Figure 1.1.4: Franz Boas, circa 1915.

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NOTES

1. Some of this chapter is adapted from the introduction to *Explorations: An Open Invitation to Biological Anthropology*: www.explorations.americananthro.org↵
2. See: https://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/ResourceDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=1499). ↵
3. See chapter two, The Culture Concept, for a history of the culture concept in anthropology. ↵
4. Lahcen Mourad (Arabic scholar) in discussion with Katie Nelson, December, 2018. ↵

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1.2: Anthropological Perspectives

Anthropologists across the subfields use unique perspectives to conduct their research. These perspectives make anthropology distinct from related disciplines — like history, sociology, and psychology — that ask similar questions about the past, societies, and human nature. The key anthropological perspectives are holism, relativism, comparison, and fieldwork. There are also both scientific and humanistic tendencies within the discipline that, at times, conflict with one another.

HOLISM

Anthropologists are interested in the *whole* of humanity, in how various aspects of life interact. One cannot fully appreciate what it means to be human by studying a single aspect of our complex histories, languages, bodies, or societies. By using a holistic approach, anthropologists ask how different aspects of human life influence one another. For example, a cultural anthropologist studying the meaning of marriage in a small village in India might consider local gender norms, existing family networks, laws regarding marriage, religious rules, and economic factors. A biological anthropologist studying monkeys in South America might consider the species' physical adaptations, foraging patterns, ecological conditions, and interactions with humans in order to answer questions about their social behaviors. By understanding how nonhuman primates behave, we discover more about ourselves (after all, humans *are* primates)! By using a holistic approach, anthropologists reveal the complexity of biological, social, or cultural phenomena.

Anthropology itself is a holistic discipline, comprised in the United States (and in some other nations) of four major subfields: cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and archaeology. While anthropologists often specialize in one subfield, their specific research contributes to a broader understanding of the human condition, which is made up of culture, language, biological and social adaptations, as well as human origins and evolution.

Definition: Holism

The study of the whole of the human condition: past, present, and future; biology, society, language, and culture (Kottak, 2012, p. 2).

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

The guiding philosophy of modern anthropology is cultural relativism—the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their culture rather than our own. Anthropologists do not judge other cultures based on their values nor do they view other ways of doing things as inferior. Instead, anthropologists seek to understand people's beliefs within the system they have for explaining things.

The opposite of cultural relativism is ethnocentrism, the tendency to view one's own culture as the most important and correct and as a measuring stick by which to evaluate all other cultures that are largely seen as inferior and morally suspect. As it turns out, many people are ethnocentric to some degree; ethnocentrism is a common human experience. Why do we respond the way we do? Why do we behave the way we do? Why do we believe what we believe? Most people find these kinds of questions difficult to answer. Often the answer is simply "because that is how it is done." People typically believe that their ways of thinking and acting are "normal"; but, at a more extreme level, some believe their ways are better than others.

Ethnocentrism is not a useful perspective in contexts in which people from different cultural backgrounds come into close contact with one another, as is the case in many cities and communities throughout the world. People increasingly find that they must adopt culturally relativistic perspectives in governing communities and as a guide for their interactions with members of the community. For anthropologists, cultural relativism is especially important. We must set aside our innate ethnocentric views in order to allow cultural relativism to guide our inquiries and interactions such that we can learn from others.

COMPARISON

Anthropologists of all the subfields use comparison to learn what humans have in common, how we differ, and how we change. Anthropologists ask questions like: How do chimpanzees differ from humans? How do different languages adapt to new technologies? How do countries respond differently to immigration? In cultural anthropology, we compare ideas, morals, practices, and systems within or between cultures. We might compare the roles of men and women in different societies, or contrast how different religious groups conflict within a given society. Like other disciplines that use comparative approaches, such as sociology or psychology, anthropologists make comparisons between people in a given society. Unlike these other disciplines, anthropologists

also compare across societies, and between humans and other primates. In essence, anthropological comparisons span societies, cultures, time, place, and species. It is through comparison that we learn more about the range of possible responses to varying contexts and problems.

FIELDWORK

Anthropologists conduct their research in the field with the species, civilization, or groups of people they are studying. In cultural anthropology, our fieldwork is referred to as ethnography**,** which is both the process and result of cultural anthropological research. The Greek term "ethno" refers to people, and "graphy" refers to writing. The ethnographic *process* involves the research method of participant-observation fieldwork: you participate in people's lives, while observing them and taking field notes that, along with interviews and surveys, constitute the research data. This research is inductive: based on day-to-day observations, the anthropologist asks increasingly specific questions about the group or about the human condition more broadly. Often times, informants actively participate in the research process, helping the anthropologist ask better questions and understand different perspectives.



Figure 1.2.1: Author Katie Nelson conducting ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented Mexican immigrant college students. Photo by Luke Berhow.

The word ethnography also refers to the end result of our fieldwork. Cultural anthropologists do not write "novels," rather they write ethnographies, descriptive accounts of culture that weave detailed observations with theory. After all, anthropologists are social scientists. While we study a particular culture to learn more about it and to answer specific research questions, we are also exploring fundamental questions about human society, behavior, or experiences.

In the course of conducting fieldwork with human subjects, anthropologists invariably encounter ethical dilemmas: Who might be harmed by conducting or publishing this research? What are the costs and benefits of identifying individuals involved in this study? How should one resolve the competing interests of the funding agency and the community? To address these questions, anthropologists are obligated to follow a professional code of ethics that guides us through ethical considerations in our research.[6]

SCIENTIFIC AND HUMANISTIC APPROACHES

As you may have noticed from the above discussion of the anthropological sub-disciplines, anthropologists are not unified in what they study or how they conduct research. Some sub-disciplines, like biological anthropology and archaeology, use a deductive, scientific approach. Through hypothesis testing, they collect and analyze material data (e.g. bones, tools, seeds, etc.) to answer questions about human origins and evolution. Other subdisciplines, like cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology, use humanistic and/or inductive approaches to their collection and analysis of nonmaterial data, like observations of everyday life or language in use.

At times, tension has arisen between the scientific subfields and the humanistic ones. For example, in 2010 some cultural anthropologists critiqued the American Anthropological Association's mission statement, which stated that the discipline's goal was "to advance anthropology as the science that studies humankind in all its aspects."[7] These scholars wanted to replace the word "science" with "public understanding." They argued that some anthropologists do not use the scientific method of inquiry; instead, they rely more on narratives and interpretations of meaning. After much debate, the word "science" remains in the mission statement and, throughout the United States, anthropology is predominantly categorized as a social science.

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NOTES

6. See the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics: http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/↵
7. See the American Anthropological Association Statement of Purpose: https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1650↵

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1.3: Cultural Anthropology and the Other Subfields

WHAT IS CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

The focus of this textbook is cultural anthropology, the largest of the subfields in the United States as measured by the number of people who graduate with PhDs each year.[2] Cultural anthropologists study the similarities and differences among living societies and cultural groups. Through immersive fieldwork, living and working with the people one is studying, cultural anthropologists suspend their own sense of what is "normal" in order to understand other people's perspectives. Beyond describing another way of life, anthropologists ask broader questions about humankind: Are human emotions universal or culturally specific? Does globalization make us all the same, or do people maintain cultural differences? For cultural anthropologists, no aspect of human life is outside their purview. They study art, religion, healing, natural disasters, and even pet cemeteries. While many anthropologists are at first intrigued by human diversity, they come to realize that people around the world share much in common.

Definition: cultural anthropology

The study of similarities and differences among living societies and cultural groups.

Cultural anthropologists often study social groups that differ from their own, based on the view that fresh insights are generated by an outsider trying to understand the insider point of view. For example, beginning in the 1960s Jean Briggs (1929-2016) immersed herself in the life of Inuit people in the central Canadian arctic territory of Nunavut. She arrived knowing only a few words of their language, but ready to brave sub-zero temperatures to learn about this remote, rarely studied group of people. In her most famous book, *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family* (1970), she argued that anger and strong negative emotions are not expressed among families that live together in small *iglus* amid harsh environmental conditions for much of the year. In contrast to scholars who see anger as an innate emotion, Briggs' research shows that *all* human emotions develop through culturally specific child-rearing practices that foster some emotions and not others.

While cultural anthropologists traditionally conduct fieldwork in faraway places, they are increasingly turning their gaze inward to observe their own societies or subgroups within them. For instance, in the 1980s, American anthropologist Philippe Bourgois sought to understand why pockets of extreme poverty persist amid the wealth and overall high quality of life in the United States. To answer this question, he lived with Puerto Rican crack dealers in East Harlem, New York. He contextualized their experiences both historically in terms of their Puerto Rican roots and migration to the U.S. and in the present as they experienced social marginalization and institutional racism. Rather than blame the crack dealers for their poor choices or blame our society for perpetuating inequality, he argued that both individual choices and social structures can trap people in the overlapping worlds of drugs and poverty (Bourgois 2003).

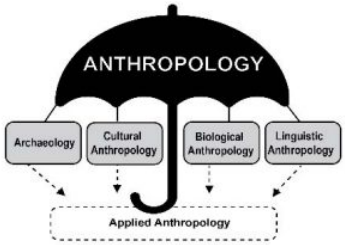


Figure 1.3.1: Anthropology and Its Subfields. Image by Katie Nelson.

THE (OTHER) SUBFIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Biological Anthropology

Biological anthropology is the study of human origins, evolution, and variation. Some biological anthropologists focus on our closest living relatives, monkeys and apes. They examine the biological and behavioral similarities and differences between nonhuman primates and human primates (us!). For example, Jane Goodall has devoted her life to studying wild chimpanzees (Goodall 1996). When she began her research in Tanzania in the 1960s, Goodall challenged widely held assumptions about the inherent differences between humans and apes. At the time, it was assumed that monkeys and apes lacked the social and emotional traits that made human beings such exceptional creatures. However, Goodall discovered that, like humans, chimpanzees also make tools, socialize their young, have intense emotional lives, and form strong maternal-infant bonds. Her work highlights the value of field-based research in natural settings that can help us understand the complex lives of nonhuman primates.

Definition: biological anthropology

The study of human origins, evolution, and variation.



Figure 1.3.2: Chimpanzees are the nonhuman primate that are most closely related to humans. We shared a common ancestor with Chimpanzees around 8 million years ago.

Other biological anthropologists focus on extinct human species, asking questions like: What did our ancestors look like? What did they eat? When did they start to speak? How did they adapt to new environments? In 2013, a team of women scientists excavated a trove of fossilized bones in the Dinaledi Chamber of the Rising Star Cave system in South Africa. The bones turned out to belong to a previously unknown **hominin** species that was later named *Homonaledi*. With over 1,550 specimens from at least fifteen individuals, the site is the largest collection of a single hominin species found in Africa (Berger, 2015). Researchers are still working to determine how the bones were left in the deep, hard to access cave and whether or not they were deliberately placed there. They also want to know what *Homo naledi* ate, if this species made and used tools, and how they are related to other *Homo* species. Biological anthropologists who study ancient human relatives are called **paleoanthropologists**. The field of paleoanthropology changes rapidly as fossil discoveries and refined dating techniques offer new clues into our past.

Definition: hominin

Humans (Homo sapiens) and their close relatives and immediate ancestors.

Definition: paleoanthropologists

Biological anthropologists who study ancient human relatives.

Other biological anthropologists focus on humans in the present including their genetic and phenotypic (observable) variation. For instance, Nina Jablonski has conducted research on human skin tone, asking why dark skin pigmentation is prevalent in places, like Central Africa, where there is high ultraviolet (UV) radiation from sunlight, while light skin pigmentation is prevalent in places, like Nordic countries, where there is low UV radiation. She explains this pattern in terms of the interplay between skin pigmentation, UV radiation, folic acid, and vitamin D. In brief, too much UV radiation can break down folic acid, which is essential to DNA and cell production. Dark skin helps block UV, thereby protecting the body's folic acid reserves in high-UV contexts. Light skin evolved as humans migrated out of Africa to low-UV contexts, where dark skin would block too much UV radiation, compromising the body's ability to absorb vitamin D from the sun. Vitamin D is essential to calcium absorption and a healthy skeleton. Jablonski's research shows that the spectrum of skin pigmentation we see today evolved to balance UV exposure with the body's need for vitamin D and folic acid (Jablonski 2012).



Figure 1.3.3: Human skin color ranges from dark brown to light pink.

Archaeology

Archaeology focuses on the material past: the tools, food, pottery, art, shelters, seeds, and other objects left behind by people. Prehistoric archaeologists recover and analyze these materials to reconstruct the lifeways of past societies that lacked writing. They ask specific questions like: How did people in a particular area live? What did they eat? Why did their societies to change over time? They also ask general questions about humankind: When and why did humans first develop agriculture? How did cities first develop? How did prehistoric people interact with their neighbors?

Definition: archaeology

Reconstructs, describes, and interprets human behavior and cultural patterns through the recovery and analysis of material remains.

The method that archaeologists use to answer their questions is excavation—the careful digging and removing of dirt and stones to uncover material remains while recording their context. Archaeological research spans millions of years from human origins to the present. For example, British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon (1906-1978), was one of few female archaeologists in the 1940s. She famously studied the city structures and cemeteries of Jericho, an ancient city dating back to the Early Bronze Age (3,200 years before the present) located in what is today the West Bank. Based on her findings, she argued that Jericho is the oldest city in the world and has been continuously occupied by different groups for over 10,000 years (Kenyon 1979).



Figure 1.3.4: Archaeologists, including Kathleen Kenyon, have helped unearth the foundations of ancient dwellings at Jericho.

Historical archaeologists study recent societies using material remains to complement the written record. The Garbage Project, which began in the 1970s, is an example of a historic archaeological project based in Tucson, Arizona. It involves excavating a contemporary landfill as if it were a conventional archaeology site. Archaeologists have found discrepancies between what people say they throw out and what is actually in their trash. In fact, many landfills hold large amounts of paper products and construction debris (Rathje and Murphy 1992). This finding has practical implications for creating environmentally sustainable waste disposal practices.

In 1991, while working on an office building in New York City, construction workers came across human skeletons buried just 30 feet below the city streets. Archaeologists were called in to investigate. Upon further excavation, they discovered a six-acre burial ground, containing 15,000 skeletons of free and enslaved Africans who helped build the city during the colonial era. The "African Burial Ground," which dates dating from 1630 to 1795, contains a trove of information about how free and enslaved Africans lived and died. The site is now a national monument where people can learn about the history of slavery in the U.S.[5]

Linguistic Anthropology

Language is a defining trait of human beings. While other animals have communication systems, only humans have complex, symbolic languages—over 6,000 of them! Human language makes it possible to teach and learn, to plan and think abstractly, to coordinate our efforts, and even to contemplate our own demise. Linguistic anthropologists ask questions like: How did language first emerge? How has it evolved and diversified over time? How has language helped us succeed as a species? How can language convey one's social identity? How does language influence our views of the world? If you speak two or more languages, you may have experienced how language affects you. For example, in English, we say: "I love you." But Spanish speakers use different terms—*te amo*, *te adoro*, *te quiero*, and so on—to convey different kinds of love: romantic love, platonic love, maternal love, etc. The Spanish language arguably expresses more nuanced views of love than the English language.

One intriguing line of linguistic anthropological research focuses on the relationship between language, thought, and culture. It may seem intuitive that our thoughts come first; after all, we like to say: "Think before you speak." However, according to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (also known as linguistic relativity), the language you speak allows you to think about some things and not others. When Benjamin Whorf (1897-1941) studied the Hopi language, he found not just word-level differences, but *grammatical* differences between Hopi and English. He wrote that Hopi has no grammatical tenses to convey the passage of time. Rather, the Hopi language indicates whether or not something has "manifested." Whorf argued that English grammatical tenses (past, present, future) inspire a linear sense of time, while Hopi language, with its lack of tenses, inspires a cyclical experience of time (Whorf 1956). Some critics, like German-American linguist Ekkehart Malotki, refute Whorf's theory, arguing that Hopi do have linguistic terms for time and that a linear sense of time is natural and perhaps universal. At the same time, Malotki recognized that English and Hopi tenses differ, albeit in ways less pronounced than Whorf proposed (Malotki 1983).

Other linguistic anthropologists track the emergence and diversification of languages, while others focus on language use in today's social contexts. Still others explore how language is crucial to socialization: children learn their culture and social identity through language and nonverbal forms of communication (Ochs and Schieffelin 2012).

Applied Anthropology

Sometimes considered a fifth subdiscipline, applied anthropology involves the application of anthropological theories, methods, and findings to solve practical problems. Applied anthropologists are employed outside of academic settings, in both the public and private sectors, including business or consulting firms, advertising companies, city government, law enforcement, the medical field, non-governmental organizations, and even the military.

Applied anthropologists span the subfields. An applied archaeologist might work in cultural resource management to assess a potentially significant archaeological site unearthed during a construction project. An applied cultural anthropologist could work at a technology company that seeks to understand the human-technology interface in order to design better tools.

Definition: applied anthropology

The application of the anthropological data, perspectives, theory, and methods to identify, assess, and solve contemporary social problems (Kottak, 2011, p.12).

Medical anthropology is an example of both an applied and theoretical area of study that draws on all four subdisciplines to understand the interrelationship of health, illness, and culture. Rather than assume that disease resides only within the individual body, medical anthropologists explore the environmental, social, and cultural conditions that impact the *experience* of illness. For example, in some cultures, people believe illness is caused by an imbalance within the community. Therefore, a communal response, such as a healing ceremony, is necessary to restore both the health of the person *and* the group. This approach differs from the one used in mainstream U.S. healthcare, whereby people go to a doctor to find the biological cause of an illness and then take medicine to restore the individual body.

Trained as both a physician and medical anthropologist, Paul Farmer demonstrates the applied potential of anthropology. During his college years in North Carolina, Farmer's interest in the Haitian migrants working on nearby farms inspired him to visit Haiti. There, he was struck by the poor living conditions and lack of health care facilities. Later, as a physician, he would return to Haiti to treat individuals suffering from diseases like tuberculosis and cholera that were rarely seen in the United States. As an anthropologist, he would contextualize the experiences of his Haitian patients in relation to the historical, social, and political forces that impact Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere (Farmer 2006). Today, he not only writes academic books about human suffering, but he also takes action. Through the work of Partners in Health, a nonprofit organization that he co-founded, he has helped open health clinics in many resource-poor countries and trained local staff to administer care. In this way, he applies his medical *and* anthropological training to improve people's lives.



Figure 1.3.6: Paul Farmer in Haiti.

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NOTES

5. https://www.nps.gov/afbg/index.htm ↵

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1.4: Why is Anthropology Important?

As we hope you have learned thus far, anthropology is an exciting and multifaceted field of study. Because of its breadth, students who study anthropology go on to work in a wide variety of careers in medicine, museums, field archaeology, historical preservation, education, international business, documentary filmmaking, management, foreign service, law, and many more. Beyond preparing students for a particular career, anthropology helps people develop essential skills that are transferable to many career choices and life paths. Studying anthropology fosters broad knowledge of other cultures, skills in observation and analysis, critical thinking, clear communication, and applied problem-solving. Anthropology encourages us to extend our perspectives beyond familiar social contexts to view things from the perspectives of others. As one former cultural anthropology student observed, "I believe an anthropology course has one basic goal: to eliminate ethnocentrism. A lot of issues we have today (racism, xenophobia, etc.) stem from the toxic idea that people are 'other' We must put that idea aside and learn to value different cultures."[8] This anthropological perspective is an essential skill for nearly any career in today's globalized world.

ANTHROPOLOGIST PROFILES

Some students decide to major in anthropology and even pursue advanced academic degrees in order to become professional anthropologists. We asked three cultural anthropologists – Anthony Kwame Harrison, Bob Myers, and Lynn Kwiatkowski – to describe what drew them to the discipline and to explain how they use anthropological perspectives in their varied research projects. From the study of race in the United States, to health experiences on the island of Dominica, to hunger and gender violence in the Philippines, these anthropologists all demonstrate the endless potential of the discipline.

Anthony Kwame Harrison, PhD



Figure 1.4.1: Anthony Kwame Harrison, PhD., Cultural Anthropologist, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Photo by Jim Stroup.

I like to tell a story about how, on the last day of my first year at the University of Massachusetts, while sitting alone in my dorm room waiting to be picked up, I decided to figure out what my major would be. So, I opened the course catalogue—back then it was a physical book—and started going through it alphabetically.

On days when I am feeling particularly playful, I say that after getting through the A's, I knew Anthropology was for me. In truth, I also considered Zoology. I was initially drawn to anthropology because of its traditional focus on exoticness and difference. I was born in Ghana, West Africa, where my American father had spent several years working with local artisans at the National Cultural Centre in Kumasi. My family moved to the United States when I was still a baby; and I had witnessed my Asante mother struggle with adapting to certain aspects of life in America. Studying anthropology, then, gave me a reason to learn more about the unusual artwork that filled my childhood home and to connect with a faraway side of my family that I hardly knew anything about.

Looking through that course catalogue, I didn't really know what anthropology was but resolved to test-the-waters by taking several classes the following year. As I flourished in these courses—two introductory level classes on cultural anthropology and archeology, a class called "Culture through Film," and another on "Egalitarian Societies"—I envisioned a possible future as an anthropologist working in rural West Africa on topics like symbolic art and folklore. I never imagined I would earn a Ph.D. researching the mostly middle-class, largely multi-racial, independent hip-hop scene in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Through my anthropological training, I have made a career exploring how race influences our perceptions of popular music. I have written several pieces on racial identity and hip hop—most notably my 2009 book, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification*. I have also explored how race impacts people's senses of belonging in various social spaces—for instance,

African American participation in downhill skiing or the experiences of underrepresented students at historically white colleges and universities. In all these efforts, my attention is primarily on understanding the complexities, nuances, and significance of race. I use these other topics—music, recreation, and higher education—as avenues through which to explore race's multiple meanings and unequal consequences.



Figure 1.4.2: Harrison performing as a participant-observing member of the Forest Fires Collective (the hip hop group he founded during his fieldwork). Photo courtesy of Kwame Harrison.

Where a fascination with the exotic initially brought me to anthropology, it is the discipline's ability to shed light on what many of us see as normal, common, and taken-for-granted that has kept me with it through three degrees (bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D.) and a fifteen-year career as a college professor. I am currently the Gloria D. Smith Professor of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech—a school that, oddly enough, does not have an anthropology program. Being an anthropologist at a major university that doesn't have an anthropology program, I believe, gives me a unique perspective on the discipline's key virtues.

One of the most important things that anthropology does is create a basis for questioning taken-for-granted notions of progress. Does the Gillette Fusion Five Razor, with its five blades, really offer a better shave than the four-bladed Schick Quattro? I cannot say for sure, but as I've witnessed the move from twin-blade razors, to Mach 3s, to today (there is even a company offering "the world's first and only" razor with "seven precision aligned blades)" there appears to be a presumption that more, in this case, razor-blades is better. I'll admit that the razor-blade example is somewhat crude. Expanding out to the latest model automobile or smartphone, people seem to have a seldom questioned belief in the notion that newer technologies ultimately improve our lives. Anthropology places such ideas within the broader context of human lifeways, or what anthropologists call *culture*. What are the most crucial elements of human biological and social existence? What additional developments have brought communities the greatest levels of collective satisfaction, effective organization, and sustainability?



Figure 1.4.3: Harrison at work hosting an underground hip hop radio show. Photo by Craig E. Arthur.

Anthropology has taught me to view the contemporary American lifestyle that I grew up thinking was normal through the wider frame of humanity's long history. How does our perspective change upon learning that for the vast majority of human history—some say as much as ninety-nine percent of it—people lived a foraging lifestyle (commonly referred to as "hunting and gathering")? Although I am not calling for a mass return to foraging, when we consider the significant worldwide issues that humans face today—such things as global warming, the threat of nuclear war, accelerating ethnic conflicts, and a world population that has grown from one billion to nearly eight billion over the past two hundred years—we are left with difficult questions about whether 10,000 years of agriculture and a couple hundred years of industrialization have been in humanity's best long-term interests. All of this is to say that anthropology offers one of the most biting critiques of modernity, which challenges us to slow down and think about whether the new technologies we are constantly being presented with make sense. Similarly, the anthropological concept of ethnocentrism is incredibly useful when paired with different examples of how people define family, recognize leadership, decide what is and is not edible, and the like. To offer just one example, many of my students are surprised to learn that among my (matrilineal) family in Ghana, I have a distinctly different relationship with cousins who are children of my mother's brother as compared with cousins who are children of her sister.

Using my own anthropological biography as an illustration, I want to stress that the discipline does not showcase diverse human lifeways to further exoticize those who live differently from us. In contrast, anthropology showcases cultural variation to illustrate the possibilities and potential for human life, and to demonstrate that the way of doing things we know best is neither normal nor necessarily right. It is just one way among a multitude of others. “Everybody does it but we all do it different”; this is culture.

Bob Myers, PhD, M.P.H.



Figure 1.4.4: Bob Myers, Cultural Anthropologist, Alfred University, at a statue honoring the first residents of Resolute, a small 200-person community in Canada. Resolute is the second northernmost permanent community in Canada, located in the Territory of Nunavut, far above the Arctic Circle. Photo courtesy of Bob Myers.

My undergraduate experience significantly shaped my attitudes about education in general and anthropology in particular. At Davidson College in North Carolina I completed a German major, minored in Biology and took many courses in English Literature. I also spent one year studying abroad at Philipps Universität in Marburg, Germany, and saved some “me time” for hitchhiking and traveling around Europe. This led me to pursue graduate work in anthropology despite the fact that I had taken only one anthropology course in college. While in graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I became fascinated with Caribbean history and migration and spent almost two years doing doctoral fieldwork and research on the island of Dominica. After finishing my PhD, I had a one-year post-doc in biostatistics in Chapel Hill before I took my first job at Davidson College where I taught for several years.[9]

Observations of an impoverished health system in Dominica and family health experiences with dysentery during fieldwork led me toward medical anthropology and public health and so I completed a M.P.H. degree at the Harvard School of Public Health before receiving a Fulbright Fellowship to go to Benin University in southern Nigeria. There, a coup and other circumstances turned my one-year fellowship into a two-year experience/adventure. I probably learned more anthropology in Nigeria than in all of graduate school, including examples of the power of a traditional kingdom and the ways large families enable members to manage in distressing economic conditions. Then I went back to the U.S. and taught for two years at Long Island University before moving to rural Alfred University in western New York, where I now work. Alfred is a diverse university with a world class engineering program, a nationally ranked BFA/MFA program, small business, school psychology, and liberal arts and sciences programs, and no anthropology other than what I’ve been teaching for 32 years. To offset the absence of other anthropologists, colleagues in religious studies and I created a major called Comparative Cultures and later, with colleagues in modern languages, environmental studies, and political science, a Global Studies major, a perfect multi-disciplinary setting for anthropology.

Anthropology is the broadest, most fundamental of academic subjects and should be at the core of a modern undergraduate education. I’m convinced that an anthropology major is not necessary for our discipline to play a significant role in students’ understanding of the messy, amazingly diverse, interconnected world after graduation. An anthropological perspective is.

To me, an anthropological perspective combines a comparative (cross-cultural), holistic view with a sense of history and social structure, and asks functional questions like what effect does that have? How does that work? How is this connected to that? An anthropological perspective also draws from many other disciplines to examine patterns, and, of course, requires one to engage with people by talking to them (something that’s become harder than ever for many students). All this contributes to the theme I stress that everything is culturally constructed. Everything! I tell students during the first week of classes that one of my goals is to convince them that much of what they’ve learned about many familiar topics (race, sex and gender, kinship, marriage, languages, religion, evolution, social media, and globalization) is biased, or incomplete. Using an anthropological perspective, there’s no issue which cannot be better understood. Every Friday I encourage my students to “Have an anthropological weekend” and ask them on Monday to describe how this happened. Students’ examples range from describing conversations with international students, exploring the cultural and economic history of tea and coffee, to seeing an evangelical church service in a new light. This encourages students to appreciate that anthropology happens all around them and isn’t something that can only be studied in a faraway society.

Another goal I have in my teaching is to illustrate that an anthropological view is useful for better coping with the world around us especially in our multi-culture, multi-racial society where ethnic diversity and immigration are politically charged and change is

happening at a pace never before experienced. I stress themes of storytelling and interpretation throughout the semester. To this end, in my introductory cultural anthropology course, we view and critically discuss at length several famous films (*Nanook of the North*, parts of *A Kalahari Family*, *The Nuer*, and sometimes *Ishi, the Last Yahi*, among others), but also Michael Wesch's *Anthropological Introduction to YouTube*. One of the most effective writing exercises I give students allows them to examine an essential part of their lives, their cell phones. The assignment "Tell me the story of your relationship with your cell phone" has resulted in some of the best papers I have ever received. Students have described how their personal relationships evolved as their phone types changed; how social media connections reduced isolation by enabling them to find like-minded friends; one described a journey exploring gender, another how the new technology expanded his artistic creativity. I use Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook in different ways including Daniel Miller's *Why We Post* studies to show that anthropology isn't just about the past or the exotic. To illustrate how thoroughly we are globalized, my students do an exercise called "The Global Closet" in which they go through everything in (or near) their closet, reading tags to see where the item was made. Most are surprised at the far-flung origins of what they wear. Yes, anthropology helps to see the familiar in a new light.

I oftentimes use non-anthropologists' work in my classes to anchor our discipline in liberal education. At the beginning of *each* course we read environmental historian William Cronon's "'Only Connect'…The Goals of a Liberal Education" (he has a great discussable list—be able to talk to anyone, read widely, think critically, problem solve—at the end) because anthropology is about breadth and making connections (with others, and seeing patterns). We listen to and discuss the late writer David Foster Wallace's "This is Water" commencement address emphasizing empathy and awareness because anthropology fosters these qualities as well. Lots of what we do in class stays with students beyond graduation. For all of these reasons, studying anthropology is the most broadly useful of undergraduate disciplines.

Lynn Kwiatkowski



Figure 1.4.5: Lynn Kwiatkowski, Cultural Anthropologist, Colorado State University, (second from left) celebrating Tết, the Lunar New Year, with a family in their home village in rural, northern Vietnam. Photo courtesy of Lynn Kwiatkowski.

Living in societies throughout the world, and conducting research with people in diverse cultures, were dreams that began to emerge for me when I was an undergraduate student studying anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the early 1980s. After graduating from college, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer where I worked in primary health care in an upland community in Ifugao Province of the Philippines. Following my Peace Corps experience, I entered graduate school in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Berkeley and became a cultural anthropologist in the mid-1990s, specializing in medical anthropology.

While I was a graduate student, I returned to the community in which I lived in Ifugao Province to conduct research for my dissertation which focused on malnutrition, particularly among women and children. I studied ways that hunger experienced by Ifugao people is influenced by gender, ethnic, and class inequality, global and local health and development programs, religious proselytization, political violence, and the state. I lived in Ifugao for almost four years. I resided in a wooden hut with a thatched roof in a small village for much of my stay there, as well as another more modern home, made of galvanized iron. I also periodically lived with a family in the center of a mountain town. I participated in the rich daily lives of farmers, woodcarvers, hospital personnel, government employees, shopkeepers, students, and other groups of people. I conducted interviews and surveys and also shared daily and ritual experiences with people to learn about inadequate access to nutritious food, and social structural sources of this kind of health problem. Participant observation research allows anthropologists to obtain a special kind of knowledge that is rarely acquired through other, more limited research methods. This type of research takes a great amount of time and effort but produces a uniquely deep and contextual type of knowledge. I published an ethnography about my research in Ifugao, titled *Struggling with Development: The Politics of Hunger and Gender in the Philippines.*

Influenced by my study of gender power relations surrounding hunger and malnutrition in the Philippines, and also by the political violence I witnessed by the Philippine government and the Communist New People's Army, I took up a new research project that focuses on gender violence. I am exploring the impacts of this violence on the health and well-being of women and the intersecting global and local sociocultural forces that give meaning to and perpetuate gender violence in Vietnam. To address these issues, I am

researching the abuse of women by their husbands, and in some cases their in-laws as well, in northern Vietnam. I also explore the ways in which abused women, and other Vietnamese professionals and government workers, contest this gender violence in Vietnamese communities. In Vietnam, I have had the opportunity to live with a family in a commune in Hanoi, and in nearby provinces. I learned about the deep pain and suffering experienced by abused women, as well as the numerous ways many of these women and their fellow community members have worked to put an end to the violence. Marital sexual violence is an important but understudied form of domestic violence in societies throughout the world, including in Vietnam.



Figure 1.4.6: Family members gathered at their home in Ifugao Province, the Philippines.
Photo courtesy of Lynn Kwiatkowski.

In recent decades, anthropologists have been reflecting on the significance and relevance of anthropological research. This has included anthropologists who are working in each of anthropology's four subfields. Some anthropologists have called for greater efforts to share our anthropological findings with the public in order to try to solve significant historical, social, biological, and environmental problems. Examples of these problems include the impacts of climate change on the health and welfare of diverse peoples throughout the globe; and social structural reasons for nutritional problems, as well as cultural meanings people give to them, such as undernutrition, and illnesses related to increasing weights of people in societies globally. I hope my research on wife abuse will contribute to the emergence of a deeper understanding of the social and cultural sources of gender violence in order to end this violence, and greater awareness of its scope and its negative effects on women.

Through their research, anthropologists contribute unique and important forms of knowledge and information to diverse groups, including local communities, nations, and global social movements, such as feminist, racial, indigenous, environmental, LGBTQ, and other social movements. Cultural anthropologists' research is unique because it often involves analysis of the intersection of global social, political and economic forces and the everyday experiences of members of a cultural group. The fieldwork and participant observation research methods provide cultural anthropologists the opportunity to live with a group of people for several months or years. They learn about the complexities of people's lives intimately, including their social relationships, their bodily and emotional experiences, and the powerful institutional forces influencing their lives. Applying the results of our ethnographic research and making our research accessible to our students and the public can make the research of anthropologists useful toward alleviating the problems people face in our society, and in countries globally.

The particular way that cultural anthropologists do their research is important to our results. Through my research experiences, I have participated in the rich daily lives of farmers, woodcarvers, hospital personnel, government employees, shopkeepers, students, and other groups of people. I conducted interviews and surveys and also shared daily and ritual experiences with people to learn about inadequate access to nutritious food, and social structural sources of this kind of health problem. Participant observation research allows anthropologists to obtain a special kind of knowledge that is rarely acquired through other, more limited research methods. This type of research takes a great amount of time and effort, but produces a uniquely deep and contextual type of knowledge. Ethnographic research can help us to understand the extent of a global problem such as gender violence, the everyday experiences of those facing abuse, and the struggles and accomplishments of people actively working to improve their societies.

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NOTES

8. This quote is taken from a survey of students in an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course at the Community College of Baltimore County, 2018. ↵

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1.5: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter emphasizes how broad the discipline of anthropology is and how many different kinds of research questions anthropologists in the four subdisciplines pursue. What do you think are the strengths or unique opportunities of being such a broad discipline? What are some challenges or difficulties that could develop in a discipline that studies so many different things?
2. Cultural anthropologists focus on the way beliefs, practices, and symbols bind groups of people together and shape their worldview and lifeways. Thinking about your own culture, what is an example of a belief, practice, or symbol that would be interesting to study anthropologically? What do you think could be learned by studying the example you have selected?
3. Discuss the definition of culture proposed in this chapter. How is it similar or different from other ideas about culture that you have encountered in other classes or in everyday life?
4. In this chapter, Anthony Kwame Harrison, Bob Myers, and Lynn Kwiatkowski describe how they first became interested in anthropology and how they have used their training in anthropology to conduct research in different parts of the world. Which of the research projects they described seemed the most interesting to you? How do you think the participant-observation fieldwork they described leads to information that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to learn?

GLOSSARY

Applied anthropology: The application of the anthropological data, perspectives, theory, and methods to identify, assess, and solve contemporary social problems (Kottak, 2011, p.12).

Archaeology: Reconstructs, describes, and interprets human behavior and cultural patterns through the recovery and analysis of material remains.

Biological anthropology: The study of human origins, evolution, and variation.

Cultural anthropology: The study of simlarities and differences among living societies and cultural groups.

Holism: The study of the whole of the human condition: past, present, and future; biology, society, language, and culture (Kottak, 2011, p. 2).

Hominin: Humans (Homo sapiens) and their close relatives and immediate ancestors.

Paleoanthropologist: Biological anthropologists who study ancient human relatives.

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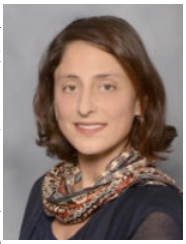
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Lara Braff is an instructor of anthropology at Grossmont College, where she teaches cultural and biological anthropology courses. She received her B.A. in anthropology and Spanish from the University of California at Berkeley and both her M.A. and Ph.D. in comparative human development from the University of Chicago, where she specialized in cultural and medical anthropology. Her research has focused on social identities and disparities in the context of reproduction and medicine in both Mexico and the U.S.

Lara's concern about the social inequality has guided her research projects, teaching practices, and involvement in open access projects like this textbook. In an effort to make college more accessible to all students, she serves as co-coordinator of Grossmont College's Open Educational Resources (OER) and Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) initiatives.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: What is Culture?

Learning Objectives

- Define culture and identify its defining characteristics.
- Define enculturation and its relationship to culture.
- Define and identify examples of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.
- Explain and identify examples of the mechanisms of cultural change.
- Explain how culture is an adaptive mechanism.

2.1: What is Culture?
2.2: The Capacity for Culture
2.3: Culture As An Adaptive Mechanism
2.4: Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism
2.5: Patterns of Culture
2.6: Levels of Culture
2.7: Culture Change
2.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Thumbnail: Maori warriors perform a Haka, meaning dance of welcome, for Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta during a Powhiri ceremony while visiting Auckland, New Zealand Sept. 21, 2012. The ceremony is an ancient Maori tradition used to determine if visitors came in peace or with hostile intent. (Publc Domain; Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo).

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2.1: What is Culture?

Culture is a concept that often invokes thoughts of a Monet, a Mozart symphony, or ballerinas in tutus dancing in a production of Swan Lake. In popular vernacular, culture often refers to the arts; a person that is cultured has knowledge of and is a patron of the arts. Then there is pop culture such as what trends are current and hip. Within anthropology, these things are simply aspects of culture. To understand the anthropological concept of culture, we need to think broader and holistically.

Anthropologists have long debated an appropriate definition of culture. Even today some anthropologists criticize the culture concept as oversimplifying and stereotyping cultures, which will be discussed more below. The first anthropological definition of culture comes from 19th-century British anthropologist Edward Tylor:

> *Culture...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 (Tylor 1920 [1871], 1).*

It is probably the most enduring definition of culture even though it relates more to the specifics, or particulars, of cultural groups. As Bohannan and Glazer (1988) comment in High Points in Anthropology, "...[it is the definition] most anthropologists can quote correctly, and the one they fall back on when others prove too cumbersome" (62). Tylor, echoing the French idea of civilization progressing from a barbaric state to “science, secularism, and rational thought” (Beldo 2010), believed that all human culture passed through stages of development with the pinnacle being that of 19th-century England. He believed, as many others of his time period did, that all other cultures were inherently inferior. Franz Boas, a German American anthropologist, challenged Tylor’s approach. He drew on the German concept of *kultur*, local and personal behaviors and traditions, to develop his ideas about culture. Boas thought that cultures did not follow a linear progression as espoused by cultural evolutionists like Tylor, but developed in different directions based on historical events. Boas took years to develop a working definition of culture, but it is one that influences anthropologists to this day. Culture is an integrated system of symbols, ideas and values that should be studied as a working system and an organic whole (Kuper 1999).



Figure 2.1.1: Tamil Culture, 2010, montage by Mithun Chuckraverthy under CC BY-SA 3.0.

One way to think about culture is to break down the concept into two distinct categories: the *Big C* and the *little c*. The Big C is an overarching general concept that can be applied to all culture groups; it is the anthropological concept. The little c is the particulars of a specific cultural group, such as American culture. Over time, anthropologists learned that including specifics when attempting to define culture (the big C) limited that definition. In other words, the definition would not apply to all cultures. Anthropologists began to develop a definition that could be applied more broadly.

“Culture” vs. “culture”

Culture (the little c), as mentioned above, is the particulars of any given cultural group. For instance, the marriage or subsistence pattern of a group of people. Specific traditions and rituals that many people associate with a cultural, would fall into the little c. A good portion of this book is devoted to examining the various manifestations of social institutions, or some of a cultural group's particulars. This chapter focuses on the Big C, culture as an overarching anthropological concept. Since there are so many definitions for culture, this text will use the broad definition proposed by Lara Braff and Katie Nelson (2020); **culture** is "a set of

beliefs, **practices**, and symbols that are learned and shared. Together, they form an all-encompassing, integrated whole that binds people together and shapes their worldview and lifeways" (6).

Definition: culture

A set of beliefs, practices, and symbols that are learned and shared. Together, they form an all-encompassing, integrated whole that binds people together and shapes their worldview and lifeways.

Definition: beliefs

All the mental aspects of culture including values, norms, philosophies, worldviews, knowledge, and so forth.

Definition: practices

Behaviors and actions that may be motivated by belief or performed without reflection as part of everyday routines.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

Although there are many definitions of culture, there are common themes that run through them all. Namely, culture is learned, shared, symbolic, holistic, dynamic, integrated, and adaptive. Each of these characteristics is expanded upon below and will we will take a closer look at some of them in later sections and chapters of this book.

Culture is learned.

While we are not born with a particular culture, we are born with the capacity to learn any culture. Through the process of *enculturation*, we learn to become members of our group both directly, through instruction from our parents and peers, and indirectly by observing and imitating those around us.

Culture is shared.

To say that a group of people *shares* a culture does not mean all individuals think or act in identical ways. One's beliefs and practices can vary within a culture depending on age, gender, social status, and other characteristics.

Culture is symbolic.

Much like art and language, culture is also symbolic. A **symbol** is something, verbal or non-verbal, that stands for something else, often without an obvious or natural connection. Individuals create, interpret, and share the meanings of symbols within their group or the larger society. For example, in U.S. society everyone recognizes a red octagonal sign as signifying "stop." In other cases, groups within American society interpret the same symbol in different ways. For example, take the Confederate flag. Some people see it as a symbol of pride in a southern heritage. Many others see it as a symbol of the long legacy of slavery, segregation, and racial oppression. Thus, displaying the Confederate flag could have positive or, more often, negative connotations. Cultural symbols powerfully convey either shared or conflicting meanings across space and time.

Definition: symbol

Something, verbal or non-verbal, that stands for something else, often without an obvious or natural connection.

Culture is holistic.

Culture is all-encompassing. It is a blueprint for living and tells us how to respond in any given situation. Culture includes social and political organizations and institutions, legal and economic systems, family groups, descent, religion, and language. However, it also includes all aspects of our everyday lives such as the clothing we wear, what we eat, what we watch on television, and what music we listen to.

Culture is dynamic.

Culture is dynamic and constantly changes in response to both internal and external factors. Some parts of culture change more quickly than others. For instance, in dominant American culture, technology changes rapidly while deep-seated values such as individualism, freedom, and self-determination change very little over time.

Culture is integrated.

Inevitably, when one part of culture changes, so do other parts. This is because nearly all parts of a culture are integrated and interrelated. As powerful as culture is, humans are not necessarily bound by culture; they have the capacity to conform to it or transform it.

Culture is adaptive.

While culture is central to making us human, we are still biological beings with natural needs and urges that we share with other animals: hunger, thirst, sex, elimination, etc. Human culture is our adaptive mechanism that uniquely channels these urges in particular ways. As a result, cultural practices can then impact our biology, growth, and development. Humans are one of the most dynamic species on Earth. Our ability to change both culturally and biologically has enabled us to persist for millions of years and to thrive in diverse environments.

These characteristics of culture allow us to understand that people everywhere are thinkers and actors shaped by their social contexts. As you will see throughout this book, these contexts are incredibly diverse.

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2.2: The Capacity for Culture

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

One aspect of life that humans and animals have in common is that we live in organized groups, or a **society.** But do we share culture? Once upon a time, social scientists regarded humans as the only species to exhibit culture. But if language and tool use are both evidence of culture, we must acknowledge that other species may also possess some rudiments of culture. Whales and dolphins, for instance, may have some capacity for language. And chimpanzees have been observed making tools, "fishing rods" so to speak, for retrieving termites from their nests. Bottle-nosed dolphins also appear to be tool-users. They have been observed to break off pieces of sea sponge and use them in order to probe for fish along the sea bottom. Ethologists have even observed that some species of songbirds, and some species of fish too, exhibit "socially learned cultural traditions" (Mesoudi 2011).

Definition: society

Organized life in groups.

While there is evidence that non-human primates and other species do learn and share some type of culture, no other species demonstrates the cultural virtuosity of human beings. For one thing, the cultures of non-human species do not seem to show the same tendencies of development and innovation from one generation to the next, as human culture does. For example, the combining of two or more separate elements into entirely new tools or practices does not seem to occur among non-humans, whereas it is a hallmark of human cultural development.

Enculturation

Tylor's definition of culture included shared beliefs, art, law, morals, custom, capabilities, and habits. Boas and his students added to this definition by emphasizing the importance of **enculturation**, the process of learning culture, in the lives of individuals. Benedict, Mead, and others established that, through the process of enculturation, culture shapes individual identity, self-awareness, and emotions in fundamental ways. Although parents and other authority figures in a young child's life are usually the initiators of this process, people in the community also play a part in steering children toward activities and beliefs that will be socially accepted in their culture. Through this process, the individuals in the child's life shape their worldview. Clifford Geertz (1973) proposed that a society's culture is a "set of control mechanisms--plans, recipes, rules, instructions what computer engineers call programs, for governing behaviors" (44). It is through conscious and unconscious learning, interaction, and observation that individuals acquire the rules of the culture they live in.

Definition: enculturation

The process of learning culture.

It is important to understand the role that enculturation plays in maintaining the beliefs and practices of a culture as well as the role it plays in our individual thought patterns. Enculturation affects how we view other cultures and their practices, which can lead to *ethnocentrism* (discussed later in this chapter). For example, in the United States, we are taught to eat with forks, knives, and spoons; however, in some cultures, especially in the Middle East and Asia, eating with your hands from a common dish is perfectly acceptable...and expected. Likewise, some countries drive on the left side of the road, while others, like the United States, drive on the right side. Often, we may hear the comment, "They drive on the wrong side of the road!". Obviously, there is no right or wrong side of the road just as there is no right or wrong way to eat food. However, there are other cultural rules that one must learn for each practice.



Figure 2.2.1: Eating Etiquette
Image 1: Qurutob: eating the traditional way with one's hands, 2007, by Zlerman under CC BY-SA 3.0.
Image 2: Corona, Long Island, New York Family Eating Supper, 1943, by Marjory Collins under Public Domain.

Shared Culture

Humans share both material and non-material culture. Material culture consists of tangible objects that people create: tools, toys, buildings, furniture, images, and even print and digital media—a seemingly endless list of items. As discussed in chapter 1, archeologists study the material culture from societies as remote in time as the Upper Paleolithic (and earlier) which tells us a lot about their activities. In fact, material culture is almost all we have to inform us about human culture in the deep past before the existence of written records. While material culture provides clues about the lives of the people who create and use it, artifacts alone are silent about many other details of past cultures, for much of human culture is non-material.

Non-material culture includes such things as: beliefs, practices, customs, traditions, and rituals, to give just a few examples. As discussed earlier in this chapter, beliefs are the mental aspects of a culture that includes norms and values. While some beliefs may be universally shared across most cultures, culturally shared beliefs tend to have boundaries. The members of one group may consider their own, shared cultural beliefs as self-evidently true, while members of other groups might consider the same beliefs as questionable, if not strange and arbitrary. Culturally relevant beliefs govern every conceivable aspect of social life: religious, political, economic, and domestic to mention only a few.

Norms

Norms are the expectations or rules, formal or informal, about what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior in a particular society. Generally, norms are separated into two types: folkways and mores. **Folkways** are a loose collection of usual or customary ways in which the members of a particular cultural community behave. Examples include: how people greet one another, how they dress, what they eat, how they prepare it, and how they eat it, how they handle interpersonal conflict, etc. **Mores** (pronounced “more-rays”) are stricter than folkways. They are the standards of moral conduct and ethical behavior that the people in a cultural community expect of one another. They include such things as rules against killing, rules about who can or cannot have sex with whom, and so on.

Definition: norms

The expectations or rules, formal or informal, about what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior in a particular society.

Definition: folkways

A loose collection of usual or customary ways in which the members of a particular cultural community behave.

Definition: mores

The standards of moral conduct and ethical behavior that the people in a cultural community expect of one another; what a community considers morally or ethically right or wrong.

The mores of a society are enforced in various ways. The most important mores are upheld by means of **laws**, which are explicitly stated rules that are enforced. People who violate laws may have to pay a penalty, for example, going to jail, or paying a monetary fine. Other mores may not be strictly against the law but are nevertheless strongly endorsed by a society. Such mores may be

upheld mainly by means of **social sanctions**, which are ways of communicating disapproval or putting pressure on people who violate a community's mores. For example, people who violate mores for which there are no formal laws may find that the people of a community make life uncomfortable for them. The community may publicly condemn the person (shaming) or avoid interacting with the person (shunning).

Definition: laws

Explicitly stated rules that are enforced.

Definition: social sanctions

Ways of communicating disapproval or putting pressure on people who violate a community's mores.

One way to look at the difference between folkways and mores is to say that folkways reflect what a cultural community regards as appropriate or inappropriate, polite or rude. Mores, however, reflect what a community considers as morally or ethically right or wrong.

Values

Cultural values are closely associated with both the beliefs and norms of a cultural community. **Values** can be defined as the symbolic, abstract concepts or standards that represent the ideals of a group. They point to what the group most regards as right, good, beautiful, desirable, etc. Values are often identified in discourse by means of words or phrases, e.g., "freedom," "equality," "filial piety," "respect for elders." Values, though, go hand in hand with beliefs. Think of a value, when articulated, as a shorthand way of referring to a belief. But of course, a value is hardly a value unless it is acted upon. In other words, we generally think of a value as a guide to conduct.

Definition: values

The symbolic, abstract concepts or standards that represent the ideals of a group.

What purpose do values serve? – we might want to ask. For one thing, shared cultural values may help promote group cohesion. They encourage group members to behave in ways that the group considers appropriate, proper, honorable, praiseworthy, and the like. As is true also with beliefs and norms though, not everyone necessarily adheres to the widely shared values of a culture to the same degree, and sometimes not at all. In fact, some cultural values may even be in conflict with other values.

Customs and Traditions

Customs and traditions are two more aspects of non-material culture. A **custom** is a widely accepted way of doing something, specific to a particular society that has developed through repetition over a long period of time. A **tradition**, as defined by David Gross (1992), is "a set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, or mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past" (8). Gross further elaborates, writing that a tradition "can be a set of observances, a collection of doctrines or teachings, a particular type of behavior, a way of thinking about the world or oneself, a way of regarding others or interpreting reality."

Definition: custom

A widely accepted way of doing something, specific to a particular society that has developed through repetition over a long period of time.

Definition: tradition

A set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, or mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past.

Gross (1992) acknowledges that customs and traditions have much in common and that therefore the differences between them are easily blurred. He insists, however, that from the perspective of society as a whole, customs are less important than traditions. Compared with traditions, Gross claims, customs involve "mostly superficial modes of behavior" that "are not as heavily invested with value." For example, says Gross, long-standing forms of greeting, like bowing in Japan, or shaking hands in the U.S. are "relatively insignificant social habits," better characterized as customs than as traditions. Still, Gross admits, "the boundary separating custom from tradition is not always easy to discern" (12).

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2.3: Culture As An Adaptive Mechanism

ADAPTATION

An **adaptation** is any alteration in the structure or functioning of an organism (or group of organisms) that improves its ability to survive and reproduce in its environment. Adaptations occur in response to **stressors** or changes in the environment in which the organism lives. Stressors can be *abiotic (*climate or high altitude), *biotic* (disease), or social (war and psychological stress). All organisms, including humans, have the ability to adapt biologically, which is referred to as **biological plasticity**. However, what makes humans unique is the extent to which we rely on culture to adapt to our environment.

Definition: adaptation

Any alteration in the structure or functioning of an organism (or group of organisms) that improves its ability to survive and reproduce in its environment.

Definition: biological plasticity

The ability to adapt biologically in response to the environment.

Definition: stressors

Something that causes strain or tension.

Biological Adaptation

Other species rely primarily on biological adaption for living in their respective environments. Biological adaptations can be short-term, long-term, or genetic. Which type of biological adaptation is activated often depends on the severity and duration of stressors in the environment. *Short-term acclimatization* can occur within seconds of exposure to a stressor. This type of response quickly reverses when the stressor is no longer present. Imagine stepping out of an air-conditioned building or car into a 90-degree day. Your body will quickly begin to perspire in an attempt to cool your body temperature and return to homeostasis. When the temperature declines, so will your perspiration. Tanning, which can occur in hours, is another short-term response, in this case, to increased UV-radiation exposure. Tans are generally lost during the months when UV-radiation decreases.

Developmental acclimatization occurs during an individual's growth and development. Note that these cannot take place once the individual is fully grown. There is usually a "magic time window" of when developmental acclimatization can occur. This adaptation can take months to years to acquire. One example of this is the efficient respiratory system of those who have grown up at high altitudes. Those who were born at high altitudes tend to develop larger lung capacities than those who move there later in life.

Note

A developmental adjustment can occur in response to cultural stressors as well. Intentional body deformation has been documented throughout human history. The ancient Maya elite used cradleboards to reshape the skull. Footbinding in China, now an illegal practice, was considered a mark of beauty and enabled girls to find a wealthy spouse.

Genetic adaptations can occur when a stressor is constant and lasts for many generations. The presence of the sickle cell allele in some human populations is one example. Keep in mind that genetic adaptations are *environmentally specific*. In other words, while a particular gene may be advantageous to have in one environment, it may be detrimental to have in another environment. The sickle-cell allele is a genetic adaptation in response to living in an environment where malaria is prevalent. However, for those living in non-malarial environments, it is no longer advantageous and actually a serious disease.

Cultural Adaptation

A **cultural adaption** is the knowledge or behavior that enables humans or groups to adjust, survive, and thrive in their environment. One way humans culturally adapt to their environment is through the use of tools. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, some non-human species do have a rudimentary culture as evidenced by their use of tools. Whether it is dolphins using sponges to protect their beaks when hunting fish on the ocean floor, chimpanzees using sticks to "fish" for termites, otters using a rock to break open a shell or humans hunting with a bow and arrow, the use of tools is a cultural adaptation that improves the

species chances of survival in their environment. Humans, however, "use culture *instrumentally*...to fulfill their basic biological needs for food, drink, shelter, comfort, and reproduction" (Kottak 2012, p. 21) as well as fulfilling basic psychological and emotional needs.

Definition: cultural adaptation

The knowledge or behavior that enables humans or groups to adjust, survive and thrive in their environment.



Figure 2.3.1: Cultural Adaptations - Tool Use

Image 1: Sea Otter uses a rock to break a shell open, 2008, by Brocken Inaglory under CC BY-SA 3.0.
Image 2: Bonobo at the San Diego Zoo "fishing" for termites, 2005, by Mike R. under CC BY-SA 3.0.
Image 3: Macaca fascicularis aurea using a stone tool, 2013, by Haslam M, Gumert MD, Biro D, Carvalho S, Malaivijitnond S under CC BY.
Image 4: Young Man with a Bow and Arrow, Lubwa, Zambia, c1905-1940, by Unknown under Public Domain.

Cultural adaptations can occur at any time and may be as simple as putting on a coat when it is cold or as complicated as engineering, building, and installing a heating system in a building, or building a space station for human habitation. Cultural adaptation has enabled humans to survive in harsh environments. However, not all cultural adaptations have been beneficial. While the goal of adaptive traits is to enhance human ability to be successful and survive in their environment, some traits have become *maladaptive***.** That is they have become more harmful than helpful and could actually threaten the survival of the people. One example is the use of air conditioners. Although air conditioners improved our lives and made it easier to live in hot and humid conditions, older air conditioners released chlorofluorocarbons and contributed to the depletion of the ozone layer which protects us from harmful ultraviolet rays. Over a long period of time, this would have a negative effect on life on earth.



Figure 2.3.2: Self-portrait of Tracy Caldwell Dyson in the Cupola module of the International Space Station observing the Earth below during Expedition 24, 2010, by NASA/Tracy Caldwell Dyson under Public Domain.

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2.4: Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

The guiding philosophy of modern anthropology is **cultural relativism**—the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their culture rather than our own. Anthropologists do not judge other cultures based on their values nor view other cultural ways of doing things as inferior. Instead, anthropologists seek to understand people's beliefs within the system they have for explaining things.

Definition: cultural relativism

The idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their culture rather than our own.

Cultural relativism is an important methodological consideration when conducting research. In the field, anthropologists must temporarily suspend their own value, moral, and esthetic judgments and seek to understand and respect the values, morals, and esthetics of the other culture on their terms. This can be a challenging task, particularly when a culture is significantly different from the one in which they were raised.

A Young Anthropologist's Experience

Katie Nelson, Inver Hills Community College

During my first field experience in Brazil, I learned firsthand how challenging cultural relativism could be. Preferences for physical proximity and comfort talking about one's body are among the first differences likely to be noticed by U.S. visitors to Brazil. Compared to Americans, Brazilians generally are much more comfortable standing close, touching, holding hands, and even smelling one another and often discuss each other's bodies. Children and adults commonly refer to each other using playful nicknames that refer to their body size, body shape, or skin color. Neighbors and even strangers frequently stopped me on the street to comment on the color of my skin (It concerned some as being overly pale or pink—Was I ill? Was I sunburned?), the texture of my hair (How did I get it so smooth? Did I straighten my hair?), and my body size and shape ("You have a nice bust, but if you lost a little weight around the middle you would be even more attractive!").

During my first few months in Brazil, I had to remind myself constantly that these comments were not rude, disrespectful, or inappropriate as I would have perceived them to be in the United States. On the contrary, it was one of the ways that people showed affection toward me. From a culturally relativistic perspective, the comments demonstrated that they cared about me, were concerned with my well-being, and wanted me to be part of the community. Had I not taken a culturally relativistic view at the outset and instead judged the actions based on my cultural perspective, I would have been continually frustrated and likely would have confused and offended people in the community. And offending your informants and the rest of the community certainly is not conducive to completing high-quality ethnography! Had I not fully understood the importance of body contact and physical proximity in communication in Brazil, I would have missed an important component of the culture.

ETHNOCENTRISM

Another perspective that has been rejected by anthropologists is **ethnocentrism**—the tendency to view one's own culture as most important and correct and as a stick by which to measure all other cultures. People who are ethnocentric view their own cultures as central and normal and reject all other cultures as inferior and morally suspect. As it turns out, many people and cultures are ethnocentric to some degree; ethnocentrism is a common human experience. Why do we respond the way we do? Why do we behave the way we do? Why do we believe what we believe? Most people find these kinds of questions difficult to answer. Often the answer is simply "because that is how it is done." They believe what they believe because that is what one normally believes and doing things any other way seems wrong.

Definition: ethnocentrism

The tendency to view one's own culture as most important and correct and as a stick by which to measure all other cultures.

Ethnocentrism is not a useful perspective in contexts in which people from different cultural backgrounds come into close contact with one another, as is the case in many cities and communities throughout the world. People increasingly find that they must adopt

culturally relativistic perspectives in governing communities and as a guide for their interactions with members of the community. For anthropologists in the field, cultural relativism is especially important. We must set aside our innate ethnocentrisms and let cultural relativism guide our inquiries and interactions with others so that our observations are not biased. Cultural relativism is at the core of the discipline of anthropology.

Cultural Relativism and Fieldwork

Objectivity and Activist Anthropology

Despite the importance of cultural relativism, it is not always possible and at times is inappropriate to maintain complete objectivity in the field. Researchers may encounter cultural practices that are an affront to strongly held moral values or that violate the human rights of a segment of a population. In other cases, they may be conducting research in part to advocate for a particular issue or for the rights of a marginalized group.

Take, for example, the practice of female genital cutting (FGC), also known as female genital mutilation (FGM), a practice that is common in various regions of the world, especially in parts of Africa and the Middle East. Such practices involving modification of female genitals for non-medical and cultural reasons range from clitoridectomy (partial or full removal of the clitoris) to infibulation, which involves removal of the clitoris and the inner and outer labia and suturing to narrow the vaginal opening, leaving only a small hole for the passage of urine and menstrual fluid Anthropologists working in regions where such practices are common often understandably have a strong negative opinion, viewing the practice as unnecessary medically and posing a risk of serious infection, infertility, and complications from childbirth. They may also be opposed to it because they feel that it violates the right of women to experience sexual pleasure, something they likely view as a fundamental human right. Should the anthropologist intervene to prevent girls and women from being subjected to this practice?

Anthropologist Janice Boddy studied FGC/FGM in rural northern Sudan and sought to explain it from a culturally relativistic perspective. She found that the practice persists, in part, because it is believed to preserve a woman's chastity and curb her sexual desire, making her less likely to have affairs once she is married. Boddy's research showed how the practice makes sense in the context of a culture in which a woman's sexual conduct is a symbol of her family's honor, which is important culturally.[5]

Boddy's relativistic explanation helps make the practice comprehensible and allows cultural outsiders to understand how it is internally culturally coherent. But the question remains. Once anthropologists understand why people practice FGC/FGM, should they accept it? Because they uncover the cultural meaning of a practice, must they maintain a neutral stance or should they fight a practice viewed as an injustice? How does an anthropologist know what is right?

Unfortunately, answers to these questions are rarely simple, and anthropologists as a group do not always agree on an appropriate professional stance and responsibility. Nevertheless, examining practices such as FGC/FGM can help us understand the debate over objectivity versus "activism" in anthropology more clearly. Some anthropologists feel that striving for objectivity in ethnography is paramount. That even if objectivity cannot be completely achieved, anthropologists' ethnography should be free from as much subjective opinion as possible. Others take the opposite stance and produce anthropological research and writing as a means of fighting for equality and justice for disempowered or voiceless groups. The debate over how much (if any) activism is acceptable is ongoing. What is clear is that anthropologists are continuing to grapple with the contentious relationship between objectivity and activism in ethnographic research.

NOTES

5. Janice Bodd, *Civilizing Women: British Crusades in Colonial Sudan* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). ↵

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2.5: Patterns of Culture

CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences, but all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are found in all cultures. Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Other examples of cultural universals are family, gender roles, an incest taboo, belief in the supernatural, marriage, art, dance, and music.

Definition: cultural universals

Patterns or traits that are found in all cultures.

Just because a trait is a cultural universal does not mean it is expressed in the same manner in all cultures. For example, every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions varies. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their own nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit that consists of parents and their offspring. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. However, each culture may view and enact these rituals and ceremonies quite differently.



Figure 2.5.1: Dance, a cultural universal.
Image 1. Children from Mwahyeran traditional dance group, Tanzania, 2010, by AnabaNunu under CC BY-SA 4.0.
Image 2. Fiestas de Invierno de Perquin, El Salvador, 2005, by Jose Huwaidi under CC BY-SA 4.0.
Image 3. Armenian National Dance in Aznavour Square, Armenia, 2018, by Armineaghayan under CC BY-SA 4.0.

GENERALITIES

Cultural generalities are those patterns or traits that are found in several, but not all, societies. One such generality that exists in some cultural groups and not others is the *nuclear family.* As discussed above, in many societies, the family unit includes more than just parents and children. In those cultures, the nuclear family is embedded in a larger family unit such as extended families, lineages, or clans. Family structures will be covered in a later chapter of this book.

Definition: cultural generalities

Patterns or traits that are found in several, but not all, societies.

While some generalities, such as family units, exist as a result of *independent invention* due to similar environmental or cultural circumstances, others result from the interaction between cultural groups. One example of this is the English language. English is spoken in many countries around the world for several reasons. First, North America and Australians both speak English because of a common cultural ancestor, or cultural inheritance (Kottak 2012). Both continents were the destination of many English settlers. Another reason for generalities is **colonialism**, "the political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people

by a foreign power for an extended time" (Kottak 2012, p. 215). Many of the countries that speak the English language today were once colonies of England. Finally, generalities can be the result of *diffusion* (discussed later in this chapter), which occurs when cultural groups have frequent contact.

Definition: colonialism

The political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended time.

PARTICULARITIES

Although, because of diffusion, they are increasingly rare to find, a **cultural particularity** is a distinct trait or feature that is confined to a single place, culture, or society (Kottak 2012, p. 27). Many particularities today exist in foods such as South Carolinas mustard pork barbeque or Newfoundland's cod tongues. However, a cultural group may adopt a new trait from another cultural group, the trait can be modified to fit their specific needs or preferences creating its own version of that cultural trait. For example, a country may have a McDonald's Restaurant, but you may not find the traditional American Big Mac on the menu.

Definition: cultural particularity

A distinct trait or feature that is confined to a single place, culture, or society.

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2.6: Levels of Culture

Anthropologists recognize three levels of culture: *international*, *national*, and *subculture*. Keep in mind that while anthropologists have classified these three general patterns, it is acknowledged that there is variation within any given culture. Even at the individual level, there may be differences from the dominant culture. While most people don't think about their culture at the most general levels, these levels do impact us even if we're not aware of it. One of the criticisms of the culture concept is that it generalizes and stereotypes groups of people. Indeed as you read about the levels of culture you may agree with this criticism. However, these generalizations can be used to develop a starting point in understanding a culture.

INTERNATIONAL CULTURE

International culture refers to cultural traits that extend beyond national boundaries. These cultural traits and patterns spread through diffusion, migration, colonization, and globalization (Kottak and Kozaitis 2012). Once again, an obvious example would be Canada, the United States, Australia, and Great Britain. These countries share common traits because they have a common language and ancestral cultural heritage. Other examples are evident in the adoption and use of technology and social media across continents. For example, computers and mobile devices allow people to live and operate across national boundaries enabling them to create and sustain an international culture around a common interest or purpose (i.e., Olympics, United Nations, World Cup, etc.).

Definition: international culture

Cultural traits that extend beyond national boundaries.

NATIONAL CULTURE

In contrast, **national culture** is the beliefs, behavior patterns, values, cultural traits, and institutions shared within a country. National culture is most easily recognizable in the form of symbols such as flags, logos, and colors as well as sound including national anthems and musical styles. Although it is a mistake to automatically assume that everyone in a large multicultural country like the United States shares a common culture, generally most people could agree on some core values on some level. **Core values** are "the key, basic, or central values that integrate culture and help distinguish it from others" (Kottak 2012, p. 21). Gary Althen (2003), in the essay "American Values and Assumptions", identifies some American core values such as individualism, freedom, equality, competitiveness, privacy, achievement, and work. Japanese culture, on the other hand, stresses different core values such as belonging, harmony, group orientation (interdependence over independence), politeness, modesty, gentleness, patience, and formality (Evason 2016). Again, it is important to remember, when speaking of national culture that all members within that society may not agree with all of the core values.

Definition: national culture

The beliefs, behavior patterns, values, cultural traits, and institutions shared within a country.

Definition: core values

The key, basic, or central values that integrate culture and help distinguish it from others.

Within the national culture, there is also popular culture. The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a television show. Rock and pop music—"pop" is short for "popular"—are part of popular culture. Popular culture is often expressed and spread via commercial media such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites.

Definition: popular culture

The pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society.



Figure 2.6.1: A keyboard showcasing social media platforms that have contributed to popular culture, 2018, by Today Testing under CC BY-SA 4.0.

SUBCULTURES

Subcultures, another level of culture, are smaller groups of people who share cultural traits and patterns within the same country. Subcultures have shared experiences and common cultural distinctions, but they are a part of the larger society or cultural system. Subcultures have their own set of symbols, meanings, and behavioral norms, which develop by interacting with one another. Subcultures develop their own self-culture, or *idioculture*, that has significant meaning to members of the group and creates social boundaries for membership and social acceptance (Griswold 2013).

Definition: subculture

Smaller groups of people who share cultural traits and patterns within the same country.

Thousands of subcultures exist within the United States. Ethnic, racial groups, and geographic regions share the language or dialect, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are united by shared experiences. Biker culture revolves around a dedication to motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by members who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetical additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. In the United States, adolescents often form subcultures to develop a shared youth identity. Alcoholics Anonymous offers support to those suffering from alcoholism. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.



Figure 2.6.1: Subcultures. Derived from Subcultures by jodieinblack under CC BY.

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2.7: Culture Change

One of the characteristics of culture is that it is dynamic. It is always changing. New objects are added to material culture every day, and they affect nonmaterial culture as well. Cultures change when something new (say, railroads or smartphones) opens up new ways of living and when new ideas enter a culture (say, as a result of travel or globalization). We are living in a world where globalization has increased the speed that our cultures are changing. In addition to globalization, there are three main mechanisms of cultural change: *diffusion*, *independent invention*, and *acculturation*.

MECHANISMS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

Americans travel overseas and return with a new appreciation of Thai noodles or Italian gelato. Television and the Internet introduce individuals to the lifestyles and values of different cultures around the world. Twitter feeds from public demonstrations in one nation have encouraged political protesters in another. This kind of transfer of material objects and ideas from one culture to another is called diffusion. **Diffusion** is the borrowing of cultural traits between cultures, either directly or through intermediaries (Kottak 2012). *Direct diffusion* occurs when two cultural groups interact with each other directly, such as in trade, tourism, and even during times of war. *Indirect diffusion* is when cultural objects and traits move to one culture to another through a "third-party", with no first-hand contact between the two cultural groups. Finally, *forced diffusion* is what it sounds like. A dominant cultural group imposes its beliefs and values on another subjugated group, such as colonialism. With all the advances in technology, mass media, and the Internet, must cultural borrowing is the result of indirect diffusion.

Definition: diffusion

The borrowing of cultural traits between cultures, either directly or through intermediaries.



Figure 2.7.1: Diffusion
Image 1: Black Lives Matter, Downtown Baltimore, 2016, John Lucia by John Lucia under CC BY 2.0.
Image 2: Black Lives Matter - Melbourne (Australia) Rally, 2020, by Matt Hrkac under CC BY 2.0.
Image 3: Black Lives Matter Paris, 2020, by Bastian Greshake Tzovaras under CC BY-SA 2.0.
Image 4: Political Banner "Black Lives Matter", Berlin, Germany, 2020, by Levin Holtkamp under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Independent invention is "the process by which humans innovate, creatively finding solutions to problems" (Kottak 2012, p. 34). One famous example is the development of agriculture in both the Middle-East and Mesoamerica. Likewise, we see pyramid-like structures in both the Middle East as well as North, Central, and South America. Remember, culture is an integrated whole, when there is a change in one area it affects other areas within that culture. The development of agriculture caused other changes such as social and political organizations, religions, and economic systems. As discussed earlier in this chapter, independent invention is one reason for cultural generalities when different cultural groups find similar solutions to similar problems.

Definition: independent invention

The process by which humans innovate, creatively finding solutions to problems



Figure 2.7.2: Independent Invention
Image 1: The Pyramids of Giza, Egypt, 2006, by Ricardo Liberato under CC BY-SA 2.0.
Image 2: Teotihuacan, Pyramid of the Moon, 2015, by Arian Zwegers under CC BY 2.0.
Image 3: Aerial view of Cahokia Mounds State Park under Public Domain.

Finally, change as a result of an ongoing exchange of cultural traits between groups that have continuous first-hand contact is referred to as **acculturation** (Kottak 2012). Although both groups may experience change as a part of their contact with each other, they remain two distinct cultural groups. *Pidgin*, which is a mixed language that results when two cultures have regular interaction is one example. Other examples would be Tex-Mex food, music, dance, clothing, and technology. Acculturation will be discussed more in the chapter on Race and Ethnicity.



Figure 2.7.3: A Mix of Culture
Image: Tex-Mex Nachos, 2018, by Kurt Kaiser under CC0 1.0.

Definition: acculturation

An ongoing exchange of cultural traits between groups that have continuous first-hand contact; both groups experience change while remaining two distinct groups.

GLOBALIZATION

The integration of world markets and technological advances of the last decades have allowed for greater exchange between cultures through the processes of **globalization**. Beginning in the 1980s, Western governments began to deregulate social services while granting greater liberties to private businesses. As a result, world markets became dominated by multinational companies, a new state of affairs at that time. We have since come to refer to this integration of international trade and finance markets as globalization. Increased communications and air travel have further opened doors for international business relations, facilitating the flow not only of goods but also of information and people as well (Scheuerman 2014). Globalization will be covered in more detail in a later chapter of this book.

Definition: globalization

A series of processes that work trans-nationally to promote change in a world in which nations and people are increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent (Kottak 2012 p. 34).

CULTURAL LAG

Though technology continues to impact changes in society, culture does not always change at the same pace. Often there is a delay when integrating a new feature into the rest of the culture. Why? Because often other elements of the culture have to change to meet or maintain the needs of the new cultural trait or feature. The automobile is a good example of an invention that took some time to become a part of the mainstream culture. People had to be persuaded that the automobile was a better form of transportation, roads had to be constructed, a way to procure fuel needed to be developed, mechanics were needed to fix cars,

efficient production of cars had to be developed, safety concerns needed to be addressed as well as rules of the road, and numerous other elements had to catch up with the invention of the automobile.

Material culture tends to be adopted more quickly than nonmaterial culture; technology can spread through society in a matter of months, but it can take generations for the ideas and beliefs of society to change. Sociologist William F. Ogburn coined the term **culture lag** to refer to this time that elapses between the introduction of a new item of material culture and its acceptance as part of the nonmaterial culture (Ogburn 1957). People are usually open to adapt or try new objects and inventions before modifying their values, beliefs, norms, expressive symbols, or practices. In other words, influencing fashion trends is easier than altering people's religious beliefs.

Definition: culture lag

The time that elapses between the introduction of a new item of material culture and its acceptance as part of the nonmaterial culture.

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2.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. Why is the concept of culture difficult to define? What do you think are the most important elements of culture?
2. In the twenty-first century, people have much greater contact with members of other cultures than they did in the past. Which topics or concerns should be priorities for future studies in culture?
3. COVID-19 had an impact on all cultures around the world and there were many short-term changes in behavior that we all had to incorporate into our daily lives. Since culture is integrated, what were some of the short-term changes to other aspects of our culture? What are some long-term cultural changes that we may see as a result of the pandemic?

GLOSSARY

Acculturation: An ongoing exchange of cultural traits between groups that have continuous first-hand contact; both groups experience change while remaining two distinct groups.

Adaptation: Any alteration in the structure or functioning of an organism (or group of organisms) that improves its ability to survive and reproduce in its environment.

Beliefs: All the mental aspects of culture including values, norms, philosophies, worldview, knowledge, and so forth.

Biological plasticity: An ability to adapt biologically in response to the environment.

Colonialism: The political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended time.

Core Values: The key, basic, or central values that integrate culture and help distinguish it from others.

Cultural adaptation: The knowledge or behavior that enables humans or groups to adjust, survive and thrive in their environment.

Cultural generalities: Patterns or traits that are found in several, but not all, societies.

Cultural particularity: A distinct trait or feature that is confined to a single place, culture, or society.

Cultural relativism: The idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their culture rather than our own.

Cultural universals: Patterns or traits that are found in all cultures.

Culture: A set of beliefs, practices, and symbols that are learned and shared. Together, they form an all-encompassing, integrated whole that binds people together and shapes their worldview and lifeways.

Culture lag: The time that elapses between the introduction of a new item of material culture and its acceptance as part of the nonmaterial culture.

Custom: A widely accepted way of doing something, specific to a particular society that has developed through repetition over a long period of time.

Diffusion: The borrowing of cultural traits between cultures, either directly or through intermediaries.

Enculturation: The process of learning culture.

Ethnocentrism: The tendency to view one's own culture as most important and correct and as a stick by which to measure all other cultures.

Folkways: A loose collection of usual or customary ways in which the members of a particular cultural community behave.

Globalization: A series of processes that work trans-nationally to promote change in a world in which nations and people are increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent.

Independent invention: The process by which humans innovate, creatively finding solutions to problems.

International culture: Cultural traits that extend beyond national boundaries.

Laws: Explicitly stated rules that are enforced.

Mores: The standards of moral conduct and ethical behavior that the people in a cultural community expect of one another; what a community considers morally or ethically right or wrong.

National culture: The beliefs, behavior patterns, values, cultural traits and institutions shared within a country.

Norms: The expectations or rules, formal or informal, about what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior in a particular society.

Practices: Behaviors and actions that may be motivated by belief or performed without reflection as part of everyday routines.

Popular culture: The pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society.

Social sanctions: Ways of communicating disapproval or putting pressure on people who violate a community's mores.

Society: Organized life in groups.

Stressors: Something that causes strain or tension.

Subcultures: Smaller groups of people who share cultural traits and patterns within the same country.

Symbol: Something, verbal or non-verbal, that stands for something else, often without an obvious or natural connection.

Tradition: A set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, or mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past.

Values: The symbolic, abstract concepts or standards that represent the ideals of a group.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Anthropological Theory

Learning Objectives

- Explain the historical development of anthropological thought.
- Identify the contributions Franz Boas and his students made to the development of new theories about culture.
- Identify the prominent anthropological figures and their school of thought.

3.1: Development of Theories on Culture
3.2: Cultural Evolution
3.3: Anthropology in Europe
3.4: Anthropology in the United States
3.5: Franz Boas and His Students
3.6: Cultural Evolution Revisited
3.7: Some More Theories
3.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Image: Franz Boas from Popular Science Monthly Volume 72, 1908, under Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

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3.1: Development of Theories on Culture

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AS STORYTELLERS

People throughout recorded history have relied on storytelling as a way to share cultural details. When early anthropologists studied people from other civilizations, they relied on the written accounts and opinions of others; they presented facts and developed their "stories," about other cultures based solely on information gathered by others. These scholars did not have any direct contact with the people they were studying. This approach has come to be known as **armchair anthropology**. Simply put, if a culture is viewed from a distance (as from an armchair), the anthropologist tends to measure that culture from his or her own vantage point and to draw comparisons that place the anthropologist's culture as superior to the one being studied. This point of view is also called *ethnocentrism* (discussed in Chapter 2).

Definition: Armchair anthropology

An early and discredited method of anthropological research that did not involve direct contact with the people studied.

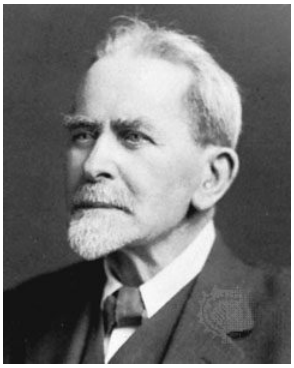


Figure 3.1.1: Sir James Frazer is among the founders of modern anthropology.

Early anthropological studies often presented a biased ethnocentric interpretation of the human condition. For example, ideas about racial superiority emerged as a result of studying the cultures that were encountered during the colonial era. During the colonial era from the sixteenth century to the mid–twentieth century, European countries (Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Dutch Republic, Spain, Portugal) asserted control over land (Asia, Africa, the Americas) and people. European ideas of wrong and right were used as a measuring stick to judge the way that people in different cultures lived. These other cultures were considered primitive, which was an ethnocentric term for people who were non-European. It is also a negative term suggesting that indigenous cultures had a lack of technological advancement. Colonizers thought that they were superior to the "Other" in every way.

Armchair anthropologists were unlikely to be aware of their ethnocentric ideas because they did not visit the cultures they studied. Scottish social anthropologist Sir James Frazer is well-known for his 1890 work *The Golden Bough: A Study of Comparative Religions*. Its title was later changed to *A Study in Magic and Religion*, and it was one of the first books to describe and record magical and religious beliefs of different culture groups around the world. Yet, this book was not the outcome of extensive study in the field. Instead, Frazer relied on the accounts of others who had traveled, such as scholars, missionaries, and government officials, to formulate his study.



Figure 3.1.2: Drawing of a Mother and Child in Malaysia, 1904

Another example of anthropological writing without the use of fieldwork is Sir E. B. Tylor's 1871 work *Primitive Culture*. Tylor, who went on to become the first professor of anthropology at Oxford University in 1896, was an important influence in the development of sociocultural anthropology as a separate discipline. Tylor defined culture as "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."[1] His definition of culture is still used frequently today and remains the foundation of the culture concept in anthropology.

Tylor's definition of culture was influenced by the popular theories and philosophies of his time, including the work of Charles Darwin. Darwin formulated the theory of evolution by natural selection in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*. Scholars of the time period, including Tylor, believed that cultures were subject to evolution just like plants and animals and thought that cultures developed over time from simple to complex. Many nineteenth century anthropologists believed that cultures evolved through distinct stages. They labeled

these stages with terms such as savagery, barbarism, and civilization.[2] These theories of cultural evolutionism would later be successfully refuted, but conflicting views about cultural evolutionism in the nineteenth century highlight an ongoing nature versus nurture debate about whether biology shapes behavior more than culture.

Both Frazer and Tylor contributed important and foundational studies even though they never went into the field to gather their information. Armchair anthropologists were important in the development of anthropology as a discipline in the late nineteenth century because although these early scholars were not directly experiencing the cultures they were studying, their work did ask important questions—questions that could ultimately only be answered by going into the field.



Figure 3.1.3: Edward Burnett Tylor

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IMAGE CREDITS

Figure 3.1.1. Sir James Frazer, 1933, under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 3.1.2. Drawing of a Mother and Child in Malaysia From Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization, E.B. Tylor, 1904, under Public Domain.

Figure 3.1.3. Edward Burnett Tylor by The GNU Project licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

NOTES

1. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Customs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1871), preface. ↵
2. Lewis Henry Morgan was one anthropologist who proposed an evolutionary framework based on these terms in his book *Ancient Society* (New York: Henry Holt, 1877). ↵

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3.2: Cultural Evolution

THEORETICAL THOUGHT

Before taking a closer look at the development of the various theoretical frameworks in anthropology, we need to first understand what a theory is. A theory is "an explanation of laws and statistical associations" (Ember & Ember 2004), or, as Lavenda and Schultz (2012) define it, "a **theory** is a formal description of some part of the world that explains how, in terms of cause and effect, that part of the world works." The important thing to remember is that a theory is a possible explanation for phenomena we find in a culture, but it is never unquestionably true and, as we will see, may at some point be proven untrue. A theory may suggest an explanation, and the evidence may support that explanation, but at some point, new evidence may be collected that proves the theory false. As is the case with the theory of cultural evolution.

Definition: theory

A formal description of some part of the world that explains how, in terms of cause and effect, that part of the world works.

CULTURAL EVOLUTION

E. B. Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Herbert Spencer all played a part in the development of the theories of cultural evolution. The primary assumption of cultural evolution is that societies develop from simple to complex, albeit at different rates, which explains why different types of societies exist in the world. These theories would later be proven untrue and rejected by future anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski.

Unilineal Evolution



Figure 3.2.1: Lewis Henry Morgan, 1908.

Proposed in the 19th century, **Unilineal Evolution**, is typically regarded as the first theoretical framework in anthropology. Originally proposed by E.B. Tylor, unilineal evolution suggests that all cultures evolved through three sequential stages: *savagery, barbarism*, and, finally, *civilization* (Sidky 2004). Lewis Henry Morgan further subdivided savagery and barbarism into sub-categories: *lower, middle, and upper* (Sidky 2004). These stages were based primarily on technological characteristics (see Figure 3.2.2) but included other things such as political organization, marriage, family, and religion. Since Western societies had the most advanced technology, they put those societies at the highest rank of civilization. Societies at a stage of savagery or barbarism were viewed as inherently inferior to civilized society, namely, Euro-Americans. (Sidky 2004). Although Morgan acknowledged that there is no biopsychological difference between races, he was, in fact, a racist. He believed that the people and races who were at the lower stages of cultural evolution were inferior because their mental abilities and brain size had not yet fully developed (Sidky 2004).

Definition: Unilineal Evolution

The belief that cultures moved through various stages of development according to different levels of rational knowledge, ending up with something resembling Euro-American lifestyles (Harris & Johnson 2007).

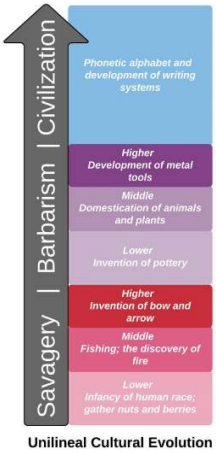


Figure 3.2.2: Unilineal Cultural Evolution.

Social Darwinism

Herbert Spencer's theory of cultural evolution, which is often referred to as **Social Darwinism,** proposed that cultural evolution was linked to biological evolution (Sidky 2004). The central belief of Social Darwinism was that there were innate biological differences that accounted for differences in intelligence, the capacity for language, and the behaviors of the different races and cultures, a view referred to as **biological determinism** (Sidky 2004). As a result, Euro-Americans were biologically and culturally superior. Spencer also coined the term "survival of the fittest" (Sidky 2004) and advocated for allowing societies to compete, thereby allowing the most fit in society to survive. With these ideas, Spencer opposed social policies that would provide assistance and relief to the impoverished and "inferior races" as it would interfere with the evolutionary process (Sidky 2004).

Definition: Social Darwinism

The racist ideological perspective that cultural and biological progress depended on the free play of competitive forces in the struggle of individual against individual, nation against nation, and race against race (Harris & Johnson 2007; Sidky 2004).

Definition: biological determinism

The belief that there are innate biological differences in intelligence, the capacity for language, and modes of behavior between human populations which explain cultural differences (Sidky 2004).

Summary

There are two main assumptions embedded in cultural evolutionism: psychic unity and the superiority of Euro-American cultures. **Psychic unity of mankind** is a concept that suggests human minds share similar thought patterns and will produce similar responses to similar stimuli (Sidky 2004). This means that all people and their societies will go through the same process of development. However, cultural evolutionists believed that psychic unity was dependent upon the stage of evolutionary development a cultural group was at. Of course, the second assumption of Western superiority was not unusual for the time period. This assumption was deeply rooted in European colonialism and based on the fact that Western societies had more sophisticated technology.

Definition: psychic unity of mankind

A basic set of elementary thought patterns common to all human minds, which produce similar responses to similar stimuli although expressed with differing permutations in differing contexts (Sidky 2004).

Nineteenth-century evolutionists contributed to anthropology by providing the first systematic methods for thinking about and explaining human societies; however, contemporary anthropologists view nineteenth-century evolutionism as too simplistic to explain the development of societies in the world. In general, the nineteenth-century evolutionists relied on racist views of human development that were popular at that time. In the early twentieth century, cultural evolutionism was strongly attacked by historical particularists for being speculative, incomplete, ethnocentric, and based on fragmentary second and third-hand reports from travelers and missionaries.

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3.3: Anthropology in Europe

The discipline of cultural anthropology developed somewhat differently in Europe and North America, in particular in the United States, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with each region contributing new dimensions to the concept of culture. Many European anthropologists were particularly interested in questions about how societies were structured and how they remained stable over time. This highlighted emerging recognition that culture and society are not the same. Culture had been defined by Tylor as knowledge, beliefs, and customs, but a society is more than just shared ideas or habits. In every society, people are linked to one another through social institutions such as families, political organizations, and businesses. Anthropologists across Europe often focused their research on understanding the form and function of these social institutions.

FUNCTIONALISM

European anthropologists developed theories of **functionalism** to explain how social institutions contribute to the organization of society and the maintenance of social order. Bronislaw Malinowski believed that culture is an integrated functional whole and that every part of culture has a function (Sidky 2004). Malinowski focused on the individual and human nature, not society (Sidky 2004). He believed that cultural traditions were developed as a response to biological and psychological specific human needs such as food, comfort, safety, knowledge, reproduction, health care, well-being, and economic livelihood. For example, one function of educational institutions like schools is to provide knowledge that prepares people to obtain jobs and make contributions to society. One thing Malinowski wanted to accomplish was to get rid of the "savage" stereotype. He emphasized that customs that appear irrational to the outsider actually served important functions within the society (Lavenda & Schultz 2013).



Figure 3.3.1: Bronislaw Malinowski, Professor of Anthropology, c1930.

Definition: Functionalism

The belief that cultural institutions function to meet the basic physical and psychological needs of people (Harris & Johnson 2007)

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

Structural functionalism was another form of functionalism that arose in Great Britain. British anthropologist, A.R Radcliffe-Brown, was its most prominent advocate. Radcliffe-Brown was interested in the way that social structures functioned to maintain social stability in a society over time (Harris & Johnson This approach had little interest in the individual, which contrasts with Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist approach. Radcliffe-Brown suggested that in many societies it was the family that served as the most important social structure because family relationships determined much about an individual's social, political, and economic relationships and these patterns were repeated from one generation to the next. In a family unit in which the father is the breadwinner and the mother stays home to raise the children, the social and economic roles of both the husband and the wife will be largely defined by their specific responsibilities within the family. If their children grow up to follow the same arrangement, these social roles will be continued in the next generation.



Figure 3.3.2: A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, (n.d.).

Definition: Structural Functionalism

The belief that social practices and social institutions function to preserve the structure of society (Lavenda & Schultz 2013; Sidky 2004).

In the twentieth century, functionalist approaches also became popular in North American anthropology, but eventually fell out of favor. One of the biggest critiques of functionalism is that it views cultures as stable and orderly and ignores or cannot explain social change. Functionalism also struggles to explain why a society develops one particular kind of social institution instead of another. Functionalist perspectives did contribute to the development of more sophisticated concepts of culture by establishing the importance of social institutions in holding societies together. While defining the division between what is cultural and what is social continues to be complex, functionalist theory helped to develop the concept of culture by demonstrating that culture is not just set of ideas or beliefs, but consists of specific practices and social institutions that give structure to daily life and allow human communities to function.

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3.4: Anthropology in the United States

During the development of anthropology in North America (Canada, United States, and Mexico), the significant contribution made by the American School of Anthropology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the concept of *cultural relativism* (discussed in Chapter 2). Cultural relativism is different than ethnocentrism because it emphasizes understanding culture from an insider's view. The focus on culture, along with the idea of cultural relativism, distinguished cultural anthropology in the United States from social anthropology in Europe. The participant-observation method of fieldwork was a revolutionary change to the practice of anthropology, but at the same time, it presented problems that needed to be overcome. The challenge was to move away from ethnocentrism, race stereotypes, and colonial attitudes, and to move forward by encouraging anthropologists to maintain high ethical standards and open minds.

Franz Boas, an American anthropologist, is acknowledged for redirecting American anthropologists away from cultural evolutionism and toward cultural relativism. Boas first studied physical science at the University of Kiel in Germany. Because he was a trained scientist, he was familiar with using empirical methods as a way to study a subject. Empirical methods are based on evidence that can be tested using observation and experiment.



Figure 3.4.1 Franz Boas posing for figure titled *Hamats'a Coming Out of Secret Room*, 1895.

In 1883, Franz Boas went on a geographical expedition to Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. *The Central Eskimo* (1888) details his time spent on Baffin Island studying the culture and language of the central Eskimo (Inuit) people. He studied every aspect of their culture such as tools, clothing, and shelters. This study was Boas' first major contribution to the American school of anthropology and convinced him that cultures could only be understood through extensive field research. As he observed on Baffin Island, cultural ideas and practices are shaped through interactions with the natural environment. The cultural traditions of the Inuit were suited for the environment in which they lived. This work led him to promote cultural relativism: the principle that a culture must be understood on its own terms rather than compared to an outsider's standard. This was an important turning point in correcting the challenge of ethnocentrism in ethnographic fieldwork.[1]

Boas is often considered the Father of American Anthropology because he trained the first generation of American anthropologists including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Alfred Kroeber. Using a commitment to cultural relativism as a starting point, these students continued to refine the concept of culture as well as contributing to the theoretical perspectives in anthropology.

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IMAGE CREDITS

Figure 3.4.1. Franz Boas posing for figure titled *Hamats'a Coming Out of Secret Room*, 1895, from Wikimedia Commons under Public Domain.

NOTES

1. Boas' attitudes about cultural relativism were influenced by his experiences in the Canadian Arctic as he struggled to survive in a natural environment foreign to his own prior experience. His private diary and letters record the evolution of his thinking about what it means to be "civilized." In a letter to his fiancé, he wrote: "I often ask myself what advantages our 'good society'

possesses over that of the 'savages' and find, the more I see of their customs, that we have no right to look down upon them ... We have no right to blame them for their forms and superstitions which may seem ridiculous to us. We ‘highly educated people’ are much worse, relatively speaking.” The entire letter can be read in George Stocking, ed. *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 33.

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3.5: Franz Boas and His Students

When Boas began his career in anthropology, *Unilineal Evolution* and *Social Darwinism* were the predominant theories in the anthropological world. However, coming from a background in physics, mathematics, and geography (Sidky 2004), Boas rejected the evolutionist theories of culture. He claimed that the laws of cultural evolution and the fixed stages of progress were based on insufficient evidence (Harris & Johnson 2007). He stressed that anthropologists should do first-hand ethnographic fieldwork and systematically collect data rather than relying on third-hand accounts of other cultures as "armchair anthropologists" (Harris & Johnson 2007, Sidky 2004). He also believed that the terms such as "savagery", "barbarism", and "civilization" expressed an ethnocentric view of one culture being better than another. He objected to evaluating other cultures using Western concepts such as "progress" and advocated for adopting a relativistic perspective (Sidky 2004). One of Boas's many contributions to anthropology, *cultural relativism*, and firsthand observation became central to the Boasian paradigm and anthropological thought for his students.

HISTORICAL PARTICULARISM



Figure 3.5.1: Franz Boas, c1915.

Similar to cultural relativism, the primary assumption of **Historical Particularism** is that each society has its own unique historical development and must be understood based on its own specific cultural and environmental context, especially its historical process. Boas approached each culture as unique and distinctive and asserted that the culture of a society was shaped by its own particular historical, psychological, and social forces (Sidky 2004). While Boas did believe that there were universal laws that could be derived from the comparative study of cultures, he thought that the ethnographic database was not yet robust enough for us to identify those laws (Sidky 2004). To that end, he and his students collected a vast amount of first-hand cultural data by conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Based on these raw data, they described particular cultures instead of trying to establish general theories that apply to all societies. At the same time, the evidence collected by historical particularists revealed the ethnocentrism and racist views of the cultural evolutionists (Sidky 2004).

Definition: Historical Particularism

The anthropological perspective, associated with Franz Boas, that stressed the uniqueness of each culture thought to be the outcome of chance historical developments (Sidky 2004).

Historical particularism was a dominant trend in anthropology during the first half of the twentieth century. One of the achievements of the historical particularists was that they succeeded in excluding racism from anthropology. The nineteenth-century evolutionists explained cultural similarities and differences by classifying societies into superior and inferior categories. Historical particularists showed that this labeling is based on insufficient evidence and claimed that societies cannot be ranked by the value judgment of researchers. Historical particularists were also responsible for showing the need for long-term, intensive fieldwork in order to produce accurate descriptions of cultures.

BOASIAN INFLUENCE

Ruth Benedict, one of Boas' first female students and known for her best-selling book *Patterns of Culture* (1934), proposed that "culture is the primary determinant of the personality of all its members" (Sidky 2004, p. 154). She argued that it was the psychological effects of culture, or the patterns of ideas and emotions, that resulted in the members of the culture exhibiting common traits.



Figure 3.5.2: Ruth Benedict, American Anthropologist, 1937.



Figure 3.5.3: Margaret Mead, 1948.

One of the most well-known anthropologists in American anthropology, Margaret Mead, was a student of Ruth Benedict. Like Benedict, she was also influenced by Franz Boas and the concept of cultural relativism. Her famous book, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), was the result of her research in Samoa and a significant contribution to the field of cultural anthropology and the nature versus nurture debate (Sidky 2004).

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

Attributed to anthropologists Benedict and Mead, the theoretical perspective of **Culture and Personality** was based on the "idea that culture is the primary determinant of the personality of its members" (Sidky 2004). Drawing on the work of Edward Sapir as well as Sigmund Freud, the theory culture and personality stressed the importance of the relationship between childrearing customs and human behaviors in different societies (Harris & Johnson 2007, Sidky 2004). They suggested anthropologists could gain an understanding of a national culture through the examination of individual personalities. The basic ideas of the theory are that (Levine 2001):

- adult behavior is "culturally patterned",
- childhood experiences influence the individual's personality and,
- personality traits are reflected in the cultural beliefs and social institutions.

Definition: Culture and Personality

The idea that culture is the primary determinant of the personality of its members.

The Culture and Personality proponents were on the cutting edge when it emerged in the early 20th century. Using clinical interviews, dream analysis, life histories, participant observation, and projective tests (e.g., Rorschach), the culture and personality analysis of the correlation between childrearing customs and human behaviors was, at that time, a practical alternative to using racism explanations for analyzing different human behaviors. In fact, the culture and personality school was responsible for greatly limiting the number of racist, hierarchical descriptions of culture types common during the early to mid-20th century. This approach to understanding culture was instrumental in moving the focus to the individual in order to understand behaviors within a culture instead of looking for universal laws of human behavior. Although the theory of Culture and Personality reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s, it led to the development of what is called psychological anthropology today (Levine 2001; Lindholm 2001).

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3.6: Cultural Evolution Revisited

LESLIE WHITE AND NEOEVOLUTIONISM

In the mid-1900s, Leslie White began to question the anti-evolutionary Boasian paradigm and began to re-examine the works of nineteenth-century evolutionists. His goal was to correct the ethnographic errors and identify any positive contribution that theories of cultural evolution offered to a science of culture (Harris & Johnson 2007). He is known for his advocacy for **Neoevolutionism** and the scientific study of culture, which he called *culturology*. White viewed his own approach to cultural evolution as a synthesis of historical and functional approaches because it combined the diachronic scope of one with the generalizing eye for formal interrelations provided by the other.



Figure 3.6.1: Leslie White,1969 (CC BY 4.0 by Regents of the University of Michigan).

Definition: Neoevolutionism

The label for the evolutionary perspective associated with Leslie White and his followers (Sidky 2004).

Evolutionist theories were no longer racist and *biological determinism* was rejected (Fog 2011). For White, the primary function of culture and the one that determines its level of advancement is its ability to harness and control energy. White's law states that "culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased" (Sidky 2004). White places technology as a key factor that drives evolutionary progress. White's argument on the importance of technology can be summarized as follows:

1. Technology is an attempt to solve the problems of survival.
2. This attempt ultimately means capturing enough energy and diverting it for human needs.
3. Societies that capture more energy and use it more efficiently have an advantage over other societies.
4. Therefore, these different societies are more advanced in an evolutionary sense.

As a result of his work, White inspired a new generation of anthropologists who became a leading force in innovative anthropological thought.

CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Ecology is a biological term for the interaction of organisms and their environment. **Cultural ecology** is a theoretical approach that attempts to explain similarities and differences in culture in relation to the environment. Highly focused on how the material culture related to basic survival (i.e. subsistence), cultural ecology was the first theoretical approach to provide a causal explanation for those similarities and differences. Developed by Julian Steward in the 1930s and 1940s, cultural ecology became an influential approach within anthropology, particularly archaeology. Elements of the approach are still seen today in ethnoecology, political ecology, human behavioral ecology, and the ecosystems approach (Tucker 2013).

Definition: ecology

The study of interactions between animal and plant populations in the context of their habitat (Sidky 2004).

Definition: Cultural Ecology

The anthropological approach focusing on the effects of the environment on labor patterns and their effects on the organization of other aspects of culture (Sicky 2004).

Using Steward’s approach, anthropologists compare cultures in order to determine what factors influence similar cultural development or, in other words, similar adaptations. In cultural ecology, it is the culture, not individuals, that adapt. This approach

assumes that culture is superorganic, a concept Steward learned from Alfred Kroeber.



Figure 3.6.1: Julian Steward and a Native Man, 1940. (Public Domain; Bureau of American Ethnography via Wikipedia)

Steward proposed that we could begin to understand these adaptations by first examining the cultural core, as this was the critical cultural component that dealt with the ability of the culture to survive. The cultural core was comprised of the technology, knowledge, labor, and family organization used to collect resources from the environment (Tucker 2013). He then thought that examination of behaviors associated with the cultural core was necessary, which included the organization of labor. Thirdly, Steward advocated for examining how social institutions and belief systems were impacted by subsistence-related behaviors. According to the cultural ecology school of thought, cultural similarities were explained by adaptations to similar environmental conditions, causing the approach to be labeled environmental determinism. Cultural changes were due to changing environmental conditions. Since environmental changes were not predictable, cultures changed in multiple directions. Cultures that may have been similar at one point might become dissimilar if environmental conditions changed. Conversely, cultures that were dissimilar could become similar. This idea of multi-directional change is called multilinear evolution and is one of the major departures from earlier evolutionary explanations of culture.

CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Cultural materialism is one of the major anthropological perspectives for analyzing human societies. It incorporates ideas from Marxism, cultural evolution, and cultural ecology. Materialism contends that the physical world impacts and sets constraints on human behavior. The materialists believe that human behavior is part of nature and therefore, it can be understood by using the methods of natural science. Materialists do not necessarily assume that material reality is more important than mental reality. However, they give priority to the material world over the world of the mind when they explain human societies. This doctrine of materialism started and developed from the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx and Engels presented an evolutionary model of societies based on the materialist perspective. They argued that societies go through the several stages, from tribalism to feudalism to capitalism to communism (Harris & Johnson, 2007). Their work drew little attention from anthropology in the early twentieth-century. However, since the late 1920s, anthropologists have increasingly come to depend on materialist explanations for analyzing societal development and some inherent problems of capitalist societies. Anthropologists who heavily rely on the insights of Marx and Engels include neo-evolutionists, neo-materialists, feminists, and postmodernists.

Definition: Cultural Materialism

The anthropological approach that attempts to account for cross-cultural similarities and differences by focusing on the material constraints on human activity, such as mode of production, mode of reproduction, and ecological factors (Sidky 2004).

Cultural materialists identify three levels of social systems that constitute a universal pattern: 1) infrastructure, 2) structure, and 3) superstructure (Harris & Johnson 2007). Infrastructure is the basis for all other levels and includes how basic needs are met and how it interacts with the local environment. Structure refers to a society's economic, social, and political organization, while superstructure is related to ideology and symbolism. Cultural materialists like Marvin Harris contend that the infrastructure is the most critical aspect as it is here where the interaction between culture and environment occurs. All three of the levels are interrelated so that changes in the infrastructure results in changes in the structure and superstructure, although the changes might not be immediate. While this appears to be environmental determinism, cultural materialists do not disclaim that change in the structure and superstructure cannot occur without first change in the infrastructure. They do, however, claim that if change in those structures is not compatible with the existing infrastructure the change is not likely to become set within the culture (Harris & Johnson 2007).

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3.7: Some More Theories

SYMBOLIC AND INTERPRETIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

The theoretical school of **Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology** assumes that culture does not exist beyond individuals. Rather, culture lies in individuals' interpretations of events and things around them. It "views public symbols and actions as the manifestation of culture that is formulated through the construction of reality" (Harris & Johnson 2007, p. 28). With a reference to socially established signs and symbols, people shape the patterns of their behaviors and give meanings to their experiences. Therefore, the goal of Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology is to analyze how people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols. The major accomplishment of symbolic anthropology has been to turn anthropology towards issues of culture and interpretation rather than grand theories.

Definition: Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology

The theoretical perspective that views public symbols and actions as the manifestation of culture that is formulated through the construction of reality.

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology emerged in the 1960s when Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and David Schneider were at the University of Chicago and is still influential today. Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology does not follow the model of physical sciences, which focus on empirical material phenomena, but is literary-based. This does not mean that Symbolic and Interpretive anthropologists do not conduct fieldwork, but instead refers to the practice of drawing on non-anthropological literature as a primary source of data. The Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropologists view culture as a mental phenomenon and reject the idea that culture can be modeled like mathematics or logic. When they study symbolic action in cultures, they use a variety of analytical tools from psychology, history, and literature. This method has been criticized for a lack of objective method. In other words, this method seems to allow analysts to see meaning wherever and however they wish. In spite of this criticism, Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology has forced anthropologists to become aware of cultural texts they interpret and of ethnographic texts they create. In order to work as intercultural translators, anthropologists need to be aware of their own cultural biases as well as other cultures they research.

There are two schools of thought within Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology. The *British school* was interested in how societies maintained cohesion and is illustrated by the work of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. The *American school* is exemplified by Clifford Geertz and Sherry Ortner and was focused on "how ideas shaped individuals subjectivities and actions" (Johnson 2013, p. 842). An important contribution of Symbolic and Interpretive anthropologists, specifically Clifford Geertz, is *thick description*, which encourages rich descriptions and explanations of behaviors with an end goal of understanding their cultural significance. Geertz borrowed this concept from Gilbert Ryle, an Oxford philosopher. The classic example of thick description is the difference between a wink and a blink. A blink is an involuntary twitch (thin description) while a wink is a conspiratorial signal to another person (thick description). The physical movements are identical, but the meaning is different.

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a theoretical approach that arose in the 1980s to explain a historical period, post-modernity, which is generally accepted to have begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is a period related to the Cold War and social upheaval in many parts of the world. The postmodernism theoretical approach is difficult to define and delineate. It is generally scoffed at in the Natural Sciences, debated in the Social Sciences, and more favorably accepted within the Humanities. In the past, debates on the merits of the postmodern approach have created divisions among faculty and derision between disciplines. The postmodern approach challenges the "dominating and bullying nature of science and reason" and focuses on "…splitting the truth, the standards, and the ideal into what has been deconstructed and into what is about to be deconstructed, and denying in advance the right of any new doctrine, theory, or revelation to take the place of the discarded rules of the past" (Cooke 2006, p. 2014). It is the academic equivalent of the social clamor against the establishment that arose in the 1960s and 1970s.

Definition: Postmodernism

A theoretical perspective that focuses on culture as open-ended negotiated meanings and stresses the examination of how ethnographies are written (Sidky 2004, p. 436).

Postmodernists claim that it is impossible for anyone to have objective and neutral knowledge of another culture. This view comes from the notion that we all interpret the world around us in our own way according to our language, cultural background, and personal experiences. In other words, everybody has their own views based on his or her social and personal contexts. Because of this aspect of human nature, anthropologists can never be unbiased observers of other cultures. When postmodern anthropologists analyze different societies, they are sensitive to this limitation. They do not assume that their way of conceptualizing culture is the only way. The postmodernists believe that anthropological texts are influenced by the political and social contexts within which they are written. Therefore, it is unreasonable when authors try to justify their interpretations and underlying biases by using the concept of objectivity. The postmodernists claim that the acceptance of an interpretation is ultimately an issue of power and wealth. In other words, we tend to legitimize particular statements represented by those with political and economic advantage. In order to heighten sensitivity towards those who are not part of mainstream culture, the postmodernists often promote underrepresented viewpoints, such as those of ethnic minorities, women, and others. Postmodernists also re-introduced a focus on individual behavior, which has become known as agency theory. Agency approaches examine how individual agents shape culture.

Postmodern anthropologists gave other anthropologists an opportunity to reconsider their approaches to cultural analysis by ushering in an era of reflexive anthropology. The anthropologist tries to become sensitive to his or her unconscious assumptions. For example, anthropologists now consider whether they should include in ethnographies different interpretations of culture other than their own. Furthermore, anthropologists need to determine their own standards for choosing what kind of information can be counted as knowledge. This reflection leads anthropologists to enrich their work. At the same time, the challenges by postmodernists often result in backlash from those who feel their understandings are threatened. Some anthropologists claim that the postmodernists rely on a particular moral model rather than empirical data or scientific methods. This moral model is structured by sympathy to those who do not possess the same privilege that the mainstream has in Western societies. Therefore, postmodernism will undermine the legitimacy of anthropology by introducing this political bias.

Another typical criticism of postmodernism comes from the fear of an extremely relativistic view. Such critics argue that postmodernism will lead to nihilism because it does not assume a common ground of understanding. Some opponents claim that postmodernism will undermine universal human rights and will even justify dictatorship. Postmodernism is an ongoing debate, especially regarding whether anthropology should rely on scientific or humanistic approaches.

FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Feminist anthropology is a four-field approach to anthropology (archaeological, biological, cultural, linguistic) that seeks to reduce male bias in research findings, anthropological hiring practices, and the scholarly production of knowledge.[1] Simultaneously, feminist anthropology challenges essentialist feminist theories developed in Europe and America. While feminists practiced cultural anthropology since its inception as an American discipline? (see Margaret Mead and Hortense Powdermaker), it was not until the 1970s that feminist anthropology was formally recognized as a subdiscipline of anthropology. Since then, it has developed its own subsection of the American Anthropological Association – the Association for Feminist Anthropology – and its own publication, *Voices*.

Definition: Feminist Anthropology

A four-field approach to anthropology (archaeological, biological, cultural, linguistic) that seeks to reduce male bias in research findings, anthropological hiring practices, and the scholarly production of knowledge.

Feminist anthropology has unfolded through three historical phases beginning in the 1970s: the anthropology of women, the anthropology of gender, and finally feminist anthropology.[2] Prior to these historical phases, feminist anthropologists trace their genealogy to the late 19th century.[3] Erminnie Platt Smith, Alice Cunningham Fletcher, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Frances Densmore—many of these women were self-taught anthropologists and their accomplishments faded and heritage erased by the professionalization of the discipline at the turn of the 20th century.[4] Prominent among early women anthropologists were the wives of ‘professional’ men anthropologists, some of whom facilitated their husbands research as translators and transcriptionists. Margery Wolf, for example, wrote her classic ethnography “The House of Lim” from experiences she encountered following her husband to northern Taiwan during his own fieldwork.[5]

While anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict are canonical representatives of the next stage in the history of feminist anthropology, the true theoretical pioneers of the field were women of color and ethnic women anthropologists. Hortense Powdermaker, for example, a contemporary of Mead’s who studied with British anthropological pioneer Bronislaw Malinowski conducted political research projects in a number of then atypical settings: reproduction and women in Melanesia (Powdermaker

1933), race in the American South (Powdermaker 1939), gender and production in Hollywood (1950), and class-gender-race intersectionality in the African Copper Belt (Powdermaker 1962). Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston, a student of Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology, experimented with narrative forms beyond the objective ethnography that characterized the proto/pseudo- scientific writings of the time. Other African American women made similar moves at the junctions of ethnography and creativity, namely Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, both of whom studied dance in the 1940s. Also important to the later spread of Feminist anthropology within other subfields beyond cultural anthropology was physical anthropologist Caroline Bond Day and archaeologist Mary Leakey.

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3.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. Which of the theories discussed in this chapter do you find yourself most in agreement with? Think of a cultural practice that you are familiar with, does the theory provide an explanation for it?
2. Do you think that it could be beneficial to view culture through different theoretical perspectives rather than just one?

GLOSSARY

Armchair Anthropology: An early and discredited method of anthropological research that did not involve direct contact with the people studied.

Biological determinism: The belief that there are innate biological differences in intelligence, the capacity for language, and modes of behavior between human populations that explain cultural differences.

Culture and Personality: The idea that culture is the primary determinant of the personality of its members.

Culture Ecology: The anthropological approach focusing on the effects of the environment on labor patterns and their effects on the organization of other aspects of the culture.

Cultural Materialism: The anthropological approach that attempts to account for cross-cultural similarities and differences by focusing on the material constraints on human activity, such as mode of production, mode of reproduction, and ecological factors.

Ecology: The study of interactions between animal and plant populations in the context of their habitat.

Feminist Anthropology: A four-field approach to anthropology (archaeological, biological, cultural, linguistic) that seeks to reduce male bias in research findings, anthropological hiring practices, and the scholarly production of knowledge.

Functionalism: The belief that cultural institutions function to meet the basic physical and psychological needs of people.

Historical Particularism: The anthropological perspective, associated with Franz Boas, that stressed the uniqueness of each culture thought to be the outcome of chance historical developments.

Neoevolutionism: The label for the evolutionary perspective associated with Leslie White and his followers.

Psychic unity of mankind: A basic set of elementary thought patterns common to all human minds, which produce similar responses to similar stimuli although expressed with differing permutations in differing contexts.

Social Darwinism: The racist ideological perspective that cultural and biological progress depended on the free play of competitive forces in the struggle of individual against individual, nation against nation, and race against race.

Structural Functionalism: The belief that social practices and social institutions function to preserve the structure of society

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology: The theoretical perspective that views public symbols and actions as the manifestation of culture that is formulated through the construction of reality.

Theory: A formal description of some part of the world that explains how, in terms of cause and effect, that part of the world works.

Unilineal Evolution: The belief that cultures moved through various stages of development according to different levels of rational knowledge, ending up with something resembling Euro-American lifestyles.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Methods and Fieldwork

Learning Objectives

- Discuss what is unique about ethnographic fieldwork and how it emerged as a key strategy in anthropology.
- Explain how traditional approaches to ethnographic fieldwork contrast with contemporary approaches.
- Identify some of the contemporary ethnographic fieldwork techniques and perspectives.
- Discuss some of the ethical considerations in doing anthropological fieldwork.
- Summarize how anthropologists transform their fieldwork data into a story that communicates meaning.

4.1: Finding the Field
4.2: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange
4.3: Traditional Ethnographic Approaches
4.4: Ethnography Today
4.5: Research Techniques and the Written Ethnography
4.6: Ethical In Anthropology
4.7: More on Ethics
4.8: End of Chapter Discussion
4.9: About the Authors

Adapted From

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Image: Bronislaw Malinowski with Natives on Trobriand Islands, 1918, by Wikimedia Commons under Public Domain.

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4.1: Finding the Field

My first experience with fieldwork as a student anthropologist took place in a small indigenous community in northeastern Brazil studying the Jenipapo-Kanindé of Lagoa Encantada (Enchanted Lake). I had planned to conduct an independent research project on land tenure among members of the indigenous tribe and had gotten permission to spend several months with the community. My Brazilian host family arranged for a relative to drive me to the rural community on the back of his motorcycle. After several hours navigating a series of bumpy roads in blazing equatorial heat, I was relieved to arrive at the edge of the reservation. He cut the motor and I removed my heavy backpack from my tired, sweaty back. Upon hearing us arrive, first children and then adults slowly and shyly began to approach us. I greeted the curious onlookers and briefly explained who I was. As a group of children ran to fetch the *cacique* (the chief/political leader), I began to explain my research agenda to several of the men who had gathered. I mentioned that I was interested in learning about how the tribe negotiated land use rights without any private land ownership. After hearing me use the colloquial term "*índio*" (Indian), a man who turned out to be the cacique's cousin came forward and said to me, "Well, your work is going to be difficult because there are no Indians here; we are only Brazilians." Then, abruptly, another man angrily replied to him, stating firmly that, in fact, they were Indians because the community was on an Indian reservation and the Brazilian government had recognized them as an indigenous tribe. A few women then entered the rapid-fire discussion. I took a step back, surprised by the intensity of my first interaction in the community. The debate subsided once the cacique arrived, but it left a strong impression in my mind. Eventually, I discarded my original research plan to focus instead on this disagreement within the community about who they were and were not. In anthropology, this type of conflict in beliefs is known as *contested identity*.



Figure 4.1.1:
Jenipapo-Kanindé Reservation, 2001
Image 1: Children playing outside a Home on the Jenipapo-Kanindé Reservation, 2001
Image 2: Author Katie Nelson (center) with her Brazilian Host Family, 2001
Image 3: A young Jenipapo-Kanindé boy shows off his grass skirt prior to a community dance, 2001.

I soon learned that many among the Jenipapo-Kanindé did not embrace the Indian identity label. The tribe members were all monolingual Portuguese-speakers who long ago had lost their original language and many of their traditions. Beginning in the 1980s, several local researchers had conducted studies in the community and had concluded that the community had indigenous origins. Those researchers lobbied on the community's behalf for official state and federal status as an indigenous reservation, and in 1997 the Funai (*Fundação Nacional do* Índio or National Foundation for the Indian) visited the community and agreed to officially demarcate the land as an indigenous reservation. More than 20 years later, the community is still waiting for that demarcation. Some in the community embraced indigenous status because it came with a number of benefits. The state (Ceará), using partial funding from Funai, built a new road to improve access to the community. The government also constructed an elementary school and a common well and installed new electric lines. Despite those gains, some members of the community did not embrace indigenous status because being considered Indian had a pejorative connotation in Brazil. Many felt that the label stigmatized them by associating them with a poor and marginalized class of Brazilians. Others resisted the label because of long-standing family and inter-personal conflicts in the community.

Fieldwork is the most important method by which cultural anthropologists gather data to answer their research questions. While interacting on a daily basis with a group of people, cultural anthropologists document their observations and perceptions and adjust the focus of their research as needed. They typically spend a few months to a few years living among the people they are studying.

The “field” can be anywhere the people are—a village in highland Papua New Guinea or a supermarket in downtown Minneapolis. Just as marine biologists spend time in the ocean to learn about the behavior of marine animals and geologists travel to a mountain range to observe rock formations, anthropologists go to places where people are.

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4.2: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange

The cultural anthropologist's goal during fieldwork is to describe a group of people to others in a way that makes strange or unusual features of the culture seem familiar and familiar traits seem extraordinary. The point is to help people think in new ways about aspects of their own culture by comparing them with other cultures. The research anthropologist Margaret Mead describes in her monograph Coming of Age in Samoa (1928) is a famous example of this. In 1925, Mead went to American Samoa, where she conducted ethnographic research on adolescent girls and their experiences with sexuality and growing up. Mead's mentor, anthropologist Franz Boas, was a strong proponent of cultural determinism, the idea that one's cultural upbringing and social environment, rather than one's biology, primarily determine behavior. Boas encouraged Mead to travel to Samoa to study adolescent behavior there and to compare their culture and behavior with that of adolescents in the United States to lend support to his hypothesis. In the foreword of Coming of Age in Samoa, Boas described what he saw as the key insight of her research: "The results of her painstaking investigation confirm the suspicion long held by anthropologists that much of what we ascribe to human nature is no more than a reaction to the restraints put upon us by our civilization."[1]

Mead studied 25 young women in three villages in Samoa and found that the stress, anxiety, and turmoil of American adolescence were not found among Samoan youth. Rather, young women in Samoa experienced a smooth transition to adulthood with relatively little stress or difficulty. She documented instances of socially accepted sexual experimentation, lack of sexual jealousy and rape, and a general sense of casualness that marked Samoan adolescence. Coming of Age in Samoa quickly became popular, launching Mead's career as one of the most well-known anthropologists in the United States and perhaps the world. The book encouraged American readers to reconsider their own cultural assumptions about what adolescence in the United States should be like, particularly in terms of the sexual repression and turmoil that seemed to characterize the teenage experience in mid-twentieth century America. Through her analysis of the differences between Samoan and American society, Mead also persuasively called for changes in education and parenting for U.S. children and adolescents.

Another classic example of a style of anthropological writing that attempted to make the familiar strange and encouraged readers to consider their own cultures in a different way is Horace Miner's Body Ritual among the Nacirema (1956). The essay described oral hygiene practices of the Nacirema ("American" spelled backward) in a way that, to cultural insiders, sounded extreme, exaggerated, and out of context. He presented the Nacirema as if they were a little-known cultural group with strange, exotic practices. Miner wrote the essay during an era in which anthropologists were just beginning to expand their focus beyond small-scale traditional societies far from home to large-scale post-industrial societies such as the United States. He wrote the essay primarily as a satire of how anthropologists often wrote about "the Other" in ways that made other cultures seem exotic and glossed over features that the Other had in common with the anthropologist's culture. The essay also challenged U.S. readers in general and anthropologists in particular to think differently about their own cultures and re-examine their cultural assumptions about what is "normal."

EMIC AND ETIC PERSPECTIVES

When anthropologists conduct fieldwork, they gather data. An important tool for gathering anthropological data is **ethnography**—the in-depth study of everyday practices and lives of a people. Ethnography produces a detailed description of the studied group at a particular time and location, also known as a "thick description," a term coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his 1973 book *The Interpretation of Cultures* to describe this type of research and writing. A thick description explains not only the behavior or cultural event in question but also the context in which it occurs and anthropological interpretations of it. Such descriptions help readers better understand the internal logic of why people in a culture behave as they do and why the behaviors are meaningful to them. This is important because understanding the attitudes, perspectives, and motivations of cultural insiders is at the heart of anthropology.

Definition: ethnography

The in-depth study of everyday practices and lives of a people.

Ethnographers gather data from many different sources. One source is the anthropologist's own observations and thoughts. Ethnographers keep field notebooks that document their ideas and reflections as well as what they do and observe when participating in activities with the people they are studying, a research technique known as participant observation. Other sources of data include informal conversations and more-formal interviews that are recorded and transcribed. They also collect documents such as letters, photographs, artifacts, public records, books, and reports.

Different types of data produce different kinds of ethnographic descriptions, which also vary in terms of perspective—from the perspective of the studied culture (emic) or from the perspective of the observer (etic). **Emic** perspectives refer to descriptions of behaviors and beliefs in terms that are meaningful to people who belong to a specific culture, e.g., how people perceive and categorize their culture and experiences, why people believe they do what they do, how they imagine and explain things. To uncover emic perspectives, ethnographers talk to people, observe what they do, and participate in their daily activities with them. Emic perspectives are essential for anthropologists' efforts to obtain a detailed understanding of a culture and to avoid interpreting others through their own cultural beliefs.

Definition: emic

Descriptions of behaviors and beliefs in terms that are meaningful to people who belong to a specific culture, e.g., how people perceive and categorize their culture and experiences, why people believe they do what they do, how they imagine and explain things.

Etic perspectives refer to explanations for behavior made by an outside observer in ways that are meaningful to the observer. For an anthropologist, etic descriptions typically arise from conversations between the ethnographer and the anthropological community. These explanations tend to be based in science and are informed by historical, political, and economic studies and other types of research. The etic approach acknowledges that members of a culture are unlikely to view the things they do as noteworthy or unusual. They cannot easily stand back and view their own behavior objectively or from another perspective. For example, you may have never thought twice about the way you brush your teeth and the practice of going to the dentist or how you experienced your teenage years. For you, these parts of your culture are so normal and "natural" you probably would never consider questioning them. An emic lens gives us an alternative perspective that is essential when constructing a comprehensive view of a people.

Definition: etic

Explanations for behavior made by an outside observer in ways that are meaningful to the observer.

Most often, ethnographers include both emic and etic perspectives in their research and writing. They first uncover a studied people's understanding of what they do and why and then develop additional explanations for the behavior based on anthropological theory and analysis. Both perspectives are important, and it can be challenging to move back and forth between the two. Nevertheless, that is exactly what good ethnographers must do.

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4.3: Traditional Ethnographic Approaches

EARLY ARMCHAIR ANTHROPOLOGY

Before ethnography was a fully developed research method, anthropologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used techniques that were much less reliable to gather data about people throughout the world. From the comfort of their homes and library armchairs, early scholars collected others' travel accounts and used them to come to conclusions about far-flung cultures and peoples. The reports typically came from missionaries, colonists, adventurers, and business travelers and were often incomplete, inaccurate, and/or misleading, exaggerated or omitted important information, and romanticized the culture.

Early scholars such as Wilhelm Schmidt and Sir E. B. Tylor sifted through artifacts and stories brought back by travelers or missionaries and selected the ones that best fit their frequently pre-conceived ideas about the peoples involved. By relying on this flawed data, they often drew inaccurate or even racist conclusions. They had no way of knowing how accurate the information was and no way to understand the full context in which it was gathered.

The work of Sir James Frazer (1854–1941) provides a good example of the problems associated with such anthropological endeavors. Frazer was a Scottish social anthropologist who was interested in myths and religions around the world. He read historical documents and religious texts found in libraries and book collections. He also sent questionnaires to missionaries and colonists in various parts of the world asking them about the people with whom they were in contact. He then used the information to draw sweeping conclusions about human belief systems. In his most famous book, The Golden Bough, he described similarities and differences in magical and religious practices around the world and concluded that human beliefs progressed through three stages: from primitive magic to religion and from religion to science. This theory implied that some people were less evolved and more primitive than others. Of course, contemporary anthropologists do not view any people as less evolved than another. Instead, anthropologists today seek to uncover the historical, political, and cultural reasons behind peoples' behaviors rather than assuming that one culture or society is more advanced than another.

The main problem with Frazer's conclusion can be traced back to the fact that he did not do any research himself and none of the information he relied on was collected by an anthropologist. He never spent time with the people he was researching. He never observed the religious ceremonies he wrote about and certainly never participated in them. Had he done so, he might have been able to appreciate that all human groups at the time (and now) were equally pragmatic, thoughtful, intelligent, logical, and "evolved." He might also have appreciated the fact that how and why information is gathered affects the quality of the information. For instance, if a colonial administrator offered to pay people for their stories, some of the storytellers might have exaggerated or even made up stories for financial gain. If a Christian missionary asked recently converted parishioners to describe their religious practices, they likely would have omitted non-Christian practices and beliefs to avoid disapproval and maintain their positions in the church. A male traveler who attempted to document rite-of-passage traditions in a culture that prohibited men from asking such questions of women would generate data that could erroneously suggest that women did not participate in such activities. All of these examples illustrate the pitfalls of armchair anthropology.

Off the Veranda

Fortunately, the reign of armchair anthropology was brief. Around the turn of the twentieth century, anthropologists trained in the natural sciences began to reimagine what a science of humanity should look like and how social scientists ought to go about studying cultural groups. Some of those anthropologists insisted that one should at least spend significant time actually observing and talking to the people studied. Early ethnographers such as Franz Boas and Alfred Cort Haddon typically traveled to the remote locations where the people in question lived and spent a few weeks to a few months there. They sought out a local Western host who was familiar with the people and the area (such as a colonial official, missionary, or businessman) and found accommodations through them. Although they did at times venture into the community without a guide, they generally did not spend significant time with the local people. Thus, their observations were primarily conducted from the relative comfort and safety of a porch—from their verandas.



Figure 4.3.1: Bronislaw Malinowski (center) with Trobriand Islanders circa 1918

Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's (1884–1942) pioneering method of **participant observation** fundamentally changed the relationship between ethnographers and the people under study. In 1914, he traveled to the Trobriand Islands and ended up spending nearly four years conducting fieldwork among the people there. In the process, he developed a rigorous set of detailed ethnographic techniques he viewed as best-suited to gathering accurate and comprehensive ethnographic data. One of the hallmarks of his method was that it required the researcher to get off the veranda to interact with and even live among the natives. In a well-known book about his research, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922), Malinowski described his research techniques and the role they played in his analysis of the Kula ceremony, an exchange of coral armbands and trinkets among members of the social elite. He concluded that the ceremonies were at the center of Trobriand life and represented the culmination of an elaborate multi-year venture called the Kula Ring that involved dangerous expeditions and careful planning. Ultimately, the key to his discovering the importance of the ceremony was that he not only observed the Kula Ring but also participated in it. This technique of participant observation is central to anthropological research today. Malinowski did more than just observe people from afar; he actively interacted with them and participated in their daily activities. And unlike early anthropologists who worked through translators, Malinowski learned the native language, which allowed him to immerse himself in the culture. He carefully documented all of his observations and thoughts. Malinowski's techniques are now central components of ethnographic fieldwork.

Definition: Participant Observation

A research technique in which the anthropologist observes and participates in the events and activities of the culture being studied.

Salvage Ethnography

Despite Malinowski's tremendous contributions to ethnography and anthropology generally, he was nevertheless a man of his time. A common view in the first half of the twentieth century was that many "primitive" cultures were quickly disappearing and features of those cultures needed to be preserved (salvaged) before they were lost. Anthropologists such as Malinowski, Franz Boas, and many of their students sought to document, photograph, and otherwise preserve cultural traditions in "dying" cultures among groups such as Native Americans and other traditional societies experiencing rapid change due to modernization, dislocation, and contact with outside groups. They also collected cultural artifacts, removing property from the communities and placing it in museums and private collections.

Others who were not formally trained in the sciences or in anthropology also participated in salvage activities. For instance, in his "documentary" film Nanook of the North (1922), Robert Flaherty filmed the life of an Inuit man named Nanook and his family in the Canadian Arctic. In an effort to preserve on film what many believed was a traditional way of life soon to be lost, Flaherty took considerable artistic license to represent the culture as he imagined it was in the past, including staging certain scenes and asking the Inuit men to use spears instead of rifles to make the film seem more "authentic."

Photographers and artists have likewise attempted to capture and preserve traditional indigenous life in paintings and photographs. Renowned painter George Catlin (1796–1872), for example, is known to have embellished scenes or painted them in ways that glossed over the difficult reality that native people in the nineteenth century were actively persecuted by the government, displaced from their lands, and forced into unsustainable lifestyles that led to starvation and warfare. Photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952) has been criticized for reinforcing romanticized images of "authentic" native scenes. In particular, he is accused of having perpetuated the problematic idea of the noble savage and, in the process, distracted attention from the serious social, political, and economic problems faced by native people.[2]

Today, anthropologists recognize that human cultures constantly change as people respond to social, political, economic, and other external and internal influences—that there is no moment when a culture is more authentic or more primitive. They acknowledge that culture is fluid and cannot be treated as isolated in time and space. Just as we should not portray people as primitive vestiges of

an earlier stage of human development, we also should not romanticize a culture or idealize another's suffering as more authentic or natural.

Definition: Salvage Ethnography

Early 20th-century practice of studying and recording cultural diversity with the goal of preserving the practices of the cultures that were threatened by Westernization.

Holism

In the throes of salvage ethnography, anthropologists in the first half of the twentieth century actively documented anything and everything they could about the cultures they viewed as endangered. They collected artifacts, excavated ancient sites, wrote dictionaries of non-written languages, and documented cultural traditions, stories, and beliefs. In the United States, those efforts developed into what is known today as the four-field approach or simply as general anthropology. This approach integrates multiple scientific and humanistic perspectives into a single comprehensive discipline composed of cultural, archaeological, biological/physical, and linguistic anthropology.

A hallmark of the four-field approach is its holistic perspective: anthropologists are interested in studying everything that makes us human. Thus, they use multiple approaches to understanding humans throughout time and throughout the world. They also acknowledge that to understand people fully one cannot look solely at biology, culture, history, or language; rather, all of those things must be considered. The interrelationships between the four subfields of anthropology are important for many anthropologists today.

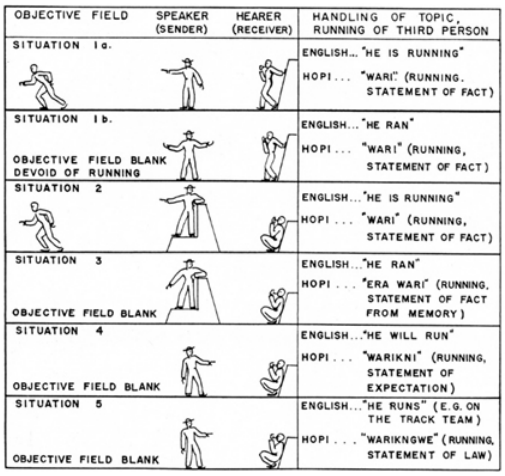


Figure 4.3.2: A chart from a 1940 publication by Whorf illustrates differences between a "temporal" language (English) and a "timeless" language (Hopi).

Linguistic anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, for instance, examined interrelationships between culture, language, and cognition. They argued that the language one speaks plays a critical role in determining how one thinks, particularly in terms of understanding time, space, and matter. They proposed that people who speak different languages view the world differently as a result. In a well-known example, Whorf contrasted the Hopi and English languages. Because verbs in Hopi contained no future or past tenses, Whorf argued that Hopi-speakers understand time in a fundamentally different way than English-speakers. An observation by an English-speaker would focus on the difference in time while an observation by a Hopi-speaker would focus on validity.[3]

In another example, Peter Gordon spent many years living among the Pirahã tribe of Brazil learning their language and culture. He noted that the Pirahã have only three words for numbers: one, two, and many. He also observed that they found it difficult to remember quantities and numbers beyond three even after learning the Portuguese words for such numbers.[4]

Although some scholars have criticized Whorf and Gordon's conclusions as overly deterministic, their work certainly illustrates the presence of a relationship between language and thought, and between cultural and biological influences. Words may not force people to think a particular way, but they can influence our thought processes and how we view the world around us. The holistic perspective of anthropology helps us to appreciate that our culture, language, and physical and cognitive capacities for language are interrelated in complex ways.

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NOTES

2. Examples of Curtis’ photography can be found in Edward Curtis, The North American Indian: The Photographic Images (New York: Aperture, 2005).

3. Benjamin Lee Whorf, “Science and Linguistics,” MIT Technology Review 42 (1940): 229–248.

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4.4: Ethnography Today

ANTHROPOLOGIES DISTINCTIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Ethnography is cultural anthropology's distinctive research strategy. It was originally developed by anthropologists to study small-scale, relatively isolated cultural groups. Typically, those groups had relatively simple economies and technologies and limited access to larger, more technologically advanced societies. Early ethnographers sought to understand the entirety of a particular culture. They spent months to years living in the community, and in that time, they documented in great detail every dimension of people's lives, including their language, subsistence strategies, political systems, formation of families and marriages, and religious beliefs. This was important because it helped researchers appreciate the interconnectedness of all dimensions of social life. The key to the success of this ethnographic approach was not only to spend considerable time observing people in their home settings engaged in day-to-day activities but also to participate in those activities. Participation informed an emic perspective of the culture, something that had been missing in earlier social science research.

Because of how useful the ethnographic research strategy is in developing an emic perspective, it has been adopted by many other disciplines including sociology, education, psychology, and political science. Education researchers, for example, use ethnography to study children in classrooms to identify their learning strategies and how they understand and make sense of learning experiences. Sociologists use ethnography to study emerging social movements and how participants in such movements stay motivated and connected despite their sometimes-conflicting goals.

New Sites for Ethnographic Fieldwork

Like the cultures and peoples studied, anthropology and ethnography are evolving. Field sites for ethnographic research are no longer exclusively located in far-flung, isolated, non-industrialized societies. Increasingly, anthropologists are conducting ethnographic research in complex, technologically advanced societies such as the United States and in urban environments elsewhere in the world. For instance, my doctoral research took place in the United States. I studied identity formation among undocumented Mexican immigrant college students in Minnesota. Because some of my informants were living in Mexico when my fieldwork ended, I also traveled to Veracruz, Mexico, and spent time conducting research there. Often, anthropologists who study migration, diasporas, and people in motion must conduct research in multiple locations. This is known as multi-sited ethnography.

Anthropologists use ethnography to study people wherever they are and however they interact with others. Think of the many ways you ordinarily interact with your friends, family, professors, and boss. Is it all face-to-face communication or do you sometimes use text messages to chat with your friends? Do you also sometimes email your professor to ask for clarification on an assignment and then call your boss to discuss your schedule? Do you share funny videos with others on Facebook and then later make a Skype video call to a relative? These new technological "sites" of human interaction are fascinating to many ethnographers and have expanded the definition of fieldwork.

Problem-oriented Research

In the early years, ethnographers were interested in exploring the entirety of a culture. Taking an **inductive** approach, they generally were not concerned about arriving with a relatively narrow predefined research topic. Instead, the goal was to explore the people, their culture, and their homelands and what had previously been written about them. The focus of the study was allowed to emerge gradually during their time in the field. Often, this approach to ethnography resulted in rather general ethnographic descriptions.

Definition: inductive

A type of reasoning that uses specific information to draw general conclusions. The researcher seeks to collect evidence without trying to definitively prove or disprove a hypothesis.

Today, anthropologists are increasingly taking a more **deductive** approach to ethnographic research. Rather than arriving at the field site with only general ideas about the goals of the study, they tend to select a particular problem before arriving and then let that problem guide their research. In my case, I was interested in how undocumented Mexican immigrant youth in Minnesota formed a sense of identity while living in a society that used a variety of dehumanizing labels such as illegal and alien to refer to them. That was my research "problem," and it oriented and guided my study from beginning to end. I did not document every dimension of my informants' lives; instead, I focused on the things most closely related to my research problem.

Definition: deductive

Reasoning from the general to the specific. The researcher creates a hypothesis and then designs a study to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

Quantitative Methods

Increasingly, cultural anthropologists are using quantitative research methods to complement qualitative approaches. **Qualitative** research in anthropology aims to comprehensively describe human behavior and the contexts in which it occurs while quantitative research seeks patterns in numerical data that can explain aspects of human behavior. **Quantitative** patterns can be gleaned from statistical analyses, maps, charts, graphs, and textual descriptions. Surveys are a common quantitative technique that usually involves closed-ended questions in which respondents select their responses from a list of pre-defined choices such as their degree of agreement or disagreement, multiple-choice answers, and rankings of items. While surveys usually lack the sort of contextual detail associated with qualitative research, they tend to be relatively easy to code numerically and, as a result, can be easier to analyze than qualitative data. Surveys are also useful for gathering specific data points within a large population, something that is challenging to do with many qualitative techniques.

Definition: Qualitative

Research designed to gain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of human behavior.

Definition: Quantitative

Research that uses statistical, mathematical, and/or numerical data to study human behavior.

Anthropological nutritional analysis is an area of research that commonly relies on collecting quantitative data. Nutritional anthropologists explore how factors such as culture, the environment, and economic and political systems interplay to impact human health and nutrition. They may count the calories people consume and expend, document patterns of food consumption, measure body weight and body mass, and test for the presence of parasite infections or nutritional deficiencies. In her ethnography *Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa* (1993), Katherine Dettwyler described how she conducted nutritional research in Mali, which involved weighing, measuring, and testing her research subjects to collect a variety of quantitative data to help her understand the causes and consequences of child malnutrition.

Mixed Methods

In recent years, anthropologists have begun to combine ethnography with other types of research methods. These mixed-method approaches integrate qualitative and quantitative evidence to provide a more comprehensive analysis. For instance, anthropologists can combine ethnographic data with questionnaires, statistical data, and a media analysis. Anthropologist Leo Chavez used mixed methods to conduct the research for his book *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (2008). He started with a problem: how has citizenship been discussed as an identity marker in the mainstream media in the United States, especially among those labeled as Latinos. He then looked for a variety of types of data and relied on ethnographic case studies and on quantitative data from surveys and questionnaires. Chavez also analyzed a series of visual images from photographs, magazine covers, and cartoons that depicted Latinos to explore how they are represented in the American mainstream.

Mixed methods can be particularly useful when conducting problem-oriented research on complex, technologically advanced societies such as the United States. Detailed statistical and quantitative data are often available for those types of societies. Additionally, the general population is usually literate and somewhat comfortable with the idea of filling out a questionnaire.

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4.5: Research Techniques and the Written Ethnography

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Observation and Participant Observation

Of the various techniques and tools used to conduct ethnographic research, observation in general and participant observation in particular are among the most important. Ethnographers are trained to pay attention to everything happening around them when in the field—from routine daily activities such as cooking dinner to major events such as an annual religious celebration. They observe how people interact with each other, how the environment affects people, and how people affect the environment. It is essential for anthropologists to rigorously document their observations, usually by writing field notes and recording their feelings and perceptions in a personal journal or diary.

As previously mentioned, participant observation involves ethnographers observing while they participate in activities with their informants. This technique is important because it allows the researcher to better understand why people do what they do from an emic perspective. Malinowski noted that participant observation is an important tool by which "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of *his* world."[6]

To conduct participant observation, ethnographers must live with or spend considerable time with their informants to establish a strong rapport with them. Rapport is a sense of trust and a comfortable working relationship in which the informant and the ethnographer are at ease with each other and agreeable to working together.

Participant observation was an important part of my own research. In 2003, I spent six months living in two Mayan villages in highland Chiapas, Mexico. I was conducting ethnographic research on behalf of the Science Museum of Minnesota to document changes in *huipil* textile designs. *Huipiles* (pronounced "we-peel-ays") are a type of hand-woven blouse that Mayan women in the region weave and wear, and every town has its own style and designs. At a large city market, one can easily identify the town each weaver is from by the colors and designs of her *huipiles*. For hundreds of years, *huipil* designs changed very little. Then, starting around 1960, the designs and colors of *huipiles* in some of the towns began to change rapidly. I was interested in learning why some towns' designs were changing more rapidly than other towns' were and in collecting examples of *huipiles* to supplement the museum's existing collection.

I spent time in two towns, Zinacantán and San Andrés Larráinzar. Zinacantán was located near the main city, San Cristóbal de las Casas. It received many tourists each year and had regularly established bus and van routes that locals used to travel to San Cristóbal to buy food and other goods. Some of the men in the town had worked in the United States and returned with money to build or improve their family homes and businesses. Other families were supported by remittances from relatives working in the United States or in other parts of Mexico. San Andrés, on the other hand, was relatively isolated and much further from San Cristóbal. Most families there relied on subsistence farming or intermittent agricultural labor and had limited access to tourism or to outside communities. San Andrés was also the site of a major indigenous revolt in the mid-1990s that resulted in greater autonomy, recognition, and rights for indigenous groups throughout Mexico. Politically and socially, it was a progressive community in many ways but remained conservative in others.

I first asked people in Zinacantán why their *huipil* designs, motifs, and colors seemed to change almost every year. Many women said that they did not know. Others stated that weaving was easy and could be boring so they liked to make changes to keep the *huipiles* interesting and to keep weaving from getting dull. When I asked people in San Andrés what they thought about what the women in Zinacantán had said, the San Andrés women replied that "Yes, perhaps they do get bored easily. But we in San Andrés are superior weavers and we don't need to change our designs." Neither response seemed like the full story behind the difference.

Though I spent hundreds of hours observing women preparing to weave, weaving, and selling their textiles to tourists, I did not truly understand what the women were telling me until I tried weaving myself. When I watched them, the process seemed so easy and simple. They attached strings of thread vertically to two ends of the back-strap looms. When weaving, they increased and decreased the tension on the vertical threads by leaning backward and forward with the back strap and teased individual threads horizontally through the vertical threads to create the desired pattern. After each thread was placed, they pushed it down with great force using a smooth, flat wooden trowel. They did the entire process with great ease and fluidity. When I only watched and did not participate, I could believe the Zinacantán women when they told me weaving was easy.

When I began to weave, it took me several days simply to learn how to sit correctly with a back-strap loom and achieve the appropriate tension. I failed repeatedly at setting up the loom with vertically strung threads and never got close to being able to

create a design. Thus, I learned through participant observation that weaving is an exceptionally difficult task. Even expert weavers who had decades of experience sometimes made mistakes as half-finished weavings and rejected textiles littered many homes. Although the women appeared to be able to multi-task while weaving (stoking the fire, calling after small children, cooking food), weaving still required a great deal of concentration to do well.

Through participant observation, I was able to recognize that other factors likely drove the changes in their textiles. I ultimately concluded that the rate of change in *huipil* design in Zinacantán was likely related to the pace of cultural change broadly in the community resulting from interactions between its residents and tourists and relatively frequent travel to a more-urban environment. Participant observation was an important tool in my research and is central to most ethnographic studies today.

Conversations and Interviews

Another primary technique for gathering ethnographic data is simply talking with people—from casual, unstructured conversations about ordinary topics to formal scheduled interviews about a particular topic. An important element for successful conversations and interviews is establishing rapport with informants. Sometimes, engaging in conversation is part of establishing that rapport. Ethnographers frequently use multiple forms of conversation and interviewing for a single research project based on their particular needs. They sometimes record the conversations and interviews with an audio recording device but more often they simply engage in the conversation and then later write down everything they recall about it. Conversations and interviews are an essential part of most ethnographic research designs because spoken communication is central to humans' experiences.

Gathering Life Histories

Collecting a personal narrative of someone's life is a valuable ethnographic technique and is often combined with other techniques. Life histories provide the context in which culture is experienced and created by individuals and describe how individuals have reacted, responded, and contributed to changes that occurred during their lives. They also help anthropologists be more aware of what makes life meaningful to an individual and to focus on the particulars of individual lives, on the tenor of their experiences and the patterns that are important to them. Researchers often include life histories in their ethnographic texts as a way of intimately connecting the reader to the lives of the informants.

The Genealogical Method

The genealogical (kinship) method has a long tradition in ethnography. Developed in the early years of anthropological research to document the family systems of tribal groups, it is still used today to discover connections of kinship, descent, marriage, and the overall social system. Because kinship and genealogy are so important in many nonindustrial societies, the technique is used to collect data on important relationships that form the foundation of the society and to trace social relationships more broadly in communities.

When used by anthropologists, the genealogical method involves using symbols and diagrams to document relationships. Circles represent women and girls, triangles represent men and boys, and squares represent ambiguous or unknown gender. Equal signs between individuals represent their union or marriage and vertical lines descending from a union represent parent-child relationships. The death of an individual and the termination of a marriage are denoted by diagonal lines drawn across the shapes and equal signs. Kinship charts are diagramed from the perspective of one person who is called the Ego, and all of the relationships in the chart are based on how the others are related to the Ego. Individuals in a chart are sometimes identified by numbers or names, and an accompanying list provides more-detailed information.

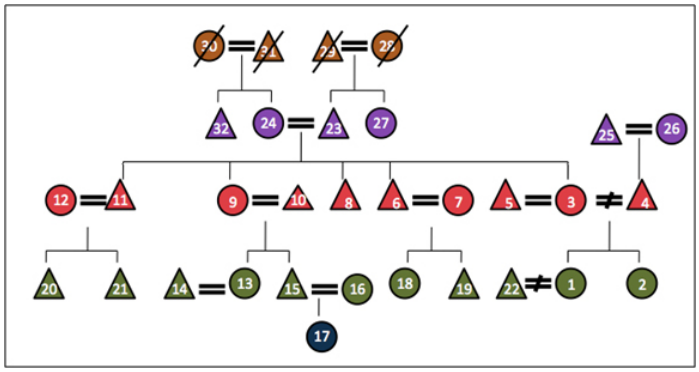


Figure 4.5.1: Anthropological Kinship Chart Created by one of Katie Nelson's Cultural Anthropology Students

Key Informants

Within any culture or subculture, there are always particular individuals who are more knowledgeable about the culture than others and who may have more-detailed or privileged knowledge. Anthropologists conducting ethnographic research in the field often seek out such cultural specialists to gain a greater understanding of certain issues and to answer questions they otherwise could not answer. When an anthropologist establishes a rapport with these individuals and begins to rely more on them for information than on others, the cultural specialists are referred to as key informants or key cultural consultants.

Key informants can be exceptional assets in the field, allowing the ethnographer to uncover the meanings of behaviors and practices the researcher cannot otherwise understand. Key informants can also help researchers by directly observing others and reporting those observations to the researchers, especially in situations in which the researcher is not allowed to be present or when the researcher's presence could alter the participants' behavior. In addition, ethnographers can check information they obtained from other informants, contextualize it, and review it for accuracy. Having a key informant in the field is like having a research ally. The relationship can grow and become enormously fruitful.

Definition: key informants

Individuals who are more knowledgeable about their culture than others and who are particularly helpful to the anthropologist.

A famous example of the central role that key informants can play in an ethnographer's research is a man named Doc in William Foote *Whyte's Street Corner Society* (1943). In the late 1930s, Whyte studied social relations between street gangs and "corner boys" in a Boston urban slum inhabited by first- and second-generation Italian immigrants. A social worker introduced Whyte to Doc and the two hit it off. Doc proved instrumental to the success of Whyte's research. He introduced Whyte to his family and social group and vouched for him in the tight-knit community, providing access that Whyte could not have gained otherwise.

Field Notes

Field notes are indispensable when conducting ethnographic research. Although making such notes is time-consuming, they form the primary record of one's observations. Generally speaking, ethnographers write two kinds of notes: field notes and personal reflections. Field notes are detailed descriptions of everything the ethnographer observes and experiences. They include specific details about what happened at the field site, the ethnographer's sensory impressions, and specific words and phrases used by the people observed. They also frequently include the content of conversations the ethnographer had and things the ethnographer overheard others say. Ethnographers also sometimes include their personal reflections on the experience of writing field notes. Often, brief notes are jotted down in a notebook while the anthropologist is observing and participating in activities. Later, they expand on those quick notes to make more formal field notes, which may be organized and typed into a report. It is common for ethnographers to spend several hours a day writing and organizing field notes.

Ethnographers often also keep a personal journal or diary that may include information about their emotions and personal experiences while conducting research. These personal reflections can be as important as the field notes. Ethnography is not an objective science. Everything researchers do and experience in the field is filtered through their personal life experiences. Two ethnographers may experience a situation in the field in different ways and understand the experience differently. For this reason, it is important for researchers to be aware of their reactions to situations and be mindful of how their life experiences affect their perceptions. In fact, this sort of reflexive insight can turn out to be a useful data source and analytical tool that improves the researcher's understanding.

The work of anthropologist Renato Rosaldo provides a useful example of how anthropologists can use their emotional responses to fieldwork situations to advance their research. In 1981, Rosaldo and his wife, Michelle, were conducting research among the Ilongots of Northern Luzon in the Philippines. Rosaldo was studying men in the community who engaged in emotional rampages in which they violently murdered others by cutting off their heads. Although the practice had been banned by the time Rosaldo arrived, a longing to continue headhunting remained in the cultural psyche of the community.

Whenever Rosaldo asked a man why he engaged in headhunting, the answer was that rage and grief caused him to kill others. At the beginning of his fieldwork, Rosaldo felt that the response was overly simplistic and assumed that there had to be more to it than that. He was frustrated because he could not uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Then, on October 11, 1981, Rosaldo's wife was walking along a ravine when she tripped, lost her footing, and fell 65 feet to her death, leaving Rosaldo a grieving single father. In his essay "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," Rosaldo later wrote that it was his own struggle with rage as he grieved for his wife that helped him truly grasp what the Ilongot men meant when they described their grief and rage.

> *Only a week before completing the initial draft of an earlier version of this introduction, I rediscovered my journal entry, written some six weeks after Michelle's death, in which I made a vow to myself about how I would return to writing anthropology, if I ever did so, by writing Grief and a Headhunter's Rage . . . My journal went on to reflect more broadly on death, rage, and headhunting by speaking of my wish for the Ilongot solution; they are much more in touch with reality than Christians. So, I need a place to carry my anger – and can we say a solution of the imagination is better than theirs? And can we condemn them when we napalm villages? Is our rationale so much sounder than theirs? All this was written in despair and rage.*[7]

Only through the very personal and emotionally devastating experience of losing his wife was Rosaldo able to understand the emic perspective of the headhunters. The result was an influential and insightful ethnographic account.

WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY

Analysis and Interpretation of Research Findings

Once all or most of the fieldwork is complete, ethnographers analyze their data and research findings before beginning to write. There are many techniques for data analysis from which to choose based on the strategy and goals of the research. Regardless of the particular technique, data analysis involves a systematic interpretation of what the researcher thinks the data mean. The ethnographer reviews all of the data collected, synthesizes findings from the review, and integrates those findings with prior studies on the topic. Once the analysis is complete, the ethnographer is ready to write an account of the fieldwork.

Ethnographic Authority

In recent years, anthropologists have expressed concern about how ethnographies should be written in terms of ethnographic authority: how ethnographers present themselves and their informants in text. In a nonfiction text, the author is a mediator between readers and the topic and the text is written to help readers understand an unfamiliar topic. In an ethnography, the topic is people, and people naturally vary in terms of their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and perspectives. That is, they have individual voices. In the past, anthropologists commonly wrote ethnographic accounts as if they possessed the ultimate most complete scientific knowledge on the topic. Subsequently, anthropologists began to challenge that writing style, particularly when it did not include the voices of their informants in the text and analysis. Some of this criticism originated with feminist anthropologists who noted that women's experiences and perspectives frequently were omitted and misrepresented in this style of writing. Others believed that this style of writing reinforced existing global power dynamics and privileges afforded to Western anthropologists' voices as most important.

Polyvocality

In response to criticisms about ethnographic authority, anthropologists have begun to include polyvocality. A **polyvocal** text is one in which more than one person's voice is presented, and its use can range from ensuring that informants' perspectives are presented in the text while still writing in the researcher's voice to including informants' actual words rather than paraphrasing them and co-authoring the ethnography with an informant. A good example of polyvocality is anthropologist Ruth Behar's book *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993). Behar's book documents the life story of a Mexican street peddler, Esperanza Hernández, and their unique friendship. Large sections of the book are in Esperanza's own words and discuss issues that are important to her. Behar also includes pieces of her own life story and an anthropological analysis of Esperanza's story.

Definition: polyvocal

A text in which more than one person's voice is presented.

By using polyvocality, researchers can avoid writing from the perspective of the ultimate ethnographic authority. A polyvocal style also allows readers to be more involved in the text since they have the opportunity to form their own opinions about the ethnographic data and perhaps even critique the author's analysis. It also encourages anthropologists to be more transparent when presenting their methods and data.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is another relatively new approach to ethnographic research and writing. Beginning in the 1960s, social science researchers began to think more carefully about the effects of their life experiences, status, and roles on their research and analyses. They began to insert themselves into their texts, including information about their personal experiences, thoughts, and life stories and to analyze in the accounts how those characteristics affected their research and analysis.

Definition: reflexivity

A text that includes information about the anthropologist's personal experiences, thoughts, and life stories and analyzes how those characteristics affected their research and analysis.

Adoption of reflexivity is perhaps the most significant change in how ethnography is researched and written in the past 50 years. It calls on anthropologists to acknowledge that they are part of the world they study and thus can never truly be objective. Reflexivity has also contributed to anthropologists' appreciation of the unequal power dynamics of research and the effects those dynamics can have on the results. Reflexivity reminds the ethnographer that there are multiple ways to interpret any given cultural scenario. By acknowledging how their backgrounds affect their interpretations, anthropologists can begin to remove themselves from the throne of ethnographic authority and allow other, less-empowered voices to be heard.

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4.6: Ethical In Anthropology

Ethical Guidelines

From the earliest days of anthropology as a discipline, concern about the ethical treatment of people who take part in studies has been an important consideration. Ethical matters are central to any research project and anthropologists take their ethical responsibilities particularly seriously. As discussed throughout this chapter, anthropologists are oriented toward developing empathy for their informants and understanding their cultures and experiences from an emic perspective. Many also have a sense of personal responsibility for the well-being of the local people with whom they work in the field.

The American Anthropological Association has developed a Code of Ethics that all anthropologists should follow in their work. Among the many ethical responsibilities outlined in the code, doing no harm, obtaining informed consent, maintaining subjects' anonymity, and making the results of the research accessible are especially important responsibilities.

Do No Harm

First and foremost, anthropologists must ensure that their involvement with a community does not harm or embarrass their informants. Researchers must carefully consider any potential harm associated with the research, including legal, emotional, political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, and take steps to insulate their informants from such harm. Since it is not always possible to anticipate every potential repercussion at the outset, anthropologists also must continually monitor their work to ensure that their research design and methods minimize any risk.

Regrettably, the proscription to do no harm is a deceptively complex requirement. Despite their best efforts, anthropologists have run into ethical problems in the field. Work by Napoleon Chagnon among an isolated indigenous tribe of the Amazon, the Yanomami, is a well-known example of ethical problems in anthropological research. In his groundbreaking ethnography *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (1968), Chagnon portrayed the Yanomami as an intensely violent and antagonistic people. The ethnography was well received initially. However, not long after its publication, controversy erupted. Anthropologists and other scholars have accused Chagnon of encouraging the violence he documented, staging fights and scenes for documentary films and fabricating data.

Today, Do No Harm is a central ethical value in anthropology. However, it can be difficult to predict every challenge one may encounter in the field or after the work is published. Anthropologists must continually reevaluate their research and writing to ensure that it does not harm the informants or their communities. Before fieldwork begins, researchers from universities, colleges, and institutions usually must submit their research agendas to an institutional review board (IRB). IRBs review research plans to ensure that the proposed studies will not harm human subjects. In many cases, the IRB is aware of the unique challenges and promises of anthropological research and can guide the researcher in eliminating or mitigating potential ethical problems.

Obtain Informed Consent

In addition to taking care to do no harm, anthropologists must obtain informed consent from all of their informants before conducting any research. Informed consent is the informant's agreement to take part in the study. Originally developed in the context of medical and psychological research, this ethical guideline is also relevant to anthropology. Informants must be aware of who the anthropologist is and the research topic, who is financially and otherwise supporting the research, how the research will be used, and who will have access to it. Finally, their participation must be optional and not coerced. They should be able to stop participating at any time and be aware of and comfortable with any risks associated with their participation.

In medical and psychological research settings in the United States, researchers typically obtain informed consent by asking prospective participants to sign a document that outlines the research and the risks involved in their participation, acknowledging that they agree to take part. In some anthropological contexts, however, this type of informed consent may not be appropriate. People may not trust the state, bureaucratic processes, or authority, for example. Asking them to sign a formal legal-looking document may intimidate them. Likewise, informed consent cannot be obtained with a signed document if many in the community cannot read. The anthropologist must determine the most appropriate way to obtain informed consent in the context of the particular research setting.

Maintain Anonymity and Privacy

Another important ethical consideration for anthropologists in the field is ensuring the anonymity and privacy of informants who need such protection. When I did research among undocumented Mexican immigrant college students, I recognized that my

informants' legal status put them at considerable risk. I took care to use pseudonyms for all of the informants, even when writing field notes. In my writing, I changed the names of the informants' relatives, friends, schools, and workplaces to protect them from being identified. Maintaining privacy and anonymity is an important way for anthropologists to ensure that their involvement does no harm.

Make Results Accessible

Finally, anthropologists must always make their final research results accessible to their informants and to other researchers. For informants, a written report in the researcher's native language may not be the best way to convey the results. Reports can be translated or the results can be converted into a more accessible format. Examples of creative ways in which anthropologists have made their results available include establishing accessible databases for their research data, contributing to existing databases, producing films that portray the results, and developing texts or recommendations that provide tangible assistance to the informants' communities. Though it is not always easy to make research results accessible in culturally appropriate ways, it is essential that others have the opportunity to review and benefit from the research, especially those who participated in its creation.

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4.7: More on Ethics

ETHICAL ISSUES IN TRUTH TELLING

As anthropologists developed more sophisticated concepts of culture, they also gained a greater understanding of the ethical challenges associated with anthropological research. Because participant-observation fieldwork brings anthropologists into close relationships with the people they study, many complicated issues can arise. Cultural relativism is a perspective that encourages anthropologists to show respect to members of other cultures, but it was not until after World War II that the profession of anthropology recognized a need to develop formal standards of professional conduct.

The Nuremberg trials, which began in 1946 Nuremberg, Germany, were conducted under the direction of France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, prosecuted members of the Nazi regime for war crimes. In addition to military and political figures, physicians and scientists were also prosecuted for unethical human experimentation and mass murder. The trials demonstrated that physicians and other scientists could be dangerous if they used their skills for abusive or exploitative goals. The Nuremberg Code that emerged from the trials is considered a landmark document in medical and research ethics. It established principles for the ethical treatment of the human subjects involved in any medical or scientific research.

Because of events such as the Nuremberg trials, many universities embraced research ethical guidelines for the treatment of human subjects. Anthropologists and students who work in universities where these guidelines exist are obliged to follow these rules. The American Anthropological Association (AAA), along with many anthropology organizations in other countries, developed codes of ethics describing specific expectations for anthropologists engaged in research in a variety of settings. The principles in the AAA code of ethics include: do no harm; be open and honest regarding your work; obtain informed consent and necessary permissions; ensure the vulnerable populations in every study are protected from competing ethical obligations; make your results accessible; protect and preserve your records; and maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships. These principles sound simple, but can be complicated in practice.

Bronislaw Malinowski

The career of Bronislaw Malinowski provides an example of how investigations of culture can lead anthropologists into difficult ethical areas. As discussed above, Malinowski is widely regarded as a leading figure in the history of anthropology. He initiated the practice of participant-observation fieldwork and published several highly regarded books including *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Following his death, the private diary he kept while conducting fieldwork was discovered and published as *A Diary in the Strictest Sense of the Term* (1967). The diary described Malinowski's feelings of loneliness and isolation, but also included a great deal of information about his sexual fantasies as well his some insensitive and contemptuous opinions about the Trobriand Islanders. The diary provided valuable insight into the mind of an important ethnographer, but also raised questions about the extent to which his personal feelings, including bias and racism, were reflected in his official conclusions.

Most anthropologists keep diaries or daily notes as a means of keeping track of the research project, but these records are almost never made public. Because Malinowski's diary was published after his death, he could not explain why he wrote what he did, or assess the extent to which he was able to separate the personal from the professional. Which of these books best reflects the truth about Malinowski's interaction with the Trobriand Islanders? This rare insight into the private life of a field researcher demonstrates that even when anthropologists are acting within the boundaries of professional ethics, they still struggle to set aside their own ethnocentric attitudes and prejudices.

Napoleon Chagnon

A more serious and complicated incident concerned research conducted among the Yanomami, an indigenous group living in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil and Venezuela. Starting in the 1960s, the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon and James Neel, a geneticist, carried out research among the Yanomami. Neel was interested in studying the effects of radiation released by nuclear explosions on people living in remote areas. Chagnon was investigating theories about the role of violence in Yanomami society. In 2000, an American journalist, Patrick Tierney, published a book about Chagnon and Neel's research: *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon*. The book contained numerous stunning allegations, including a claim that the pair had deliberately infected the Yanomami with measles, starting an epidemic that killed thousands of people. The book also claimed that Neel had conducted medical experiments without the consent of the Yanomami and that Chagnon had deliberately created conflicts between Yanomami groups so he could study the resulting violence.

These allegations were brought to the attention of the American Anthropological Association, and a number of inquiries were eventually conducted. James Neel was deceased, but Napoleon Chagnon steadfastly denied the allegations. In 2002, the AAA issued their report; Chagnon was judged to have misrepresented the violent nature of Yanomami culture in ways that caused them harm and to have failed to obtain proper consent for his research. However, Chagnon continued to reject these conclusions and complained that the process used to evaluate the evidence was unfair. In 2005, the AAA rescinded its own conclusion, citing problems with the investigation process. The results of several years of inquiry into the situation satisfied few people. Chagnon was not definitively pronounced guilty, nor was he exonerated. Years later, debate over this episode continues.[8] The controversy demonstrates the extent to which truth can be elusive in anthropological inquiry. Although anthropologists should not be storytellers in the sense that they deliberately create fictions, differences in perspective and theoretical orientation create unavoidable differences in the way anthropologists interpret the same situation. Anthropologists must try to use their toolkit of theory and methods to ensure that the stories they tell are truthful and represent the voice of the people being studied using an ethical approach.



Figure 4.7.1: Yanomami Woman and Child, 1997

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NOTES

8. For more information about the controversy, see Thomas Gregor and Daniel Gross, “Guilt by Association: The Culture of Accusation and the American Anthropological Associations Investigation of Darkness in El Dorado.” American Anthropologist 106 no. 4 (2004):687-698 and Robert Borofsky, Yanomami: The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn From It (Berkley: University California Press, 2005). Napoleon Chagnon has written his rebuttal in Noble Savages: My Life Among Two Dangerous Tribes—The Yanomamo and the Anthropologists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

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4.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. If you were to conduct anthropological fieldwork anywhere in the world, where would you go? What would you study? Why? Which ethnographic techniques would you use? What kinds of ethical considerations would you likely encounter? How would you disseminate your research?
2. What is unique about ethnographic fieldwork and how did it emerge as a key strategy in anthropology?
3. How do traditional approaches to ethnographic fieldwork contrast with contemporary approaches?
4. What are some of the contemporary ethnographic fieldwork techniques and perspectives and why are they important to anthropology?
5. What are some of the ethical considerations in doing anthropological fieldwork and why are they important?
6. How do anthropologists transform their fieldwork data into a story that communicates meaning? How are reflexivity and polyvocality changing the way anthropologists communicate their work?

GLOSSARY

Deductive: reasoning from the general to the specific; the inverse of inductive reasoning. Deductive research is more common in the natural sciences than in anthropology. In a deductive approach, the researcher creates a hypothesis and then designs a study to prove or disprove the hypothesis. The results of deductive research can be generalizable to other settings.

Emic: a description of the studied culture from the perspective of a member of the culture or insider.

Ethnography: the in-depth study of the everyday practices and lives of a people.

Etic: a description of the studied culture from the perspective of an observer or outsider.

Inductive: a type of reasoning that uses specific information to draw general conclusions. In an inductive approach, the researcher seeks to collect evidence without trying to definitively prove or disprove a hypothesis. The researcher usually first spends time in the field to become familiar with the people before identifying a hypothesis or research question. Inductive research usually is not generalizable to other settings.

Key Informants: individuals who are more knowledgeable about their culture than others and who are particularly helpful to the anthropologist.

Participant observation: a type of observation in which the anthropologist observes while participating in the same activities in which her informants are engaged.

Polyvocal: A text in which more than one person's voice is presented.

Qualitative: anthropological research designed to gain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of human behavior.

Quantitative: anthropological research that uses statistical, mathematical, and/or numerical data to study human behavior.

Reflexivity: A text that includes information about the anthropologist's personal experiences, thoughts, and life stories and analyzes how those characteristics affected their research and analysis.

Salvage ethnography: Early 20th-century practice of studying and recording cultural diversity with the goal of preserving the practices of the cultures that were threatened by Westernization.

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4.9: About the Authors

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Katie Nelson, PhD is a professor of anthropology at Inver Hills Community College. Her current research focuses on identity, belonging and citizenship(s) among migrant and undocumented populations in the U.S., Mexico and Morocco. She is particularly interested in examining how migrants forge a sense of identity and belonging in the contexts of national discourses that problematize their presence. She serves as the incoming Chair-elect of the Teaching Anthropology Interest Group, a part of the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association. She is fluent in the Spanish and Portuguese languages and is currently learning French and Arabic. Katie received her BA in Anthropology and Latin American Studies from Macalester College, her MA in Anthropology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, an MA in Education and Instructional Technology from the University of Saint Thomas and her PhD from CIESAS Occidente (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social – Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology), based in Guadalajara, Mexico.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Language

Learning Objectives

- Explain the relationship between human language and culture.
- Identify the universal features of human languages and the design features that make them unique.
- Describe the structures of language: phonemes, morphemes, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.
- Assess the relationship between language variations and ethnic or cultural identity.
- Explain how language is affected by social class, ethnicity, gender and other aspects of identity.
- Evaluate the reasons why languages change and efforts that can be made to preserve endangered languages.

5.1: Language
5.2: Biological Basis of Language and Language Aquisition
5.3: Human Language Compared with Other Species
5.4: Language Universals and the Structure of Language
5.5: Language Variation
5.6: Linguistic Relativity
5.7: Language In Its Social Setting
5.8: Historical Linguistics
5.9: Language Death, Revitalization and the Digital Age
5.10: End of Chapter Discussion
5.11: About the Author

Image: Detail of the Rosetta Stone inscription. Major advances in the decoding were recognition that the stone offered three versions of the same text; that the demotic text used phonetic characters to spell foreign names; that the hieroglyphic text did so as well, and had pervasive similarities to the demotic; and that, in addition to being used for foreign names, phonetic characters were also used to spell native Egyptian words. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Kajk).

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5.1: Language

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN LANGUAGE TO HUMAN CULTURE

Human language can be considered a culture's most important feature since complex human culture could not exist without language and language could not exist without culture. They are inseparable because language encodes culture and provides the means through which culture is shared and passed from one generation to the next. Humans think in language and do all cultural activities using language. It surrounds our every waking and sleeping moments, although we do not usually think about its importance. For that matter, humans do not think about their immersion in culture either, much as fish, if they were endowed with intelligence, would not think much about the water that surrounds them. Without language and culture, humans would be just another great ape. Anthropologists must have skills in linguistics so they can learn the languages and cultures of the people they study.

All human languages are symbolic systems that make use of symbols to convey meaning. A *symbol*, as defined in Chapter 2, anything, verbal or non-verbal, that stands for something else, often without an obvious or natural connection. It has a meaning that cannot be guessed because there is no obvious connection between the symbol and its referent. This feature of human language is called **arbitrariness**. For example, many cultures assign meanings to certain colors, but the meaning for a particular color may be completely different from one culture to another. Western cultures like the United States use the color black to represent death, but in China it is the color white that symbolizes death. White in the United States symbolizes purity and is used for brides' dresses, but no Chinese woman would ever wear white to her wedding. Instead, she usually wears red, the color of good luck. Words in languages are symbolic in the same way. The word *key* in English is pronounced exactly the same as the word *qui* in French, meaning "who," and *ki* in Japanese, meaning "tree." One must learn the language in order to know what any word means.

Definition: arbitrariness

The relationship between a symbol and its referent (meaning), in which there is no obvious connection between them.

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5.2: Biological Basis of Language and Language Aquisition

THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF LANGUAGE

The human anatomy that allowed the development of language emerged six to seven million years ago when the first human ancestors became bipedal—habitually walking on two feet. Most other mammals are quadrupedal—they move about on four feet. This evolutionary development freed up the forelimbs of human ancestors for other activities, such as carrying items and doing more and more complex things with their hands. It also started a chain of anatomical adaptations. One adaptation was a change in the way the skull was placed on the spine. The skull of quadrupedal animals is attached to the spine at the back of the skull because the head is thrust forward. With the new upright bipedal position of pre-humans, the attachment to the spine moved toward the center of the base of the skull. This skeletal change in turn brought about changes in the shape and position of the mouth and throat anatomy.

Humans have all the same organs in the mouth and throat that the other great apes have, but the *larynx*, or voice box (you may know it as the Adam's apple), is in a lower position in the throat in humans. This creates a longer *pharynx*, or throat cavity, which functions as a resonating and amplifying chamber for the speech sounds emitted by the larynx. The rounding of the shape of the tongue and *palate*, or the roof of the mouth, enables humans to make a greater variety of sounds than any great ape is capable of making (see Figure 5.2.1).

Speech is produced by exhaling air from the lungs, which passes through the larynx. The voice is created by the vibration of the vocal folds in the larynx when they are pulled tightly together, leaving a narrow slit for the air to pass through under pressure. The narrower the slit, the higher the pitch of the sound produced. The sound waves in the exhaled air pass through the pharynx then out through the mouth and/or the nose. The different positions and movements of the articulators—the tongue, the lips, the jaw—produce the different speech sounds.

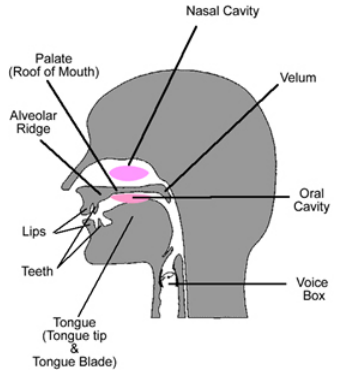


Figure 5.2.1: Human Articulatory Anatomy

Along with the changes in mouth and throat anatomy that made speech possible came a gradual enlargement and compartmentalization of the brain of human ancestors over millions of years. The modern human brain is among the largest, in proportion to body size, of all animals. This development was crucial to language ability because a tremendous amount of brain power is required to process, store, produce, and comprehend the complex system of any human language and its associated culture. In addition, two areas in the left brain are specifically dedicated to the processing of language; no other species has them. They are Broca's area in the left frontal lobe near the temple, and Wernicke's area, in the temporal lobe just behind the left ear.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN CHILDHOOD

Linguist Noam Chomsky proposed that all languages share the properties of what he called **Universal Grammar** (UG), a basic template for all human languages, which he believed was embedded in our genes, hard-wiring the brains of all human children to acquire language. Although the theory of UG is somewhat controversial, it is a fact that all normally developing human infants have an innate ability to acquire the language or languages used around them. Without any formal instruction, children easily acquire the sounds, words, grammatical rules, and appropriate social functions of the language(s) that surround them. They master the basics by about age three or four. This also applies to children, both deaf and hearing, who are exposed to signed language.

Definition: Universal Grammar (UG)

A theory developed by linguist Noam Chomsky suggesting that a basic template for all human languages is embedded in our genes.

If a child is not surrounded by people who are using a language, that child will gradually lose the ability to acquire language naturally without effort. If this deprivation continues until puberty, the child will no longer be biologically capable of attaining native fluency in any language, although they might be able to achieve a limited competency. This phenomenon has been called the **Critical Age Range Hypothesis**. A number of abused children who were isolated from language input until they were past puberty provide stark evidence to support this hypothesis. The classic case of "Genie" is an example of this evidence.[1]

Definition: Critical Age Range Hypothesis

Research suggesting that a child will gradually lose the ability to acquire language naturally and without effort, if he or she is not exposed to other people speaking a language until past the age of puberty. This applies to the acquisition of a second language as well.

Found at the age of almost 14, Genie had been confined for all of her life to her room and, since the age of two, had been tied to a potty chair during the day and to a crib at night with almost no verbal interaction and only minimal attention to her physical needs. After her rescue, a linguist worked with her intensively for about five years in an attempt to help her learn to talk, but she never achieved language competence beyond that of a two-year old child. The hypothesis also applies to the acquisition of a second language. A person who starts the study of another language after puberty will have to exert a great deal of effort and will rarely achieve native fluency, especially in pronunciation. There is plenty of evidence for this in the U.S. educational system. You might very well have had this same experience. It makes you wonder why our schools rarely offer foreign language classes before the junior high school level.

NOTES

1. You can find a documentary film about Genie via Google or YouTube under the title *Genie, Secret of the Wild Child*, a NOVA production. ↵

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5.3: Human Language Compared with Other Species

THE GESTURE CALL SYSTEM

All animals communicate and many animals make meaningful sounds. Others use visual signs, such as facial expressions, color changes, body postures and movements, light (fireflies), or electricity (some eels). Many use the sense of smell and the sense of touch. Most animals use a combination of two or more of these systems in their communication, but their systems are **closed communication systems** in that they cannot create new meanings or messages. Human communication is an **open communication system** that can easily create new meanings and messages. Most animal communication systems are basically innate; they do not have to learn them, but some species' systems entail a certain amount of learning. For example, songbirds have the innate ability to produce the typical songs of their species, but most of them must be taught how to do it by older birds.

Great apes and other primates have relatively complex systems of communication that use varying combinations of sound, body language, scent, facial expression, and touch. Their systems have therefore been referred to as a **gesture-call system**. Humans share a number of forms of this gesture-call, or non-verbal system with the great apes. Spoken language undoubtedly evolved embedded within it. All human cultures have not only verbal languages, but also non-verbal systems that are consistent with their verbal languages and cultures and vary from one culture to another. We will discuss the three most important human non-verbal communication systems.



Figure 5.3.1: Chimpanzees and other great apes use gesture-call communication systems.

Definition: gesture-call system

A system of non-verbal communication using varying combinations of sound, body language, scent, facial expression, and touch, typical of great apes and other primates, as well as humans.

Definition: closed communication system

A form of communication that cannot create new meanings or messages; it can only convey pre-programmed (innate) messages.

Definition: open communication system

A form of communication that can create an infinite number of new messages; a feature of human language only.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Kinesics

Kinesics is the term used to designate all forms of human body language, including gestures, body position and movement, facial expressions, and eye contact. Although all humans can potentially perform these in the same way, different cultures may have different rules about how to use them. For example, eye contact for Americans is highly valued as a way to show we are paying attention and as a means of showing respect. But for the Japanese, eye contact is usually inappropriate, especially between two people of different social statuses. The lower status person must look down and avoid eye contact to show respect for the higher status person.

Definition: kinesics

The study of all forms of human body language, including gestures, body position and movement, facial expressions, and eye contact.

Facial expressions can convey a host of messages, usually related to the person's attitude or emotional state. Hand gestures may convey unconscious messages, or constitute deliberate messages that can replace or emphasize verbal ones.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of the social use of space, specifically the distance an individual tries to maintain around himself in interactions with others. The size of the "space bubble" depends on a number of social factors, including the relationship between the two people, their relative status, their gender and age, their current attitude toward each other, and above all their culture. In some cultures, such as in Brazil, people typically interact in a relatively close physical space, usually along with a lot of touching. Other cultures, like the Japanese, prefer to maintain a greater distance with a minimum amount of touching or none at all. If one person stands too far away from the other according to cultural standards, it might convey the message of emotional distance. If a person invades the culturally recognized space bubble of another, it could mean a threat. Or, it might show a desire for a closer relationship. It all depends on who is involved.

Definition: proxemics

The study of the social use of space, including the amount of space an individual tries to maintain around himself in his interactions with others.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage refers to those characteristics of speech beyond the actual words spoken. These include the features that are inherent to all speech: pitch, loudness, and tempo or duration of the sounds. Varying pitch can convey any number of messages: a question, sarcasm, defiance, surprise, confidence or lack of it, impatience, and many other often subtle connotations. An utterance that is shouted at close range usually conveys an emotional element, such as anger or urgency. A word or syllable that is held for an undue amount of time can intensify the impact of that word. For example, compare "It's beautiful" versus It's beauuuuu-tiful!" Often the latter type of expression is further emphasized by extra loudness of the syllable, and perhaps higher pitch; all can serve to make a part of the utterance more important. Other paralinguistic features that often accompany speech might be a chuckle, a sigh or sob, deliberate throat clearing, and many other non-verbal sounds like "hm," "oh," "ah," and "um."

Definition: paralanguage

Those characteristics of speech beyond the actual words spoken, such as pitch, loudness, tempo.

Most non-verbal behaviors are unconsciously performed and not noticed unless someone violates the cultural standards for them. In fact, a deliberate violation itself can convey meaning. Other non-verbal behaviors are done consciously like the U.S. gestures that indicate approval, such as thumbs up, or making a circle with your thumb and forefinger—"OK." Other examples are waving at someone or putting a forefinger to your lips to quiet another person. Many of these deliberate gestures have different meanings (or no meaning at all) in other cultures. For example, the gestures of approval in U.S. culture mentioned above may be obscene or negative gestures in another culture.

Try This

As an experiment in the power of non-verbal communication, try violating one of the cultural rules for proxemics or eye contact with a person you know. Choosing your "guinea pigs" carefully (they might get mad at you!), try standing or sitting a little closer or farther away from them than you usually would for a period of time, until they notice (and they will notice). Or, you could choose to give them a bit too much eye contact, or too little, while you are conversing with them. Note how they react to your behavior and how long it takes them to notice.

HUMAN LANGUAGE COMPARED WITH THE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS OF OTHER SPECIES

Human language is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the communication systems of all other species of animals. Linguists have long tried to create a working definition that distinguishes it from non-human communication systems. Linguist Charles Hockett's solution was to create a hierarchical list of what he called design features, or descriptive characteristics, of the communication systems of all species, including that of humans.[2] Those features of human language not shared with any other species illustrate exactly how it differs from all other species.

Hockett's Design Features

The communication systems of all species share the following features:

1. A mode of communication by which messages are transmitted through a system of signs, using one or more sensory systems to transmit and interpret, such as vocal-auditory, visual, tactile, or kinesic;
2. **Semanticity**: the signs carry meaning for the users, and
3. **Pragmatic function**: all signs serve a useful purpose in the life of the users, from survival functions to influencing others' behavior.

Some communication systems (including humans) also exhibit the following features:

1. **Interchangeability:** the ability of individuals within a species to both send and receive messages. One species that lacks this feature is the honeybee. Only a female "worker bee" can perform the dance that conveys to her hive-mates the location of a newly discovered food source. Another example is the mockingbird whose songs are performed only by the males to attract a mate and mark his territory.
2. **Cultural transmission**: the need for some aspects of the system to be learned through interaction with others, rather than being 100 percent innate or genetically programmed. The mockingbird learns its songs from other birds, or even from other sounds in its environment that appeal to it.
3. **Arbitrariness**: the form of a sign is not inherently or logically related to its meaning; signs are symbols. It could be said that the movements in the honeybees' dance are arbitrary since anyone who is not a honeybee could not interpret their meaning.

Only true human language also has the following characteristics:

1. **Discreteness**: every human language is made up of a small number of meaningless discrete sounds. That is, the sounds can be isolated from each other, for purposes of study by linguists, or to be represented in a writing system.
2. **Duality of patterning** (two levels of combination): at the first level of patterning, these meaningless discrete sounds, called **phonemes**, are combined to form words and parts of words that carry meaning, or **morphemes**. In the second level of patterning, morphemes are recombined to form an infinite possible number of longer messages such as phrases and sentences according to a set of rules called **syntax**. It is this level of combination that is entirely lacking in the communication abilities of all other animals and makes human language an open system while all other animal systems are closed.
3. **Displacement**: the ability to communicate about things that are outside of the here and now made possible by the features of discreteness and duality of patterning. While other species are limited to communicating about their immediate time and place, we can talk about any time in the future or past, about any place in the universe, or even fictional places.
4. **Productivity/creativity**: the ability to produce and understand messages that have never been expressed before or to express new ideas. People do not speak according to prepared scripts, as if they were in a movie or a play; they create their utterances spontaneously, according to the rules of their language. It also makes possible the creation of new words and even the ability to lie.

A number of great apes, including gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans, have been taught human sign languages with all of the human design features. In each case, the apes have been able to communicate as humans do to an extent, but their linguistic abilities are reduced by the limited cognitive abilities that accompany their smaller brains.

NOTES

2. Adapted here from Nick Cipollone, Steven Keiser, and Shravan Vasishth, *Language Files* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1998), 20-23. ↵

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5.4: Language Universals and the Structure of Language

UNIVERSALS OF LANGUAGE

Languages we do not speak or understand may sound like meaningless babble to us, but all the human languages that have ever been studied by linguists are amazingly similar. They all share a number of characteristics, which linguists call **language universals**. These language universals can be considered properties of the Universal Grammar that Chomsky proposed. Here is a list of some of the major ones.

1. All human cultures have a human language and use it to communicate.
2. All human languages change over time, a reflection of the fact that all cultures are also constantly changing.
3. All languages are systematic, rule-driven, and equally complex overall, and equally capable of expressing any idea that the speaker wishes to convey. There are no primitive languages.
4. All languages are symbolic systems.
5. All languages have a basic word order of elements, like subject, verb, and object, with variations.
6. All languages have similar basic grammatical categories such as nouns and verbs.
7. Every spoken language is made up of *discrete* sounds that can be categorized as vowels or consonants.
8. The underlying structure of all languages is characterized by the feature *duality of patterning*, which permits any speaker to utter any message they need or wish to convey, and any speaker of the same language to understand the message.

Definition: language universals

Characteristics shared by all languages.

DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS: STRUCTURES OF LANGUAGE

The study of the structures of language is called descriptive linguistics. **Descriptive linguists** discover and describe the phonemes of a language, research called *phonology*. They study the *lexicon* (the vocabulary) of a language and how the morphemes are used to create new words, or *morphology*. They analyze the rules by which speakers create phrases and sentences, or the study of syntax. And they look at how these features all combine to convey meaning in certain social contexts, fields of study called semantics and pragmatics.

Definition: descriptive linguistics

The study of the structure of language.

The Sounds of Language: Phonemes

A **phoneme** is defined as the minimal unit of sound that can make a difference in meaning if substituted for another sound in a word that is otherwise identical. The phoneme itself does not carry meaning. For example, in English if the sound we associate with the letter “p” is substituted for the sound of the letter “b” in the word bit, the word’s meaning is changed because now it is pit, a different word with an entirely different meaning. The human articulatory anatomy is capable of producing many hundreds of sounds, but no language has more than about 100 phonemes. English has about 36 or 37 phonemes, including about eleven vowels, depending on dialect. Hawaiian has only five vowels and about eight consonants. No two languages have the same exact set of phonemes.

Definition: phonemes

The minimal units of sound that can make a difference in meaning, but has no meaning of its own.

Linguists use a written system called the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to represent the sounds of a language. Unlike the letters of our alphabet that spell English words, each IPA symbol always represents only one sound no matter the language. For example, the letter “a” in English can represent the different vowel sounds in such words as *cat*, *make*, *papa*, *law*, etc., but the IPA symbol /a/ always and only represents the vowel sound of *papa* or *pop*.

The Units That Carry Meaning: Morphemes

A **morpheme** is a minimal unit of meaning in a language; a morpheme cannot be broken down into any smaller units that still relate to the original meaning. It may be a word that can stand alone, called an unbound morpheme (*dog*, *happy*, *go*, *educate*). Or it could be any part of a word that carries meaning that cannot stand alone but must be attached to another morpheme, ***bound morphemes***. They may be placed at the beginning of the root word, such as *un-* ("not," as in *unhappy*), or *re-* ("again," as in *rearrange*). Or, they may follow the root, as in *-ly* (makes an adjective into an adverb: *quickly* from *quick*), *-s* (for plural, possessive, or a verb ending) in English. Some languages, like Chinese, have very few if any bound morphemes. Others, like Swahili have so many that nouns and verbs cannot stand alone as separate words; they must have one or more other bound morphemes attached to them.

Definition: morphemes

The minimal units of meaning in a language.

The Structure of Phrases and Sentences: Syntax

Rules of **syntax** tell the speaker how to put morphemes together grammatically and meaningfully. There are two main types of syntactic rules: rules that govern word order, and rules that direct the use of certain morphemes that perform a grammatical function. For example, the order of words in the English sentence "The cat chased the dog" cannot be changed around or its meaning would change: "The dog chased the cat" (something entirely different) or "Dog cat the chased the" (something meaningless). English relies on word order much more than many other languages do because it has so few morphemes that can do the same type of work.

Definition: syntax

The rules by which a language combines morphemes into larger units.

For example, in our sentence above, the phrase "the cat" must go first in the sentence, because that is how English indicates the subject of the sentence, the one that does the action of the verb. The phrase "the dog" must go after the verb, indicating that it is the dog that received the action of the verb, or is its object. Other syntactic rules tell us that we must put "the" before its noun, and "–ed" at the end of the verb to indicate past tense. In Russian, the same sentence has fewer restrictions on word order because it has bound morphemes that are attached to the nouns to indicate which one is the subject and which is the object of the verb. So the sentence *koshka* [*chased*] *sobaku*, which means "the cat chased the dog," has the same meaning no matter how we order the words, because the *–a* on the end of *koshka* means the cat is the subject, and the *–u* on the end of *sobaku* means the dog is the object. If we switched the endings and said *koshku* [*chased*] *sobaka*, now it means the dog did the chasing, even though we haven't changed the order of the words. Notice, too, that Russian does not have a word for "the."

Conveying Meaning in Language: Semantics and Pragmatics

The whole purpose of language is to communicate meaning about the world around us so the study of meaning is of great interest to linguists and anthropologists alike. The field of **semantics** focuses on the study of the meanings of words and other morphemes as well as how the meanings of phrases and sentences derive from them. Recently linguists have been enjoying examining the multitude of meanings and uses of the word "like" among American youth, made famous through the film *Valley Girl* in 1983. Although it started as a feature of California English, it has spread all across the country, and even to many young second-language speakers of English. It's, like, totally awesome dude!

Definition: semantics

How meaning is conveyed at the word and phrase level.

The study of **pragmatics** looks at the social and cultural aspects of meaning and how the context of an interaction affects it. One aspect of pragmatics is the speech act. Any time we speak we are performing an act, but what we are actually trying to accomplish with that utterance may not be interpretable through the dictionary meanings of the words themselves. For example, if you are at the dinner table and say, "Can you pass the salt?" you are probably not asking if the other person is capable of giving you the salt. Often the more polite an utterance, the less direct it will be syntactically. For example, rather than using the imperative syntactic form and saying "Give me a cup of coffee," it is considered more polite to use the question form and say "Would you please give me a cup of coffee?"

Definition: pragmatics

How social context contributes to meaning in an interaction.

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5.5: Language Variation

SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Languages Versus Dialects

The number of languages spoken around the world is somewhat difficult to pin down, but we usually see a figure between 6,000 and 7,000. Why are they so hard to count? The term **language** is commonly used to refer to the idealized "standard" of a variety of speech with a name, such as English, Turkish, Swedish, Swahili, or Urdu. One language is usually considered to be incomprehensible to speakers of another one. The word **dialect** is often applied to a subordinate variety of a language and the common assumption is that we can understand someone who speaks another dialect of our own language.

Definition: language

An idealized form of speech, usually referred to as the standard variety.

Definition: dialect

A variety of speech. The term is often applied to a subordinate variety of a language. Speakers of two dialects of the same language do not necessarily always understand each other.

These terms are not really very useful to describe actual language variation. For example, many of the hundreds of "dialects" spoken in China are very different from each other and are not mutually comprehensible to speakers of other Chinese "dialects." The Chinese government promotes the idea that all of them are simply variants of the "Chinese language" because it helps to promote national solidarity and loyalty among Chinese people to their country and reduce regional factionalism. In contrast, the languages of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are considered separate languages, but actually if a Swede, a Dane, and a Norwegian were to have a conversation together, each could use their own language and understand most of what the others say. Does this make them dialects or languages? The Serbian and Croatian languages are considered by their speakers to be separate languages due to distinct political and religious cultural identities. They even employ different writing systems to emphasize difference, but they are essentially the same and easily understandable to each other.

So in the words of linguist John McWhorter, actually "dialects is all there is."[3] What he means by this is that a continuum of language variation is geographically distributed across populations in much the same way that human physical variation is, with the degree of difference between any two varieties increasing across increasing distances. This is the case even across national boundaries. Catalan, the language of northeastern Spain, is closer to the languages of southern France, Provençal and Occitan than any one is to its associated national language, Spanish or French. One language variety blends with the next geographically like the colors of the rainbow. However, the historical influence of colonizing states has affected that natural distribution. Thus, there is no natural "language" with variations called "dialects." Usually one variety of a language is considered the "standard," but this choice is based on the social and political prestige of the group that speaks that variety; it has no inherent superiority over the other variants called its "dialects." The way people speak is an indicator of who they are, where they come from, and what social groups they identify with, as well as what particular situation they find themselves in, and what they want to accomplish with a specific interaction.

How Does Language Variation Develop?

Why do people from different regions in the United States speak so differently? Why do they speak differently from the people of England? A number of factors have influenced the development of English dialects, and they are typical causes of dialect variation in other languages as well.

Settlement patterns: The first English settlers to North America brought their own dialects with them. Settlers from different parts of the British Isles spoke different dialects (they still do), and they tended to cluster together in their new homeland. The present-day dialects typical of people in various areas of the United States, such as New England, Virginia, New Jersey, and Delaware, still reflect these original settlement sites, although they certainly have changed from their original forms.

Migration routes: After they first settled in the United States, some people migrated further west, establishing dialect boundaries as they traveled and settled in new places.

Geographical factors: Rivers, mountains, lakes and islands affected migration routes and settlement locations, as well as the relative isolation of the settlements. People in the Appalachian mountains and on certain islands off the Atlantic coast were relatively isolated from other speakers for many years and still speak dialects that sound very archaic compared with the mainstream.

Language contact: Interactions with other language groups, such as Native Americans, French, Spanish, Germans, and African-Americans, along paths of migration and settlement resulted in mutual borrowing of vocabulary, pronunciation, and some syntax.

Have you ever heard of "Spanglish"? It is a form of Spanish spoken near the borders of the United States that is characterized by a number of words adopted from English and incorporated into the phonological, morphological and syntactic systems of Spanish. For example, the Spanish sentence *Voy a estationar mi camioneta*, or "I'm going to park my truck" becomes in Spanglish *Voy a parquear mi troca*. Many other languages have such English-flavored versions, including Franglais and Chinglish. Some countries, especially France, actively try to prevent the incursion of other languages (especially English) into their language, but the effort is always futile. People will use whatever words serve their purposes, even when the "language police" disapprove. Some Franglais words that have invaded in spite of the authorities protestations include the recently acquired *binge-drinking*, *beach*, *e-book*, and *drop-out*, while older ones include *le weekend* and *stop*.

Region and occupation: Rural farming people may continue to use archaic expressions compared with urban people, who have much more contact with contemporary life styles and diverse speech communities.

Social class: Social status differences cut across all regional variations of English. These differences reflect the education and income level of speakers.

Group reference: Other categories of group identity, including ethnicity, national origin of ancestors, age, and gender can be symbolized by the way we speak, indicating in-group versus out-group identity. We talk like other members of our groups, however we define that group, as a means of maintaining social solidarity with other group members. This can include occupational or interest-group jargon, such as medical or computer terms, or surfer talk, as well as pronunciation and syntactic variations. Failure to make linguistic accommodation to those we are speaking to may be interpreted as a kind of symbolic group rejection even if that dialect might be relatively stigmatized as a marker of a disrespected minority group. Most people are able to use more than one style of speech, also called **register**, so that they can adjust depending on who they are interacting with: their family and friends, their boss, a teacher, or other members of the community.

Linguistic processes: New developments that promote the simplification of pronunciation or syntactic changes to clarify meaning can also contribute to language change.

Definition: register

A style of speech that varies depending on who is speaking to whom and in what context.

These factors do not work in isolation. Any language variation is the result of a number of social, historical, and linguistic factors that might affect individual performances collectively and therefore dialect change in a particular speech community is a process that is continual.

Try This

Which of these terms do you use, pop versus soda versus coke? Pail versus bucket? Do you say "vayse" or "vahze" for the vessel you put flowers in? Where are you from? Can you find out where each term or pronunciation is typically used? Can you find other regional differences like these?

What Is a "Standard" Variety of a Language?

The **standard language** is simply one of many variants that has been given special prestige in the community because it is spoken by the people who have the greatest amount of prestige, power, and (usually) wealth. In the case of English its development has been in part the result of the invention of the printing press in the sixteenth-century and the subsequent increase in printed versions of the language. This then stimulated more than a hundred years of deliberate efforts by grammarians to standardize spelling and grammatical rules. Their decisions invariably favored the dialect spoken by the aristocracy. Some of their other decisions were rather arbitrarily determined by standards more appropriate to Latin, or even mathematics. For example, as it is in many other languages, it was typical among the common people of the time (and it still is among the present-day working classes and in casual

speech), to use multiple negative particles in a sentence, like "I *don't* have *no* money." Those eighteenth-century grammarians said we must use either *don't* or *no*, but not both, that is, "I don't have any money" or "I have no money." They based this on a mathematical rule that says that two negatives make a positive. (When multiplying two signed negative numbers, such as -5 times -2, the result is 10.) These grammarians claimed that if we used the double negative, we would really be saying the positive, or "I have money." Obviously, anyone who utters that double-negative sentence is not trying to say that they have money, but the rule still applies for standard English to this day.

Definition: standard language

The variant of any language that has been given special prestige in the community.

Non-standard varieties of English, also known as **vernaculars**, are usually distinguished from the standard by their inclusion of such stigmatized forms as multiple negatives, the use of the verb form ain't (which was originally the normal contraction of *am not*, as in "I ain't," comparable to "you aren't," or "she isn't"); pronunciation of words like *this* and *that* as *dis* and *dat*; pronunciation of final "–ing" as "–in;" and any other feature that grammarians have decreed as "improper" English.

Definition: vernaculars

Non-standard varieties of a language, which are usually distinguished from the standard by their inclusion of stigmatized forms.

The standard of any language is a rather artificial, idealized form of language, the language of education. One must learn its rules in school because it is not anyone's true first language. Everyone speaks a dialect, although some dialects are closer to the standard than others. Those that are regarded with the least prestige and respect in society are associated with the groups of people who have the least amount of social prestige. People with the highest levels of education have greater access to the standard, but even they usually revert to their first dialect as the appropriate register in the context of an informal situation with friends and family. In other words, no language variety is inherently better or worse than any other one. It is due to social attitudes that people label some varieties as "better" or "proper," and others as "incorrect" or "bad." Recall Language Universal 3: "All languages are systematic, rule-driven, and equally complex overall, and equally capable of expressing any idea that the speaker wishes to convey."

In 1972 sociolinguist William Labov did an interesting study in which he looked at the pronunciation of the sound /r/ in the speech of New Yorkers in two different department stores. Many people from that area drop the /r/ sound in words like *fourth* and *floor* (*fawth*, *floah*), but this pronunciation is primarily associated with lower social classes and is not a feature of the approved standard for English, even in New York City. In two different contexts, an upscale store and a discount store, Labov asked customers what floor a certain item could be found on, already knowing it was the fourth floor. He then asked them to repeat their answer, as though he hadn't heard it correctly. He compared the first with the second answers by the same person, and he compared the answers in the expensive store versus the cheaper store. He found 1) that the responders in the two stores differed overall in their pronunciation of this sound, and 2) that the same person may differ between situations of less and more self-consciousness (first versus second answer). That is, people in the upscale store tended to pronounce the /r/, and responders in both stores tended to produce the standard pronunciation more in their second answers in an effort to sound "higher class." These results showed that the pronunciation or deletion of /r/ in New York correlates with both social status and context.[4]

There is nothing inherently better or worse in either pronunciation; it depends entirely on the social norms of the community. The same /r/ deletion that is stigmatized in New York City is the prestigious, standard form in England, used by the upper class and announcers for the BBC. The pronunciation of the /r/ sound in England is stigmatized because it is used by lower-status people in some industrial cities.

It is important to note that almost everyone has access to a number of different language variations and registers. They know that one variety is appropriate to use with some people in some situations, and others should be used with other people or in other situations. The use of several language varieties in a particular interaction is known as **code-switching**.

Definition: code-switching

Using two or more language varieties in a particular interaction.

Try This

To understand the importance of using the appropriate register in a given context, the next time you are with a close friend or family member try using the register, or style of speech, that you might use with your professor or a respected member of the clergy. What is your friend's reaction? I do not recommend trying the reverse experiment, using a casual vernacular register with such a respected person (unless they are also a close friend). Why not?

NOTES

3. John McWhorter, *The Power of Babel: A Natural History of Language* (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt, 2001), 53. ↵
4. William Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964). ↵

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5.6: Linguistic Relativity

THE SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS

In the 1920s, Benjamin Whorf was a graduate student studying with linguist Edward Sapir at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Sapir, considered the father of American linguistic anthropology, was responsible for documenting and recording the languages and cultures of many Native American tribes, which were disappearing at an alarming rate. This was due primarily to the deliberate efforts of the United States government to force Native Americans to assimilate into the Euro-American culture. Sapir and his predecessors were well aware of the close relationship between culture and language because each culture is reflected in and influences its language. Anthropologists need to learn the language of the culture they are studying in order to understand the world view of its speakers. Whorf believed that the reverse is also true, that a language affects culture as well, by actually influencing how its speakers think. His hypothesis proposes that the words and the structures of a language influence how its speakers think about the world, how they behave, and ultimately the culture itself. Simply stated, Whorf believed that human beings see the world the way they do because the specific languages they speak influence them to do so. He developed this idea through both his work with Sapir and his work as a chemical engineer for the Hartford Insurance Company investigating the causes of fires.

One of his cases while working for the insurance company was a fire at a business where there were a number of gasoline drums. Those that contained gasoline were surrounded by signs warning employees to be cautious around them and to avoid smoking near them. The workers were always careful around those drums. On the other hand, empty gasoline drums were stored in another area, but employees were more careless there. Someone tossed a cigarette or lighted match into one of the "empty" drums, it went up in flames, and started a fire that burned the business to the ground. Whorf theorized that the meaning of the word *empty* implied to the worker that "nothing" was there to be cautious about so the worker behaved accordingly. Unfortunately, an "empty" gasoline drum may still contain fumes, which are more flammable than the liquid itself.

Whorf's studies at Yale involved working with Native American languages, including Hopi. The Hopi language is quite different from English, in many ways. For example, let's look at how the Hopi language deals with time. Western languages (and cultures) view time as a flowing river in which we are being carried continuously away from a past, through the present, and into a future. Our verb systems reflect that concept with specific tenses for past, present, and future. We think of this concept of time as universal, that all humans see it the same way. A Hopi speaker has very different ideas and the structure of their language both reflects and shapes the way they think about time. The Hopi language has no present, past, or future tense. Instead, it divides the world into what Whorf called the manifested and unmanifest domains. The manifested domain deals with the physical universe, including the present, the immediate past and future; the verb system uses the same basic structure for all of them. The unmanifest domain involves the remote past and the future, as well as the world of desires, thought, and life forces. The set of verb forms dealing with this domain are consistent for all of these areas, and are different from the manifested ones. Also, there are no words for hours, minutes, or days of the week.

Native Hopi speakers often had great difficulty adapting to life in the English speaking world when it came to being "on time" for work or other events. It is simply not how they had been conditioned to behave with respect to time in their Hopi world, which followed the phases of the moon and the movements of the sun. In a book about the Abenaki who lived in Vermont in the mid-1800s, Trudy Ann Parker described their concept of time, which very much resembled that of the Hopi and many of the other Native American tribes. "They called one full day a sleep, and a year was called a winter. Each month was referred to as a moon and always began with a new moon. An Indian day wasn't divided into minutes or hours. It had four time periods—sunrise, noon, sunset, and midnight. Each season was determined by the budding or leafing of plants, the spawning of fish or the rutting time for animals. Most Indians thought the white race had been running around like scared rabbits ever since the invention of the clock."[5]

The **lexicon**, or vocabulary, of a language is an inventory of the items a culture talks about and has categorized in order to make sense of the world and deal with it effectively. For example, modern life is dictated for many by the need to travel by some kind of vehicle—cars, trucks, SUVs, trains, buses, etc. We therefore have thousands of words to talk about them, including types of vehicles, models, brands, or parts.

Definition: lexicon

The vocabulary of a language.

The most important aspects of each culture are similarly reflected in the lexicon of its language. Among the societies living in the islands of Oceania in the Pacific, fish have great economic and cultural importance. This is reflected in the rich vocabulary that describes all aspects of the fish and the environments that islanders depend on for survival. For example, in Palau there are about 1,000 fish species and Palauan fishermen knew, long before biologists existed, details about the anatomy, behavior, growth patterns and habitat of most of them—in many cases far more than modern biologists know even today. Much of fish behavior is related to the tides and the phases of the moon. Throughout Oceania, the names given to certain days of the lunar months reflect the likelihood of successful fishing. For example, in the Caroline Islands, the name for the night before the new moon is *otolol*, which means "to swarm." The name indicates that the best fishing days cluster around the new moon. In Hawai`i and Tahiti two sets of days have names containing the particle *`ole* or *`ore*; one occurs in the first quarter of the moon and the other in the third quarter. The same name is given to the prevailing wind during those phases. The words mean "nothing," because those days were considered bad for fishing as well as planting.

Parts of Whorf's hypothesis, known as **linguistic relativity**, were controversial from the beginning, and still are among some linguists. Yet Whorf's ideas now form the basis for an entire sub-field of cultural anthropology: cognitive or psychological anthropology. A number of studies have been done that support Whorf's ideas. Linguist George Lakoff's work looks at the pervasive existence of metaphors in everyday speech that can be said to predispose a speaker's world view and attitudes on a variety of human experiences.[6]

Definition: linguistic relativity

The idea that the structures and words of a language influence how its speakers think, how they behave, and ultimately the culture itself (also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis).

A metaphor is an expression in which one kind of thing is understood and experienced in terms of another entirely unrelated thing; the metaphors in a language can reveal aspects of the culture of its speakers. Take, for example, the concept of an argument. In logic and philosophy, an argument is a discussion involving differing points of view, or a debate. But the conceptual metaphor in American culture can be stated as ARGUMENT IS WAR. This metaphor is reflected in many expressions of the everyday language of American speakers: I won the argument. He shot down every point I made. They attacked every argument we made. Your point is right on target. I had a fight with my boyfriend last night. In other words, we use words appropriate for discussing war when we talk about arguments, which are certainly not real war. But we actually think of arguments as a verbal battle that often involve anger, and even violence, which then structures how we argue.

To illustrate that this concept of argument is not universal, Lakoff suggests imagining a culture where an argument is not something to be won or lost, with no strategies for attacking or defending, but rather as a dance where the dancers' goal is to perform in an artful, pleasing way. No anger or violence would occur or even be relevant to speakers of this language, because the metaphor for that culture would be ARGUMENT IS DANCE.

NOTES

5. Trudy Ann Parker, Aunt Sarah, *Woman of the Dawnland* (Lancaster, NH, Dawnland Publications 1994), 56. ↵
6. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4-5. ↵

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5.7: Language In Its Social Setting

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

The way we speak can be seen as a marker of who we are and with whom we identify. We talk like the other people around us, where we live, our social class, our region of the country, our ethnicity, and even our gender. These categories are not homogeneous. All New Yorkers do not talk exactly the same; all women do not speak according to stereotypes: all African-Americans do not speak an African-American dialect. No one speaks the same way in all situations and contexts, but there are some consistencies in speaking styles that are associated with many of these categories.

Social Class

As discussed above, people can indicate social class by the way they speak. The closer to the standard version their dialect is, the more they are seen as a member of a higher social class because the dialect reflects a higher level of education. In American culture, social class is defined primarily by income and net worth, and it is difficult (but not impossible) to acquire wealth without a high level of education. However, the speech of people in the higher social classes also varies with the region of the country where they live, because there is no single standard of American English, especially with respect to pronunciation. An educated Texan will sound different from an educated Bostonian, but they will use the standard version of English from their own region. The lower the social class of a community, the more their language variety will differ from both the standard and from the vernaculars of other regions.

Ethnicity

An ethnicity, or ethnic group, is a group of people who identify with each other based on some combination of shared cultural heritage, ancestry, history, country of origin, language, or dialect. In the United States such groups are frequently referred to as "races," but there is no such thing as biological race, and this misconception has historically led to racism and discrimination. Because of the social implications and biological inaccuracy of the term "race," it is often more accurate and appropriate to use the terms ethnicity or ethnic group. A language variety is often associated with an ethnic group when its members use language as a marker of solidarity. They may also use it to distinguish themselves from a larger, sometimes oppressive, language group when they are a minority population.

A familiar example of an oppressed ethnic group with a distinctive dialect is African-Americans. They have a unique history among minorities in the United States, with their centuries-long experience as captive slaves and subsequent decades under Jim Crow laws. (These laws restricted their rights after their emancipation from slavery.) With the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and other laws, African-Americans gained legal rights to access public places and housing, but it is not possible to eliminate racism and discrimination only by passing laws; both still exist among the white majority. It is no longer "politically correct" to openly express racism, but it is much less frowned upon to express negative attitudes about African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Typically, it is not the language itself that these attitudes are targeting; it is the people who speak it.

As with any language variety, AAVE is a complex, rule-driven, grammatically consistent language variety, a dialect of American English with a distinctive history. A widely accepted hypothesis of the origins of AAVE is as follows. When Africans were captured and brought to the Americas, they brought their own languages with them. But some of them already spoke a version of English called a pidgin. A pidgin is a language that springs up out of a situation in which people who do not share a language must spend extended amounts of time together, usually in a working environment. Pidgins are the only exception to the Language Universal number 3 (all languages are systematic, rule-driven, and equally complex overall, and equally capable of expressing any idea that the speaker wishes to convey).

There are no primitive languages, but a **pidgin** is a simplified language form, cobbled together based mainly on one core language, in this case English, using a small number of phonemes, simplified syntactic rules, and a minimal lexicon of words borrowed from the other languages involved. A pidgin has no native speakers; it is used primarily in the environment in which it was created. An English-based pidgin was used as a common language in many areas of West Africa by traders interacting with people of numerous language groups up and down the major rivers. Some of the captive Africans could speak this pidgin, and it spread among them after the slaves arrived in North America and were exposed daily to English speakers. Eventually, the use of the pidgin expanded to the point that it developed into the original forms of what has been called a Black English plantation creole. A **creole** is a language that develops from a pidgin when it becomes so widely used that children acquire it as one of their first languages. In this situation, it becomes a more fully complex language consistent with Universal number 3.

Definition: pidgin

A simplified language that springs up out of a situation in which people who do not share a language must spend extended amounts of time together.

Definition: creole

A language that develops from a pidgin when the pidgin becomes so widely used that children acquire it as one of their first languages.

All African-Americans do not speak AAVE, and people other than African-Americans also speak it. Anyone who grows up in an area where their friends speak it may be a speaker of AAVE like the rapper Eminem, a white man who grew up in an African-American neighborhood in Detroit. Present-day AAVE is not homogeneous; there are many regional and class variations. Most variations have several features in common, for instance, two phonological features: the dropped /r/ typical of some New York dialects, and the pronunciation of the "*th*" sound of words like this and that as a /d/ sound, *dis* and *dat*. Most of the features of AAVE are also present in many other English dialects, but those dialects are not as severely stigmatized as AAVE is. It is interesting, but not surprising, that AAVE and southern dialects of white English share many features. During the centuries of slavery in the south, African-American slaves outnumbered whites on most plantations. Which group do you think had the most influence on the other group's speech? The African-American community itself is divided about the acceptability of AAVE. It is probably because of the historical oppression of African-Americans as a group that the dialect has survived to this day, in resistance to the majority white society's disapproval.

Language and Gender

In any culture that has differences in gender role expectations—and all cultures do—there are differences in how people talk based on their sex and gender identity. These differences have nothing to do with biology. Children are taught from birth how to behave appropriately as a male or a female in their culture, and different cultures have different standards of behavior. It must be noted that not all men and women in a society meet these standards, but when they do not they may pay a social price. Some societies are fairly tolerant of violations of their standards of gendered behavior, but others are less so.

In the United States, men are generally expected to speak in a low, rather monotone pitch; it is seen as masculine. If they do not sound sufficiently masculine, American men are likely to be negatively labeled as effeminate. Women, on the other hand, are freer to use their entire pitch range, which they often do when expressing emotion, especially excitement. When a woman is a television news announcer, she will modulate the pitch of her voice to a sound more typical of a man in order to be perceived as more credible. Women tend to use minimal responses in a conversation more than men. These are the vocal indications that one is listening to a speaker, such as *m-hm*, *yeah*, *I see*, *wow*, and so forth. They tend to face their conversation partners more and use more eye contact than men. This is one reason women often complain that men do not listen to them.

Deborah Tannen, a professor of linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., has done research for many years on language and gender. Her basic finding is that in conversation women tend to use styles that are relatively cooperative, to emphasize an equal relationship, while men seem to talk in a more competitive way in order to establish their positions in a hierarchy. She emphasizes that both men and women may be cooperative and competitive in different ways.[7]

Other societies have very different standards for gendered speech styles. In Madagascar, men use a very flowery style of talk, using proverbs, metaphors and riddles to indirectly make a point and to avoid direct confrontation. The women on the other hand speak bluntly and say directly what is on their minds. Both admire men's speech and think of women's speech as inferior. When a man wants to convey a negative message to someone, he will ask his wife to do it for him. In addition, women control the marketplaces where tourists bargain for prices because it is impossible to bargain with a man who will not speak directly. It is for this reason that Malagasy women are relatively independent economically.

In Japan, women were traditionally expected to be subservient to men and speak using a "feminine" style, appropriate for their position as wife and mother, but the Japanese culture has been changing in recent decades so more and more women are joining the workforce and achieving positions of relative power. Such women must find ways of speaking to maintain their feminine identities and at the same time express their authority in interactions with men, a challenging balancing act. Women in the United States do as well, to a certain extent. Even Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of England, took speech therapy lessons to "feminize" her language use while maintaining an expression of authority.

The Deaf Culture and Signed Languages

Deaf people constitute a linguistic minority in many societies worldwide based on their common experience of life. This often results in their identification with a local Deaf culture. Such a culture may include shared beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, and values, like any other culture, and it is invariably marked by communication through the use of a sign language. It is not enough to be physically deaf (spelled with a lower case “d”) to belong to a Deaf culture (written with a capital “D”). In fact, one does not even need to be deaf. Identification with a Deaf culture is a personal choice. It can include family members of deaf people or anyone else who associates with deaf people, as long as the community accepts them. Especially important, members of Deaf culture are expected to be competent communicators in the sign language of the culture. In fact, there have been profoundly deaf people who were not accepted into the local Deaf community because they could not sign. In some deaf schools, at least in the United States, the practice has been to teach deaf children how to lip read and speak orally, and to prevent them from using a signed system. They were expected to blend in with the hearing community as much as possible. This is called the **oralist approach** to education, but it is considered by members of the Deaf community to be a threat to the existence of their culture. For the same reason, the development of cochlear implants, which can restore hearing for some deaf children, has been controversial in U.S. Deaf communities. The members often have a positive attitude toward their deafness and do not consider it to be a disability. To them, regaining hearing represents disloyalty to the group and a desire to leave it.

Definition: oralist approach

An approach to the education of deaf children that emphasizes lip-reading and speaking orally while discouraging use of signed language.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf, there are over 200 distinct sign languages in the world, which are not mutually comprehensible. They are all considered by linguists to be true languages, consistent with linguistic definitions of all human languages. They differ only in the fact that they are based on a gestural-visual rather than a vocal-auditory sensory mode. Each is a true language with basic units comparable to phonemes but composed of hand positions, shapes, and movements, plus some facial expressions. Each has its own unique set of morphemes and grammatical rules. American Sign Language (ASL), too, is a true language separate from English; it is not English on the hands. Like all other signed languages, it is possible to sign with a word-for-word translation from English, using finger spelling for some words, which is helpful in teaching the deaf to read, but they prefer their own language, ASL, for ordinary interactions. Of course, Deaf culture identity intersects with other kinds of cultural identity, like nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation, so each Deaf culture is not only small but very diverse.

NOTE

7. For more information see Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996). Or, Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010). ↵

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5.8: Historical Linguistics

LANGUAGE CHANGE: HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

Recall the language universal stating that all languages change over time. In fact, it is not possible to keep them from doing so. How and why does this happen? The study of how languages change is known as **historical linguistics**. The processes, both historical and linguistic, that cause language change can affect all of its systems: phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic.

Definition: historical linguistics

The study of how languages change.

Historical linguists have placed most of the languages of the world into **taxonomies**, groups of languages classified together based on words that have the same or similar meanings. Language taxonomies create something like a family tree of languages. For example, words in the Romance family of languages, called sister languages, show great similarities to each other because they have all derived from the same "mother" language, Latin (the language of Rome). In turn, Latin is considered a "sister" language to Sanskrit (once spoken in India and now the mother language of many of India's modern languages, and still the language of the Hindu religion) and classical Greek. Their "mother" language is called "Indo-European," which is also the mother (or grandmother!) language of almost all the rest of European languages.

Definition: taxonomies

A system of classification; groups of languages classified together based on words that have the same or similar meanings.

Let's briefly examine the history of the English language as an example of these processes of change. England was originally populated by Celtic peoples, the ancestors of today's Irish, Scots, and Welsh. The Romans invaded the islands in the first-century AD, bringing their Latin language with them. This was the edge of their empire; their presence there was not as strong as it was on the European mainland. When the Roman Empire was defeated in about 500 AD by Germanic speaking tribes from northern Europe (the "barbarians"), a number of those related Germanic languages came to be spoken in various parts of what would become England. These included the languages of the Angles and the Saxons, whose names form the origin of the term Anglo-Saxon and of the name of England itself—Angle-land. At this point, the languages spoken in England included those Germanic languages, which gradually merged as various dialects of English, with a small influence from the Celtic languages, some Latin from the Romans, and a large influence from Viking invaders. This form of English, generally referred to as *Old English*, lasted for about 500 years. In 1066 AD, England was invaded by William the Conqueror from Normandy, France. New French rulers brought the French language. French is a Latin-based language, and it is by far the greatest source of the Latin-based words in English today; almost 10,000 French words were adopted into the English of the time period. This was the beginning of *Middle English*, which lasted another 500 years or so.

The change to *Modern English* had two main causes. One was the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth-century, which resulted in a deliberate effort to standardize the various dialects of English, mostly in favor of the dialect spoken by the elite. The other source of change, during the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries, was a major shift in the pronunciation of many of the vowels. Middle English words like *hus* and *ut* came to be pronounced *house* and *out*. Many other vowel sounds also changed in a similar manner.

None of the early forms of English are easily recognizable as English to modern speakers. Here is an example of the first two lines of the Lord's Prayer in Old English.

Transitioning to Modern English

From 995 AD, before the Norman Invasion:

Fæder ūre, ðū ðē eart on heofonum,
Sī ðīn nama gehālgod.

From the Wycliffe Bible in 1389 AD (1066 AD until about 1500 AD):

Our fadir that art in heuenes,
halwid be thi name. [8]

From the 1526 AD Tyndale Bible, following the late Middle English/early Modern English version:

O oure father which arte in heven,
halowed be thy name.

From the King James Version of the Bible, 1611 AD, in the early Modern English language of Shakespeare.

Our father which art in heauen,
hallowed be thy name.

Over the centuries since the beginning of Modern English, it has been further affected by exposure to other languages and dialects worldwide. This exposure brought about new words and changed meanings of old words. More changes to the sound systems resulted from phonological processes that may or may not be attributable to the influence of other languages. Many other changes, especially in recent decades, have been brought about by cultural and technological changes that require new vocabulary to deal with them.

Try This

Just think of all the words we use today that have either changed their primary meanings, or are completely new: mouse and mouse pad, Google, app, computer (which used to be a person who computes!), texting, cool, cell, gay. How many more can you think of?

GLOBALIZATION AND LANGUAGE

Globalization is the spread of people, their cultures and languages, products, money, ideas, and information around the world. Globalization is nothing new; it has been happening throughout the existence of humans, but for the last 500 years it has been increasing in its scope and pace, primarily due to improvements in transportation and communication. Beginning in the fifteenth-century, English explorers started spreading their language to colonies in all parts of the world. English is now one of the three or four most widely spoken languages. It has official status in at least 60 countries, and it is widely spoken in many others. Other colonizers also spread their languages, especially Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and Russian. Like English, each has its regional variants. One effect of colonization has often been the suppression of local languages in favor of the language of the more powerful colonizers.

In the past half-century, globalization has been dominated by the spread of North American popular culture and language to other countries. Today it is difficult to find a country that does not have American music, movies and television programs, or Coca Cola and McDonald's, or many other artifacts of life in the United States, and the English terms that go with them.

In addition, people are moving from rural areas to cities in their own countries, or they are migrating to other countries in unprecedented numbers. Many have moved because they are refugees fleeing violence, or they found it increasingly difficult to survive economically in their own countries. This mass movement of people has led to the on-going extinction of large numbers of the world's languages as people abandon their home regions and language in order to assimilate into their new homes.

NOTES

8. From Wikipedia: History of the Lord's Prayer in English. ↵

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5.9: Language Death, Revitalization and the Digital Age

LANGUAGE SHIFT, LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE, AND LANGUAGE DEATH

Of the approximately 6,000 languages still surviving today, about half the world's more than seven billion people speak only ten. These include Mandarin Chinese, two languages from India, Spanish, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, and German. Many of the rest of the world's languages are spoken by a few thousand people, or even just a few hundred, and most of them are threatened with extinction, called **language death**. It has been predicted that by the end of this century up to 90 percent of the languages spoken today will be gone. The rapid disappearance of so many languages is of great concern to linguists and anthropologists alike. When a language is lost, its associated culture and unique set of knowledge and worldview are lost with it forever. Remember Whorf's hypothesis. An interesting website shows short videos of the last speakers of several endangered languages, including one speaking an African "click language."

Definition: language death

The total extinction of a language.

Some minority languages are not threatened with extinction, even those that are spoken by a relatively small number of people. Others, spoken by many thousands, may be doomed. What determines which survive and which do not? Smaller languages that are associated with a specific country are likely to survive. Others that are spoken across many national boundaries are also less threatened, such as Quechua, an indigenous language spoken throughout much of South America, including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina. The great majority of the world's languages are spoken by people with minority status in their countries. After all, there are only about 193 countries in the world, and over 6,000 languages are spoken in them. You can do the math.

The survival of the language of a given speech community is ultimately based on the accumulation of individual decisions by its speakers to continue using it or to abandon it. The abandonment of a language in favor of a new one is called **language shift**. These decisions are usually influenced by the society's prevailing attitudes. In the case of a minority speech community that is surrounded by a more powerful majority, an individual might keep or abandon the native language depending on a complex array of factors. The most important factors will be the attitudes of the minority people toward themselves and their language, and the attitude of the majority toward the minority.

Definition: language shift

When a community stops using their old language and adopts a new one.

Language represents a marker of identity, an emblem of group membership and solidarity, but that marker may have a downside as well. If the majority look down on the minority as inferior in some way and discriminates against them, some members of the minority group may internalize that attitude and try to blend in with the majority by adopting the majority's culture and language. Others might more highly value their identity as a member of that stigmatized group, in spite of the discrimination by the majority, and continue to speak their language as a symbol of resistance against the more powerful group. One language that is a minority language when spoken in the United States and that shows no sign of dying out either there or in the world at large, is Spanish. It is the primary language in many countries and in the United States it is by far the largest minority language.



Figure 5.9.1: James Kim with his brother.

A former student of mine, James Kim (pictured in Figure 5.9.1 as a child with his brother), illustrates some of the common dilemmas a child of immigrants might go through as he loses his first language. Although he was born in California, he spoke only Korean for the first six years of his life. Then he went to school, where he was the only Korean child in his class. He quickly learned English, the language of instruction and the language of his classmates. Under peer pressure, he began refusing to speak Korean, even to his parents, who spoke little English. His parents tried to encourage him to keep his Korean language and culture by sending him to Korean school on Saturdays, but soon he refused to attend. As a college student, James began to regret the loss of the language of his parents, not to mention his relationship with them. He tried to take a college class in Korean, but it was too difficult and time consuming. After consulting with me, he created a six-minute radio piece, called "First Language Attrition: Why My Parents

and I Don't Speak the Same Language," while he was an intern at a National Public Radio station. He interviewed his parents in the piece and was embarrassed to realize he needed an interpreter.[9] Since that time, he has started taking Korean lessons again, and he took his first trip to Korea with his family during the summer of 2014. He was very excited about the prospect of reconnecting with his culture, with his first language, and especially with his parents.

The Korean language as a whole is in no danger of extinction, but many Korean speaking communities of immigrants in the United States, like other minority language groups in many countries, are having difficulty maintaining their language and culture. Those who are the most successful live in large, geographically coherent neighborhoods; they maintain closer ties to their homeland by frequent visits, telephone, and email contact with relatives. There may also be a steady stream of new immigrants from the home country. This is the case with most Spanish speaking communities in the United States, but it is less so with the Korean community.[10]

Another example of an oppressed minority group that has struggled with language and culture loss is Native Americans. Many were completely wiped out by the European colonizers, some by deliberate genocide but the great majority (up to 90 percent) by the diseases that the white explorers brought with them, against which the Native Americans had no immunity. In the twentieth-century, the American government stopped trying to kill Native Americans but instead tried to assimilate them into the white majority culture. It did this in part by forcing Native American children to go to boarding schools where they were required to cut their hair, practice Christianity, and speak only English. When they were allowed to go back home years later, they had lost their languages and their culture, but had not become culturally "white" either. The status of Native Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries as a scorned minority prompted many to hide their ethnic identities even from their own children. In this way, the many hundreds of original Native American languages in the United States have dwindled to less than 140 spoken today, according to UNESCO. More than half of those could disappear in the next few years, since many are spoken by only a handful of older members of their tribes. However, a number of Native American tribes have recently been making efforts to revive their languages and cultures, with the help of linguists and often by using texts and old recordings made by early linguists like Edward Sapir.

REVITALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

A fascinating example of a tribal language revitalization program is that of the Wampanoag tribe in Massachusetts. The Wampanoag were the Native Americans who met the Puritans when they landed at Plymouth Rock, helped them survive the first winter, and who were with them at the first Thanksgiving. The contemporary descendants of that historic tribe still live in Massachusetts, but bringing back their language was not something Wampanoag people had ever thought possible because no one had spoken it for more than a century.

A young Wampanoag woman named Jessie Little Doe Baird (pictured in Figure 5.9.2 with her daughter Mae) was inspired by a series of dreams in which her ancestors spoke to her in their language, which she of course did not understand. She eventually earned a master's degree in Algonquian linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston and launched a project to bring her language back from the dead. This process was made possible by the existence of a large collection of documents, including copies of the King James Bible, written phonetically in Wampanoag during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. She also worked with speakers of languages related to the Algonquian family to help in the reconstruction of the language. The community has established a school to teach the language to the children and promote its use among the entire community. Her daughter Mae is among the first new native speakers of Wampanoag.[11]



Figure 5.9.2: Jessie Little Doe Baird with daughter Mae.

HOW IS THE DIGITAL AGE CHANGING COMMUNICATION?

The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth-century was just the beginning of technological transformations that made the spread of information in European languages and ideas possible across time and space using the printed word. Recent advances in travel and digital technology are rapidly transforming communication; now we can be in contact with almost anyone, anywhere, in seconds. However, it could be said that the new age of instantaneous access to everything and everyone is actually continuing a social divide that started with the printing press.

In the fifteenth-century, few people could read and write, so only the tiny educated minority were in a position to benefit from printing. Today, only those who have computers and the skills to use them, the educated and relatively wealthy, have access to this

brave new world of communication. Some schools have adopted computers and tablets for their students, but these schools are more often found in wealthier neighborhoods. Thus, technology is continuing to contribute to the growing gap between the economic haves and the have-nots.

There is also a digital generation gap between the young, who have grown up with computers, and the older generations, who have had to learn to use computers as adults. These two generations have been referred to as digital natives and digital immigrants.[12] The difference between the two groups can be compared to that of children versus adults learning a new language; learning is accomplished much more easily by the young.

Computers, and especially social media, have made it possible for millions of people to connect with each other for purposes of political activism, including "Occupy Wall Street" in the United States and the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East. Some anthropologists have introduced computers and cell phones to the people they studied in remote areas, and in this way they were able to stay in contact after finishing their ethnographic work. Those people, in turn, were now able to have greater access to the outside world.

Facebook and Twitter are becoming key elements in the survival of a number of endangered indigenous languages. Facebook is now available in over 70 languages, and Twitter in about 40 languages. For example, a website has been created that seeks to preserve Anishinaabemowin, an endangered Native American language from Michigan. The language has 8,000-10,000 speakers, but most of the native speakers are over 70 years old, which means the language is threatened with extinction. Modern social media are an ideal medium to help encourage young people to communicate in their language to keep it alive.[13] Clearly, language and communication through modern technology are in the forefront of a rapidly changing world, for better or for worse. It's anybody's guess what will happen next.

NOTES

9. You can hear the 6-minute piece at http://www.scpr.org/programs/offramp/2012/04/05/25912/first-language-attrition-why-my-parents-and-i-dont/↵
10. From François Grosjean, *Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), chapter two. ↵
11. Filmmaker Anne Makepeace created a documentary of the story, called *We Still Live Here: Âs Nutayuneân*, which PBS broadcast in 2010. You can watch the clips from the video online. ↵
12. Terms first coined by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Native* (New York, Basic Books, 2008). ↵
13. Lydia Emmanouilidou, For Rare Languages, Social Media Provide New Hope. http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/07/26/333732206/for-rare-languages-social-media-provide-new-hope↵

IMAGE CREDITS

Figure 5.9.2. Jessie Little Doe Baird with daughter Mae. Photo courtesy of Cultural Survival and Make Peace Productions

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5.10: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. How do you think modern communication technologies like cell phones and computers are changing how people communicate? Is the change positive or negative?
2. How is language related to social and economic inequality? Do you think that attitudes about language varieties have affected you and/or your family?
3. How has the use of specific terms in the news helped to shape public opinion? For example, what are the different implications of the terms terrorist versus freedom fighter? Downsizing versus firing staff at a company? Euphemistic terms used in reference to war include friendly fire, pacification, collateral damage? Can you think of other examples?
4. Think about the different styles you use when speaking to your siblings and parents, your friends, your significant other, your professors, your grandparents. What are some of the specific differences among these styles? What do these differences indicate about the power relationships between you and others?

GLOSSARY

Arbitrariness: the relationship between a symbol and its referent (meaning), in which there is no obvious connection between them.

Closed communication system: a form of communication that cannot create new meanings or messages; it can only convey pre-programmed (innate) messages.

Code-switching: using two or more language varieties in a particular interaction.

Creole: a language that develops from a pidgin when the pidgin becomes so widely used that children acquire it as one of their first languages.

Critical Age Range Hypothesis: research suggesting that a child will gradually lose the ability to acquire language naturally and without effort if he or she is not exposed to other people speaking a language until past the age of puberty. This applies to the acquisition of a second language as well.

Cultural transmission: the need for some aspects of the system to be learned; a feature of some species'communication systems.

Descriptive linguistics: the study of the structure of language.

Dialect: a variety of speech. The term is often applied to a subordinate variety of a language. Speakers of two dialects of the same language do not necessarily always understand each other.

Discreteness: a feature of human speech that they can be isolated from others.

Displacement: the ability to communicate about things that are outside of the here and now.

Gesture-call system: a system of non-verbal communication using varying combinations of sound, body language, scent, facial expression, and touch, typical of great apes and other primates, as well as humans.

Historical linguistics: the study of how languages change.

Interchangeability: the ability of all individuals of the species to both send and receive messages; a feature of some species' communication systems.

Kinesics: the study of all forms of human body language.

Language: an idealized form of speech, usually referred to as the standard variety.

Language death: the total extinction of a language.

Language shift: when a community stops using their old language and adopts a new one.

Language universals: characteristics shared by all languages.

Lexicon: the vocabulary of a language.

Linguistic relativity: the idea that the structures and words of a language influence how its speakers think, how they behave, and ultimately the culture itself (also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis).

Morphemes: the basic meaningful units in a language.

Open communication system: a form of communication that can create an infinite number of new messages; a feature of human language only.

Oralist approach: an approach to the education of deaf children that emphasizes lip-reading and speaking orally while discouraging the use of signed language.

Paralanguage: those characteristics of speech beyond the actual words spoken, such as pitch, loudness, tempo.

Phonemes: the basic meaningless sounds of a language.

Pidgin: a simplified language that springs up out of a situation in which people who do not share a language must spend extended amounts of time together.

Pragmatic Function: all signs serve a useful purpose in the life of the users, from survival functions to influencing others' behavior.

Pragmatics: how social context contributes to meaning in an interaction.

Productivity/creativity: the ability to produce and understand messages that have never been expressed before.

Proxemics: the study of the social use of space, including the amount of space an individual tries to maintain around himself in his interactions with others.

Register: a style of speech that varies depending on who is speaking to whom and in what context.

Semanticity: signs carry meaning for users

Semantics: how meaning is conveyed at the word and phrase level.

Standard language: the variant of any language that has been given special prestige in the community.

Syntax: the rules by which a language combines morphemes into larger units.

Taxonomies: a system of classification.

Universal grammar (UG): a theory developed by linguist Noam Chomsky suggesting that a basic template for all human languages is embedded in our genes.

Vernaculars: non-standard varieties of a language, which are usually distinguished from the standard by their inclusion of stigmatized forms.

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5.11: About the Author

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Linda Light has been a lecturer in linguistic and cultural anthropology at California State University Long Beach since 1995. During much of that period she also taught as adjunct professor at Cypress College, Santa Ana College, Rancho Santiago College, and Golden West College, all in Orange County, California. She was a consultant to Coastline Community College District in the production of thirty-five educational videos that were used in three series, including the cultural anthropology series Our Diverse World. Her main areas of interest have been indigenous language loss and maintenance, language and gender, and first language attrition in the children of immigrants.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Subsistence

Learning Objectives

- Identify the four modes of subsistence and describe the major activities associated with obtaining food in each system.
- Explain the difference between wild and domesticated resources and how plants and animals are domesticated.
- Explain the relationship between the subsistence system used in a society and the amount of private property or wealth differences that develop.
- Assess the ways in which subsistence systems are linked to expectations about gender roles.
- Categorize the social and economic characteristics associated with agriculture and describe the benefits and drawbacks of the agricultural subsistence system.
- Analyze the ways in which the global agricultural system separates producers from consumers and contributes to wealth differences.
- Appraise the ways in which human intervention in the environment has made it difficult to separate the “natural” from the human-influenced environment.

6.1: Subsistence Systems
6.2: Foraging
6.3: Pastoralism
6.4: Horticulture
6.5: Agriculture
6.6: The Global Agriculture System
6.7: End of Chapter Discussion
6.8: About the Author

Image: Rice cultivation in Banyumas, Central Java. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Wie146).

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6.1: Subsistence Systems

Think about the last meal you ate. Where did the ingredients come from? If it was a cheeseburger, where did the cow live and die? Now think about all the food you consume in a normal week. Can you identify the geographic origin of all the ingredients? In other words, how much do you know about the trip your food took to arrive at your plate? How much you know about where your food comes from would tell an anthropologist something about the **subsistence system** used in your community. A subsistence system is the set of practices used by members of a society to acquire food. If you are like me and you cannot say much about where your food comes from, then you are part of an agricultural society that separates food production from consumption, a recent development in the history of humans. People who come from non-agricultural societies have a more direct connection to their food and are likely to know where 100 percent of their food comes from.

Definition: subsistence system

The set of skills, practices, and technologies used by members of a society to acquire and distribute food.

Finding food each day is a necessity for every person no matter where that person lives, but food is not just a matter of basic survival. Humans assign symbolic meaning to food, observing cultural norms about what is considered "good" to eat and applying taboos against the consumption of other foods. Catholics may avoid meat during Lent, for instance, while Jewish and Islamic communities forbid the consumption of certain foods such as pork. In addition to these attitudes and preferences, every society has preferred methods for preparing food and for consuming it with others. The cultural norms and attitudes surrounding food and eating are known as **foodways**. By studying both the subsistence system used by a society to acquire food and the foodway associated with consuming it, anthropologists gain insight into the most important daily tasks in every society.

Definition: foodways

The cultural norms and attitudes surrounding food and eating.

STUDYING SUBSISTENCE SYSTEM

Since the need to eat is one of the few true human universals, anthropologists have studied subsistence systems from a variety of perspectives. One way to think about the importance of food for human populations is to consider the number of calories an individual must obtain every day in order to survive. Anthropologists use the term **carrying capacity** to quantify the number of calories that can be extracted from a particular unit of land to support a human population. In his 1798 publication *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Thomas Malthus argued, "the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man."[1] He suggested that human populations grow at an exponential rate, meaning the population climbs at a rate that is constantly increasing. However, the availability of resources in the environment increases at only an arithmetic rate, which means that left unchecked human populations would soon outstrip the environment's ability to provide sustenance. Malthus famously argued that war, famine, and disease were "good" or at least "functional" in the sense that they kept populations from growing too large.

Definition: carrying capacity

A measurement of the number of calories that can be extracted from a particular unit of land in order to support a human population.

While Malthus presented a grim view of humanity's future, research suggests that the rate of human population growth, currently about one percent per year, is actually slowing. It is also not necessarily true that population growth has an entirely negative impact on human communities. The Danish economist Ester Boserup, for example, argued that human history reveals a connection between population growth and cultural innovation, particularly innovation in farming techniques. Because necessity is the mother of invention, she reasoned, the pressure of having more mouths to feed could be the dynamic that drives societies to develop new solutions.[2]

Modern anthropological studies of subsistence systems draw on insights and perspectives from several different fields, including biology, chemistry, and ecology, as well as a range of ethnographic techniques. This interdisciplinary perspective allows for cross-cultural comparison of human diets. In several decades of anthropological research on subsistence systems, anthropologists have observed that the quest for food affects almost every aspect of daily life. For instance, every person plays a role in society as a



Figure 6.1.1: Carrying Capacity: The area in the orange box, which is not under cultivation, might provide enough resources for a family of four to survive for a year. An equivalent area, marked by the blue box, could provide enough resources for a significantly larger population under intensive agricultural cultivation.

producer, distributor, or consumer of food. In the journey of a fish from the sea to the plate, for instance, we can see that in some societies, the same person can fill more than one of those roles, while in other societies there is more specialization. In a small fishing village, the same person might catch the fish, distribute some extra to friends and family, and then consume the bounty that same day. In a city, the consumer of the fish at a fancy restaurant is not the same person who caught the fish. In fact, that person almost certainly has no knowledge who caught, cleaned, distributed, and prepared the fish he or she is consuming. The web of social connections that we can trace through subsistence provide a very particular kind of anthropological insight into how societies function at their most basic level.



Figure 6.1.2: These images show how fish are harvested in two different subsistence systems. Consider the amount of investment and labor that went into the development of technologies that make mass fish farming, or aquaculture, possible compared to fishing with simple nets.

Modes of Subsistence

Like all human systems, a society's subsistence system is intricately linked to other aspects of culture such as kinship, politics, and religion. Although we can study these systems in isolation, it is important to remember that in the real world all aspects of culture overlap in complex ways. Consider harvest rituals, for example, which are religious ceremonies focused on improving the food supply. These rituals are shaped by religious beliefs as well as the demands and challenges of obtaining food. Likewise, subsistence systems are the economic base of every society. Working to put food on the table is the essential task of every family or household, and this work is the basis of a **domestic economy** that interacts with the modes of production and modes of exchange described in the Economics chapter.

Definition: domestic economy

The work associated with obtaining food for a family or household.

When anthropologists first began to examine subsistence systems, they started like all scientists do, with classification. Early on, anthropologists saw the benefit of grouping similar societies into types, or categories, based on the range of practices they used in the quest for food. These groupings allowed for comparisons between cultures. At a basic level, societies can be divided into those that have an **immediate return system** for finding food and those that use a **delayed return system**. The residents of a small fishing village who eat the fish they catch each day have an immediate return on their labor. Farmers who must wait several months between the time they plant seeds and the time they harvest have a delayed return system.

Definition: immediate return system

Techniques for obtaining food in which the food acquired can be immediately consumed. Foraging is an immediate return system.

Definition: delayed return system

Techniques for obtaining food that require an investment of work over a period of time before the food becomes available for consumption. Farming is a delayed return system due to the passage of time between planting and harvest.

Beyond this basic division, anthropologists recognize four general types of food system known as **modes of subsistence**. The four modes of subsistence are foraging, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture. Each mode is defined by the tasks involved in obtaining food as well as the way members of the society are organized socially to accomplish these tasks. Because each mode of subsistence is tailored to particular ecological conditions, we can think of each culture's subsistence system as an adaptation, or a set of survival strategies uniquely developed to suit a particular environment. Because culture shapes the way we view and interact with the environment, different societies can adapt to similar environments in different ways. Foraging, sometimes known as hunting and gathering, describes societies that rely primarily on "wild" plant and animal food resources. Pastoralism is a subsistence system in which people raise herds of domesticated livestock. Horticulture is the small-scale cultivation of crops intended primarily for subsistence. Agriculture, the subsistence system used in the United States, involves the cultivation of domesticated plants and animals using technologies that allow for intensive use of the land. Can all societies be categorized neatly into one of these modes? No. In fact, almost every society combines one or more of these strategies into their subsistence practices. For example, in the United States there are individuals who participate in all of these subsistence modes, including foraging. When anthropologists analyze a subsistence system, they look for the dominant mode of subsistence, or the most typical way that members of a society procure food. So, while some people in the United States grow their own food or hunt wild animals, the dominant mode of subsistence is agriculture, and people obtain food primarily by purchasing it.

Definition: modes of subsistence

The techniques used by the members of a society to obtain food. Anthropologists classify subsistence into four broad categories: foraging, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture.

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6.2: Foraging

> *"Why should we plant, when there are so many mongongos in the world?"*
> *-/Xashe, !Kung forager*[3]

Foraging is a mode of subsistence defined by its reliance on wild plant and animal food resources already available in the environment rather than on domesticated species that have been altered by human intervention. Foragers use a remarkable variety of practices to procure meals. Hunting for animal protein is central to the foraging lifestyle and foragers capture and consume a wide variety of animals, from squirrels caught with a bow and arrow or blow dart to buffalo once killed by the dozens in communal hunts. Fishing for marine resources forms the basis for acquiring protein in many foraging communities and includes a range of practices from exploiting coastal shellfish and crab, to harvesting offshore resources such as deep-sea fish and marine mammals such as whales and seals. Augmenting the protein from hunting or fishing, gathered wild plant resources, such as fruits, nuts, roots, tubers, and berries typically provide a large percentage of the calories that go into any meal. Gathering requires expert knowledge of where plant resources can be found, when they will be best to harvest, and how to prepare them for consumption. Foraging is the only immediate return subsistence system.

Definition: foraging

A subsistence system that relies on wild plant and animal food resources. This system is sometimes called "hunting and gathering."

Foraging societies tend to have what is called a **broad spectrum diet**: a diet based on a wide range of resources. Many of the foods regularly eaten by foragers, such as insects and worms, would not necessarily be considered edible by many people in the United States. For example, many people do not know that earthworms are a good source of iron and high-quality protein, roughly equivalent to eggs, but that is exactly what anthropologists learned by studying the diet of foraging societies in Venezuela.[4] Foragers are scientists of their own ecosystems, having acquired extensive knowledge of the natural world through experience that allows them to exploit many kinds of food resources. The Aché, a foraging group living in the subtropical rainforest in Paraguay, eat 33 different kinds of mammals, more than 15 species of fish, the adult forms of 5 insects, 10 types of larvae, and at least 14 kinds of honey. This is in addition to finding and collecting 40 species of plants.[5] The !Kung foragers, who live in the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa, treasure the mongongo nut, which is tasty, high in protein, and abundant for most of the year, but they also hunt giraffes, six species of antelope, and many kinds of smaller game like porcupine.[6]

Definition: broad spectrum diet

A diet based on a wide range of food resources.

In general, foraging societies are small, with low population densities of less than 5 people per square mile. Large families and communities are not necessarily desirable since more mouths to feed can equate to increased pressure to find food. Another factor that contributes to a lower population density is the fact that it is more difficult for the young and the elderly to participate in food procurement. Children only gradually acquire the skills necessary to successfully find food and generally do not make significant contributions to the group until their teenage years. Likewise, elders who can no longer produce enough food themselves expect to be cared for by others.[7]

One important hallmark of foraging societies is their egalitarian social structure. Stark differences in wealth, which characterize many societies, are rare in foraging communities. One reason for this is that foragers have a different perspective on private property. Foraging societies tend to move their camps frequently to exploit various resources, so holding on to a lot of personal possessions or "wealth" is impractical. Foragers also place a high cultural value on generosity. Sharing of food and other resources is a social norm and a measure of a person's goodness. Those who resist sharing what they have with others will be ridiculed, or could even become social outcasts.[8] Over the long term, daily habits of giving and receiving reinforce social equality. This practice is also an important survival strategy that helps groups get through times of food scarcity.

Though foragers have high levels of social equality, not everyone is treated exactly the same. Gender inequality exists in many communities and develops from the fact that work among foragers is often divided along gender lines. Some jobs, such as hunting large animals, belong to men whose success in hunting gives them high levels of respect and prestige. While women do hunt in many communities and often contribute the majority of the group's food through gathering, their work tends not to be as socially

prestigious.[9] Likewise, elders in foraging communities tend to command respect and enjoy a higher social status, particularly if they have skills in healing or ritual activities.

RULE-BREAKING FORAGERS

Nomadic lifestyles are the norm for most foragers, but there have been some societies that have broken this rule and developed large-scale sedentary societies. This was possible in areas with abundant natural resources, most often fish. Historically, fishing formed the foundation of large-scale foraging societies in Peru, the Pacific Northwest (the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw), and Florida (the Calusa). These societies all developed advanced fishing technologies that provided enough food surplus that some people could stop participating in food procurement activities.

The Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw of the Pacific Northwest provide an excellent example. In that region, the salmon that spawn in the rivers are so abundant that they could support sedentary populations of a size that would normally be associated with intensive agriculture. Because there was a surplus of food, some members of society were able to pursue other full-time occupations or specializations such as working as artisans or even becoming "chiefs." This led to wealth differences and social inequality that would not normally be found in a foraging community. Conscious of the corrosive effect of wealth and status differences on their community, the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw developed a tradition of potlatch, a kind of "extreme gift-giving" to neutralize some of these tensions.

ASSESSING THE FORAGING LIFESTYLE

In 1651, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes became one of the first scholars to comment on foragers, describing their lifestyle as "nasty, brutish, and short." We now realize that his viewpoint was colored by ethnocentrism and, more specifically, Eurocentrism. Hobbes, as well as many scholars that came after him, viewed Western societies as the pinnacle of social evolution and viewed less technologically advanced societies as deficient, antiquated, or primitive, a perspective that persisted well into the twentieth century.

In the 1960s, the anthropological perspective on foragers changed when Marshall Sahlins suggested that these communities were "the original affluent society." He argued that foragers had an idyllic life, in which only a small percentage of the day was spent "working," or acquiring resources, and most of the day was spent in leisure and socializing, leading to stronger community and family bonds:

> *Hunter-gatherers consume less energy per capita per year than any other group of human beings. Yet when you come to examine it the original affluent society was none other than the hunter's—in which all the people's material wants were easily satisfied. To accept that hunters are affluent is therefore to recognize that the present human condition of man slaving to bridge the gap between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means is a tragedy of modern times.*[10]

Today anthropologists recognize that foraging, far from being primitive, is one of the most effective and dynamic subsistence systems humans have ever developed, yet Sahlins' conception of the original affluent society is overly romantic. Foraging is a challenging lifestyle; some groups spend up to 70 hours per week collecting food. The amount of leisure time and relative comfort of the foraging lifestyle vary significantly based on differences in the availability of food and environmental conditions.[11]

Contemporary studies of foraging also recognize that foragers have rarely lived in isolation. Throughout the world, foragers have lived near farming populations for hundreds or even thousands of years. Conflicts and competition for resources with non-foraging societies have characterized the foraging experience and foragers, with their relatively small population size and limited technology, have often been on the losing end of these confrontations. Government policies containing foragers to small "reservation" areas or forcing them to settle in towns have had catastrophic effects on foragers, as has the destruction through agricultural and industrial development of the ecosystems on which many groups once depended. A sad worldwide pattern of exploitation and marginalization is the reason that many foragers today live in dwindling communities in marginal ecological zones.[12]

The Built Environment and Domesticated Landscapes

None of us live in a natural environment. Current research on the causes of global climate change have demonstrated that humans are having a profound effect on the Earth and its ecosystems, but it would be a mistake to conclude that human effects on the environment are a recent development. Humans have been making environmental alterations for a long time and we have been engaged in a process of domesticating the planet for several thousand years. For this reason, no part of the planet can really be considered 100 percent "natural." When anthropologists study subsistence, they gain a window into the ways in which cultures have co-evolved with their environments, a field of study known as **historical ecology**. Analysis of the ways in which cultures and the environment are mutually interconnected, demonstrates that there is no way to separate the "natural" world from the human-influenced world, or what anthropologists refer to as the **built environment**.

Definition: historical ecology

The study of how human cultures have developed over time as a result of interactions with the environment.

Definition: built environment

Spaces that are human-made, including cultivated land as well as buildings.

This can be seen by considering the historical ecology of the Nukak, a group of foragers who live in the Amazon rainforest near the headwaters of the Rio Negro along the southern border between Colombia and Venezuela and whose subsistence demonstrates the blurry line between foraging and agriculture and "natural" and "domesticated." The Nukak are a small linguistic and ethnic group who are part of the larger culture known as Makú. The Nukak were the last among the Makú to be contacted by the outside world and perhaps owing to this fact, they practice the most "traditional" way of life. The Nukak were not known to the public at large until 1988, when a group of 41 individuals came in contact with a school in the rural town of Calamar, in southeastern Colombia.

The Nukak are a highly mobile group of foragers who make an average of between 70 and 80 residential moves a year. The frequency of their moves changes seasonally: infrequent short-distance moves in the wet season, and more frequent long-distance moves occurring in the dry season. Anthropologist Gustavo Politis, who spent years living with the Nukak, observed that the Nukak will never occupy the same camp twice, even if they are moving to an area where an old camp is still in good shape. When they establish a camp, they remove all the light brush and some of the medium-sized trees, leaving a few medium-sized trees and all the large trees intact.

Due to the selective nature of the forest clearing, a habitat, which can most readily be described as a "wild orchard," is produced. This wild orchard offers nearly perfect conditions for the germination and growth of seeds because the large trees provide enough shade to prevent the invasion of vines and shrubs. As the Nukak use the camp and consume fruit they have gathered, they discard the uneaten portions, including the seeds. Significantly, the kinds of fruit the Nukak tend to eat in their camps are the ones that have hard outer seed cases. Once discarded in a Nukak campsite, these seeds have a higher chance of germinating and growing in the abandoned camp than they do in other parts of the rainforest. The result is that Nukak territory is peppered with wild orchards that have high concentrations of edible plants, and the forest reflects a pattern of human intervention long after the Nukak have departed.[13]

The Nukak are an important case study in the Amazon for a number of reasons. They are a testament to the ability of small foraging groups to domesticate landscapes in active ways that greatly increase the productivity of the environment. They do this even though they are not "farmers" and will not always utilize the resources they help create. In addition, the Nukak demonstrate that no place in the Amazon can be considered *pristine* if a group such as the Nukak have ever lived there. The same can be said for the rest of the planet.

The Domestication of the Dog and Cooperative Hunting

Although the transition from foraging to agriculture is often described as the Agricultural Revolution, archaeological evidence suggests this change took a long time. The earliest species humans chose to domesticate were often not staple crops such as wheat, corn, rice, or cows, but utilitarian species. For instance, bottle gourds were domesticated for use as water containers before the invention of pottery. Dogs were domesticated as early as 15,000 years ago in eastern Asia from their wild ancestor the wolf. Although it is unlikely that dogs were an important source of food, they did play a role in subsistence by aiding humans who relied on hunting the Ice Age megafauna such as wooly mammoths. Dogs played such a critical role in hunting that some archaeologists

believe they may have contributed to the eventual extinction of the woolly mammoths.[14] Dogs were also valued for their role as watchdogs capable of protecting the community from predators and invaders.



Figure 6.2.1: The woolly mammoth was hunted to extinction in North America at the end of the last ice age. It is likely that dogs played a critical role in hunting these and other large game animals.

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6.3: Pastoralism

> *"To us, a co-wife is something very good, because there is much work to do. When it rains … the village gets mucky. And it's you who clears it out. It's you who … looks after the cows. You do the milking … and your husband may have very many cows. That's a lot of work… So Maasai aren't jealous because of all this work."*
> *– Maiyani, Maasai woman* [15]

Pastoralism is a subsistence system that relies on herds of domesticated livestock. Over half of the world's pastoralists reside in Africa, but there are also large pastoralist populations in Central Asia, Tibet, and arctic Scandinavia and Siberia. The need to supply grazing fields and water for the livestock requires moving several times a year. For that reason, this subsistence system is sometimes referred to as nomadic pastoralism. In Africa, for instance, a nomadic lifestyle is an adaptation to the frequent periods of drought that characterize the region and put stress on the grazing pastures. Pastoralists may also follow a nomadic lifestyle for other reasons such as avoiding competition and conflict with neighbors or avoiding government restrictions.

Definition: pastoralism

A subsistence system in which people raise herds of domesticated livestock.

Pastoralists can raise a range of different animals, although most often they raise herd animals such as cows, goats, sheep, and pigs. In some parts of South America, alpaca and llama have been domesticated for centuries to act as beasts of burden, much like camels, horses, and donkeys are used in Asia and Africa. Pastoralists who raise alpacas, donkeys, or camels, animals not typically considered food, demonstrate an important point about the pastoralist subsistence system. The goal of many pastoralists is not to produce animals to slaughter for meat, but instead to use other resources such as milk, which can be transformed into butter, yogurt, and cheese, or products like fur or wool, which can be sold. Even animal dung is useful as an alternate source of fuel and can be used as an architectural product to seal the roofs of houses. In some pastoral societies, milk and milk products comprise between 60 and 65 percent of the total caloric intake. However, very few, if any, pastoralist groups survive by eating only animal products. Trade with neighboring farming communities helps pastoralists obtain a more balanced diet and gives them access to grain and other items they do not produce on their own.



Figure 6.3.1: A Typical Maasai Herd: Although women do most of the work of tending the herd, only men are allowed to own cattle

A community of animal herders has different labor requirements compared to a foraging community. Caring for large numbers of animals and processing their products requires a tremendous amount of work, chores that are nonexistent in foraging societies. For pastoralists, daily chores related to caring for livestock translate into a social world structured as much around the lives of animals as around the lives of people.

The Maasai, a society of east African pastoralists whose livelihood depends on cows, have been studied extensively by anthropologists. Among the Maasai, domestic life is focused almost entirely around tasks and challenges associated with managing

the cattle herds. Like many pastoralist communities, the Maasai measure wealth and social status according to the number of animals a person owns. However, raising cattle requires so much work that no one has the ability to do these jobs entirely on his or her own. For the Maasai, the solution is to work together in family units organized around polygynous marriages. A household with multiple wives and large numbers of children will have more labor power available for raising animals.

PASTORALISM AND GENDER DYNAMICS

The example of the Maasai demonstrates the extent to which a subsistence system can structure gender roles and the division of labor between the sexes. In Maasai society, women do almost all of the work with the cows, from milking several times each day to clearing the muck the cows produce. Despite doing much of the daily work with cattle, Maasai women are not permitted to own cattle. Instead, the cattle belong to the men, and women are given only "milking rights" that allow them to use the products of the female animals and to assign these animals to their sons. Men make all decisions about slaughtering, selling, and raising the cattle. Lack of cattle ownership means that women do not have the same opportunities as men to build wealth or gain social status and the woman's role in Maasai society is subordinate to man's. This same pattern is repeated in many pastoralist societies, with women valued primarily for the daily labor they can provide and for their role as mothers.

While women lack the political and economic power enjoyed by Maasai men, they do exercise some forms of power within their own households and among other women. They support each other in the daily hard work of managing both cattle and domestic responsibilities, for instance sharing in childcare, a practice based on the belief that "men care about cattle while women care about children."[16] Because most marriages are arranged by elders, it is common for women to engage in love affairs with other men, but women keep each other's secrets; telling anyone about another woman's adultery would be considered an absolute betrayal of solidarity. Women who resist their husband's authority by having love affairs are also resisting larger claims of male authority and ownership over them.[17]

PASTORALISM AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

As discussed previously, foragers tend to have little private property. Obtaining food from the natural environment and living a highly mobile lifestyle does not provide the right conditions for hoarding wealth, while the strong value on sharing present in foraging communities also limits wealth differences. Pastoralists, in contrast, have a great deal of personal property: most of it in the form of animals, a kind of "money on legs," but also in the form of household objects and personal items like clothing or jewelry that pastoralists can keep more easily than foragers because they do not move as frequently.

Ownership of the grazing land, water supply, and other resources required for livestock is a trickier matter. Generally, these natural resources are treated as communal property shared by everyone in the society. Pastoralists may range over hundreds of miles throughout the year, so it would be highly impractical to "own" any particular plot of land or to try fencing it to exclude outsiders as is commonly done by agriculturalists. Sharing resources can lead to conflict, however, both within pastoralist societies and between pastoralists and their neighbors. In an influential essay, *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), Garrett Hardin pointed out that people tend not to respect resources they do not own. For instance, pastoralists who have a personal interest in raising as many cattle of their own as possible may not be particularly motivated to preserve grass or water resources in the long term. Do pastoralists destroy the environments in which they live? Evidence from anthropological studies of pastoralist communities suggests that pastoralists do have rules that regulate use of land and other resources and that these restrictions are effective in conserving environmental resources.

The Maasai, for instance, have a complex land-management system that involves rotating pastures seasonally and geographically to preserve both grass and water. Research conducted in Kenya and Tanzania suggests that these grazing practices improve the health and biodiversity of the ecosystem because grazing cattle cut down the tall grasses and make habitats for warthogs, Thomson's gazelle, and other species. In addition, the large swaths of community land managed by the Maasai stabilize and support the vast Serengeti ecosystem. Ecologists estimate that if this land were privately owned and its usage restricted, the population of wildebeest would be reduced by one-third. Since thousands of tourists visit the Serengeti each year to view wildlife, particularly the migration of the wildebeest, which is the largest mammal migration in the world, the Maasai's communal land management is worth an estimated $83.5 million to the tourist economies of Kenya and Tanzania.[18]

Despite the sophistication of their land and animal management techniques, pastoralists today face many pressures. The growth of the tourism industry in many countries has led to increased demand for private land ownership to support safari centers, wild game parks, and ecolodges. The steady growth of human populations and intensive agriculture has also led to the widespread encroachment of cities and farms into traditional pastoralist territories. Persistent drought, famine, and even civil war threaten some pastoralist groups, particularly in central Africa. Meanwhile, pastoralists continue to experience tense relationships with their

agricultural neighbors as both groups compete for resources, disputes that are intensifying as global warming leads to more intense heat and drought in many world regions.

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6.4: Horticulture

> *"Yams are persons with ears. If we charm they hear." – Alo, Trobriand Island farmer*[19]

Have you ever grown a garden in your backyard? How much time did you put into your garden? How much of your diet did the garden yield? People whose gardens supply the majority of their food are known as horticulturalists**. Horticulture** differs in three ways from other kinds of farming. First, horticulturalists move their farm fields periodically to use locations with the best growing conditions. For this reason, horticulture is sometimes known as shifting cultivation. Second, horticultural societies use limited mechanical technologies to farm, relying on physical labor from people and animals, like oxen that may be used to pull a plow, instead of mechanical farm equipment. Finally, horticulture differs from other kinds of farming in its scale and purpose. Most farmers in the United States sell their crops as a source of income, but in horticultural societies crops are consumed by those who grow them or are shared with others in the community rather than sold for profit.

Definition: horticulture

A subsistence system based on the small-scale cultivation of crops intended primarily for the direct consumption of the household or immediate community.

Horticultural societies are common around the world; this subsistence system feeds hundreds of thousands of people, primarily in tropical areas of south and central America, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. A vast array of horticultural crops may be grown by horticulturalists, and farmers use their specialized knowledge to select crops that have high yield compared to the amount of labor that must be invested to grow them. A good example is manioc, also known as cassava. Manioc can grow in a variety of tropical environments and has the distinct advantage of being able to remain in the ground for long periods without rotting. Compared to corn or wheat, which must be harvested within a particular window of time to avoid spoiling, manioc is flexible and easier to grow as well as to store or distribute to others. Bananas, plantains, rice, and yams are additional examples of popular horticultural crops. One thing all these plants have in common, though, is that they lack protein and other important nutrients. Horticultural societies must supplement their diets by raising animals such as pigs and chickens or by hunting and fishing.



Figure 6.4.1: Bean plants grow up the stalk of a corn plant, while squash vines grow along the ground between corn stalks, inhibiting weed growth, an innovative technique developed by indigenous farmers in the Americas thousands of years ago.

Growing crops in the same location for several seasons leads to depletion of the nutrients in the soil as well as a concentration of insects and other pests and plant diseases. In agricultural systems like the one used in the United States, these problems are addressed through the use of fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation, and other technologies that can increase crop yields even in bad conditions. Horticulturalists respond to these problems by moving their farm fields to new locations. Often this means clearing a section of the forest to make room for a new garden, a task many horticulturalists accomplish by cutting down trees and setting controlled fires to burn away the undergrowth. This approach, sometimes referred to as "slash-and-burn," sounds destructive and has often been criticized, but the ecological impact is complex. Once abandoned, farm fields immediately begin to return to a forested state; over time, the quality of the soil is renewed. Farmers often return after several years to reuse a former field, and this recycling of farmland reduces the amount of forest that is disturbed. While they may relocate their farm fields with regularity, horticulturalists tend not to move their residences, so they rotate through gardens located within walking distance of their homes.

Horticulturalists practice multi-cropping, growing a variety of different plants in gardens that are biodiverse. Growing several different crops reduces the risk of relying on one kind of food and allows for intercropping, mixing plants in ways that are advantageous. A well-known and ingenious example of intercropping is the practice of growing beans, corns, and squash together. Native American farmers in the pre-colonial period knew that together these plants, sometimes called "the three sisters," were healthier than they were if grown separately. Rather than completely clearing farmland, horticulturalists often maintain some trees and even weeds around the garden as a habitat for predators that prey on garden pests. These practices, in addition to skillful rotation of the farmland itself, make horticultural gardens particularly resilient.

FOOD AS POLITICS

Because daily life for horticulturalists revolves around care for crops, plants are not simply regarded as food but also become the basis for social relationships. In the Trobriand Islands, which are located in the Solomon Sea north of Papua New Guinea, yams are the staple crop. Just as a Maasai pastoralist gains respect by raising a large herd of animals, Trobriand Island farmers earn their reputations by having large numbers of yams. However, this is not as easy as it might seem. In Trobriand Island society every man maintains a yam garden, but he is not permitted to keep his entire crop. Women "own" the yams and men must share what they grow with their daughters, their sisters, and even with their wives' family members. Other yams must be given to the chief or saved to exchange on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, or festivals. With so many obligations, it is not surprising that the average man would have trouble building an impressive yam pile on his own. Fortunately, just as men have obligations to others, so too can they expect gifts from their sisters' husbands and their friends in the community.

A large pile of yams, displayed proudly in a man's specially constructed yam house, is an indication of how well he is respected by his family and friends. Maintaining these positive relationships requires constant work, and men must reciprocate gifts of yams received from others or risk losing those relationships. Men who are stingy or mean spirited will not receive many yams, and their lack of social approval will be obvious to everyone who glances at their empty yam houses. The chief has the largest yam house of all, but also the most obligations. To maintain the goodwill of the people, he is expected to sponsor feasts with his yam wealth and to support members of the community who may need yams throughout the year.

So central are yams to Trobriand Island life that yams have traditionally been regarded not as mere plants, but as living beings with minds of their own. Farmers talk to their yams, using a special tone and soft voice so as not to alarm the vegetables. Men who have been initiated into the secret practices of yam magic use incantations or magical charms to affect the growth of the plants, or alternatively to discourage the growth of a rival's crop. Yams are believed to have the ability to wander away from their fields at night unless magic is used to keep them in place. These practices show the close social and spiritual association between farmers and their crops.

CIVILIZING BEANS

Beans are often associated with gastrointestinal problems, namely flatulence. It turns out that this is related to the history of the domestication of the bean. Beans, along with maize and squash, were one of the most important crops domesticated by Native Americans in the New World. The benefits of eating beans are best understood when viewed in relation to maize cultivation. From a purely nutritional point of view, beans are a good source of protein while corn is not. Corn is also deficient in the essential amino acids lysine and tryptophan. Eating maize and beans together provides more protein for hardworking farmers. In addition, maize and beans have a mutually beneficial relationship in the garden. Thanks to a symbiotic relationship with a bacteria known as Rhizobium, beans and almost all legumes fix usable nitrogen in the soil, increasing fertility for other plants grown nearby. When intercropped, maize benefits from this nitrogen fixing, and beans benefit from being able to attach their vines to the strong stalks of the maize. Squash, which grows large leaves that spread widely across the ground, are also beneficial to intercrop with maize and beans because the leaves reduce pest and weed invasion by providing ground cover.

Despite being nutritious and useful in the garden, beans were domesticated relatively late. In Mexico, there is evidence of bean domestication around 1000 BC, a thousand years later than the domestication of corn.[20] This is probably because of the gastrointestinal problems that come with eating beans. The flatulence is the result of certain chemicals found in the wild beans that were ancestral to today's domesticated species. The lack of digestibility surely made beans an unappetizing food in early human communities. However, soaking beans before cooking them and then boiling them over direct heat for several hours reduces these chemicals and makes beans much easier to stomach. The ability to boil water was the key to bringing beans to the table.

Archaeological studies in Central America have revealed that the invention of a particular type of pottery known as the "culinary shoe pot" may have been the technological breakthrough needed to boil beans. The pots are used by placing the "foot" of the pot in the coals of a fire so heat can be transmitted through the vessel for long periods of time. Pots of this design have been found in the



Figure 6.4.2: A Culinary Shoe Pot from Oaxaca, Mexico. Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Catalog Number 2009-117/536

archaeological record throughout Central America in sites dating to the same period as the beginning of bean domestication and pots of similar design continue to be used throughout that region today. This example demonstrates the extent to which the expansion of the human diet has been linked to innovations in other areas of culture.



Figure 6.4.3: Clay Cooking Pots in the Republic of Suriname. Courtesy of Karina Noriega. All rights reserved.

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6.5: Agriculture

> *"The adoption of agriculture, supposedly our most decisive step toward a better life, was in many ways a catastrophe from which we have never recovered." – Jared Diamond* [21]

Agriculture is defined as the cultivation of domesticated plants and animals using technologies such as irrigation, draft animals, mechanization, and inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides that allow for intensive and continuous use of land resources. About 10,000 years ago, human societies entered a period of rapid innovation in subsistence technologies that paved the way for the emergence of agriculture. The transition from foraging to farming has been described as the **Neolithic Revolution**. Neolithic means "new stone age," a name referring to the very different looking stone tools produced during this time period. The Neolithic was characterized by an explosion of new technologies, not all of them made from stone, which were geared toward agricultural tasks, rather than hunting or processing gathered plant foods. These new tools included scythes for harvesting plants, and adzes or hoes for tilling the soil. These technological developments began to dramatically improve yields and allow human communities to support larger and larger numbers of people on food produced in less space. It is important to remember that the invention of agriculture was not necessarily an advance in efficiency, because more work had to go in to producing more food. Instead, it was an *intensification* of horticultural strategies. As a subsistence system, agriculture is quite different from other ways of making a living, and the invention of agriculture had far-ranging effects on the development of human communities. In analyzing agriculture and its impacts, anthropologists focus on four important characteristics shared by agricultural communities.

Definition: agriculture

The cultivation of domesticated plants and animals using technologies that allow for intensive use of the land.

Definition: Neolithic Revolution

A period of rapid innovation in subsistence technologies that began 10,000 years ago and led to the emergence of agriculture. Neolithic means "new stone age," a name referring to the stone tools produced during this time period.

The first characteristic of agriculture is reliance on a few **staple crops**, foods that form the backbone of the subsistence system. An example of a staple crop would be rice in China, or potatoes in Ireland. In agricultural societies, farmers generally grow a surplus of these staple crops, more than they need for their own tables, which are then sold for profit. The reliance on a single plant species, or **mono-cropping**, can lead to decreased dietary diversity and carries the risk of malnutrition compared to a more diverse diet. Other risks include crop failure associated with bad weather conditions or blight, leading to famine and malnutrition, conditions that are common in agricultural communities.

Definition: staple crops

Foods that form the backbone of the subsistence system by providing the majority of the calories a society consumes.

Definition: mono-cropping

The reliance on a single plant species as a food source. Mono-cropping leads to decreased dietary diversity and carries the risk of malnutrition compared to a more diverse diet.

A second hallmark of agriculture is the link between intensive farming and a rapid increase in human population density. The archaeological record shows that human communities grew quickly around the time agriculture was developing, but this raises an interesting question. Did the availability of more food lead to increases in human population? Or, did pressure to provide for a growing population spur humans to develop better farming techniques? This question has been debated for many years. Ester Boserup, who studied the emergence of agriculture, concluded that growth in human populations preceded the development of agriculture, forcing communities to develop innovations in technology. However, the improved productive capabilities of agriculture came at a cost. People were able to produce more food with agriculture, but only by working harder and investing more in the maintenance of the land. The life of a farmer involved more daily hours of work compared to the lifestyle of a forager, so agricultural communities had an incentive to have larger families so that children could help with farm labor. However, the

presence of more children also meant more mouths to feed, increasing the pressure to further expand agricultural production. In this way, agriculture and population growth became a cycle.

A third characteristic of agriculture is the development of a division of labor, a system in which individuals in a society begin to specialize in certain roles or tasks. Building houses, for instance, becomes a full-time job separate from farming. The division of labor was possible because higher yields from agriculture meant that the quest for food no longer required everyone's participation. This feature of agriculture is what has allowed nonagricultural occupations such as scientists, religious specialists, politicians, lawyers, and academics to emerge and flourish.

The emergence of specialized occupations and an agricultural system geared toward producing surplus rather than subsistence changed the economics of human communities. The final characteristic of agriculture is its tendency to create wealth differences. For anthropologists, agriculture is a critical factor explaining the origins of social class and wealth inequality. The more complex an economic system becomes, the more opportunities individuals or factions within the society have to manipulate the economy for their own benefit. Who do you suppose provided the bulk of the labor power needed in early agricultural communities? Elites found ways to pass this burden to others. Agricultural societies were among the first to utilize enslaved and indentured labor.

Although the development of agriculture is generally regarded as a significant technological achievement that made our contemporary way of life possible, agriculture can also be viewed as a more ominous development that forced us to invest more time and labor in our food supply while yielding a lower quality of life.[22] Agriculture created conditions that led to the expansion of social inequality, violent conflict between communities, and environmental degradation. For these reasons, some scientists like Jared Diamond have argued that the invention of agriculture was humanity's worst mistake.

THE ORIGINS OF AGRICULTURE

Some of the most contested and exciting questions in anthropology center on the origins of agriculture. How did humans come to adopt an agricultural way of life? What came first, permanent settlements or agriculture? Did agriculture develop first in places with rich natural resources, or in places where making a living from the land was more difficult? Why did agriculture arise nearly simultaneously in so many world regions? These questions are primarily investigated by archaeologists, anthropologists who study cultures of the past by recovering the material remains of their settlements. Archaeological evidence suggests that the transition to agriculture occurred over a long period of time, across many generations.

Lewis Binford, an archaeologist who studied the origins of agriculture, observed that humans were living in permanent settlements before the end of the last ice age 10,000–12,000 years ago. He believed that as human populations grew, some communities were forced into marginal natural environments where it was difficult to get food from foraging, pastoralism, or horticulture. He argued that the pressure of living in these "tension zones" led to agricultural innovation.[23] Although inventing agriculture might seem like a challenge for humanity, the cultural anthropologist Leslie White pointed out that by this time in human history all communities had substantial practical knowledge of the natural world and the plant and animal species they depended on for survival. "The cultivation of plants required no new facts or knowledge. Agriculture was simply a new kind of relationship between man—or more properly, woman—and plants."[24] By moving plants into new environments and controlling their growth, people were able to ensure a better food supply.

This may explain why domestication arose, but why did it take so long for humans to develop agriculture? Why did many societies all over the world develop agriculture nearly simultaneously? One possible answer is found in the climate change that followed the end of the last ice age. Warming temperatures and shifting environmental zones led to the extinction of the megafauna human hunters had been relying upon such as musk ox, woolly mammoth and woolly rhinoceros, and giant deer. Many animals once preyed on these species, such as the cave lion and spotted hyena, but humans may have adapted culturally by reorienting their diets toward domesticated plant and animal species.

There are some other interesting theories about how and why agriculture developed. Brian Hayden, an archaeologist specializing in political ecology, the use of resources to achieve political goals, has suggested that agriculture arose as some members of society began to accumulate resources in order to sponsor feasts and give gifts designed to influence others. This "feasting theory" suggests that agriculture was not a response to the necessities of survival, but part of a quest for power among some members of society.[25] This model is intriguing because it explains why some of the earliest domesticates such as chili peppers and avocados are not staple foods and are not even particularly nutritious. In fact, many of the earliest plants cultivated were not intended to produce food for meals, but rather to produce ingredients for alcoholic beverages.

For example, the wild ancestor of corn, a plant called teosinte, has an edible "ear" so small that it would have cost more calories to chew than the nutrition it provided. This led some archaeologists to theorize that it was in fact the sweetness in the stalk of the plant

that farmers wanted to utilize to ferment a corn-based alcoholic beverage still consumed in many parts of Central America called *chicha*. It might have been that only after years of cultivating the crop for its stalk that farmers found uses for the ear, which later was selectively bred to grow to the sizes we are familiar with today.

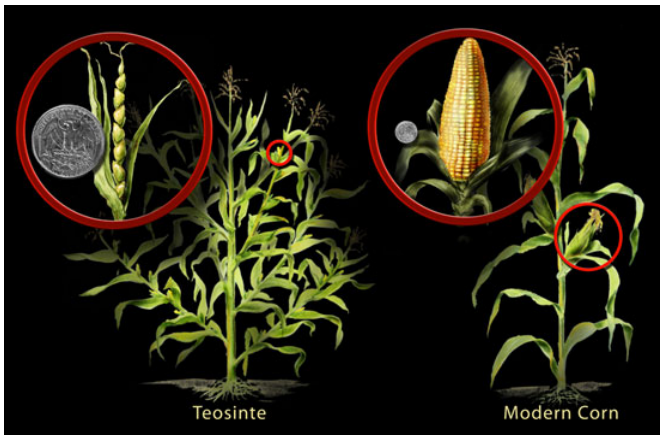


Figure 6.5.1: Domestication involves the manipulation of plant and animal species to promote characteristics that are useful to the gardeners, such as the size. The evolution of the modern corn from the ancestral teosinte followed selective breeding practices of farmers in the Americas.

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6.6: The Global Agriculture System

> *"We can indeed eliminate the scourge of hunger in our lifetime. We must be the Zero Hunger generation." – José Graziano da Silva, Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations* [26]

Despite agriculture's tremendous productivity, food shortages, malnutrition, and famines are common around the world. How can this be? Many people assume that the world's agricultural systems are not capable of producing enough food for everyone, but this is incorrect. Evidence from agricultural research demonstrates that there is enough worldwide agricultural capacity to feed everyone on the planet.[27] The problem is that this capacity is unevenly distributed. Some countries produce much more food than they need, and others much less. In addition, distribution systems are inefficient and much food is lost to waste or spoilage. It is also true that in an agricultural economy food costs money, and worldwide many people who are starving or undernourished lack food because they cannot pay for it, not because food itself is unavailable.

Let's return for a moment to the concept of meals and where our food actually comes from. Walking down the aisles of our local grocery store, we are surrounded by products that come from far away: apples from Chile, coffee from Guatemala, beans from India. This is evidence that our economy is organized around what anthropologists refer to as a **world system**, a complex web through which goods circulate around the globe. In the world system, complex chains of distribution separate the producers of goods from the consumers. Agricultural products travel long distances from their points of origin to reach consumers in the grocery store, passing through many hands along the way. The series of steps a food like apples or coffee takes from the field to the store is known as a **commodity chain**.

Definition: world system

A complex economic system through which goods circulate around the globe. The world system for food is characterized by a separation of the producers of goods from the consumers.

Definition: commodity chain

The series of steps a food takes from location where it is produced to the store where it is sold to consumers.



Figure 6.6.1: Links in the Commodity Chain for Coffee: As the coffee changes hands from the growers, to the exporters, to the importers, and then to the retail distributors, the value of the coffee increases. Consider the differences in wage between these workers.

The commodity chain for agricultural products begins in the farms where plant and animal foods are produced. Farmers generally do not sell their produce directly to consumers, but instead sell to large food processors that refine the food into a more usable form. Coffee beans, for instance, must be roasted before they can be sold. Following processing, food moves to wholesalers who will package it for sale to retail establishments like grocery stores. As foods move through the commodity chain, they become more valuable. Coffee beans harvested fresh from the field are worth $1.40 per pound to the farmer, but sell for $10–$20 at Starbucks.[28]

The fact that food is more valuable at the end of the commodity chain than at the beginning has several consequences for human communities. The most obvious of these is the reality that farming is not a particularly lucrative occupation, particularly for small-scale farmers in developing countries. Though their labor makes profit for others, these farmers see the lowest financial returns. Another effect of global commodity chains is that food moves very far from its point of origin. For wealthy people, this means

having access to a variety of foods in the grocery store, including things like strawberries or mangos in the middle of winter, but in order to serve markets in wealthy countries, food is diverted away from the locales where it is grown. When quinoa, a high-protein grain grown in Bolivia, became popular with health enthusiasts in wealthy countries, the price of this food more than tripled. Local populations began to export their quinoa crop rather than eating it, replacing this nutritious traditional food with white bread and Coca-Cola, which were much cheaper, but contributed to increased rates of obesity and diabetes.[29] The global travels of the food supply have also affected social relations that were once strengthened by participation in food growing and sharing. Distance and competition have replaced these communal experiences. Many people yearn for more connection with their food, a sentiment that fuels things like "foodie culture," farm-to-table restaurants, and farmer's markets.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a consideration of meals, but revealed that each individual meal is part of a diet generated through a particular subsistence system. Many of our daily experiences, including our attitudes, skills, and relationships with others, are influenced by our subsistence system. Knowing that the Earth has been transformed for thousands of years by human subsistence activities, we must also consider the ways in which our future will be shaped by the present. Are we managing our resources in a sustainable way? How will we continue to feed growing populations in the future? Think about it next time you sit down to eat a meal.

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28. Information about the current prices paid to coffee farmers is available from the International Coffee Organization: http://www.ico.org/coffee_prices.asp↵
29. This phenomenon has been observed in many countries. For an ethnographic analysis of the health effects of the decline of traditional foods in Guatemala, see Emily Yates-Doerr, *The Weight of Obesity: Hunger and Global Health in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). ↵

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6.7: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. A hallmark of agriculture is the separation of food production from food consumption; many people know almost nothing about where their food has come from. How does this lack of knowledge affect the food choices people make? How useful are efforts to change food labels to notify shoppers about the use of farming techniques such as genetic modification or organic growing for consumers? What other steps could be taken to make people more knowledgeable about the journey that food takes from farm to table?
2. The global commodity chains that bring food from many countries to grocery stores in the United States give wealthy consumers a great variety of food choices, but the farmers at the beginning of the commodity chain earn very little money. What kinds of solutions might help reduce the concentration of wealth at the end of the commodity chain?
3. Mono-cropping is a feature of industrial food production and has the benefit of producing staple foods like wheat and corn in vast quantities, but mono-cropping makes our diet less diverse. Are the effects of agricultural mono-cropping reflected in your own everyday diet? How many different plant foods do you eat on a regular basis? How difficult would it be for you to obtain a more diverse diet by shopping in the same places you shop now?

GLOSSARY

Agriculture: the cultivation of domesticated plants and animals using technologies that allow for intensive use of the land.

Broad spectrum diet: a diet based on a wide range of food resources.

Built environment: spaces that are human-made, including cultivated land as well as buildings.

Carrying capacity: a measurement of the number of calories that can be extracted from a particular unit of land in order to support a human population.

Commodity chain: the series of steps a food takes from location where it is produced to the store where it is sold to consumers.

Delayed return system: techniques for obtaining food that require an investment of work over a period of time before the food becomes available for consumption. Farming is a delayed return system due to the passage of time between planting and harvest.

Domestic economy: the work associated with obtaining food for a family or household.

Foodways: the cultural norms and attitudes surrounding food and eating.

Foraging: a subsistence system that relies on wild plant and animal food resources. This system is sometimes called "hunting and gathering".

Historical ecology: the study of how human cultures have developed over time as a result of interactions with the environment.

Horticulture: a subsistence system based on the small-scale cultivation of crops intended primarily for the direct consumption of the household or immediate community.

Immediate return system: techniques for obtaining food in which the food acquired can be immediately consumed. Foraging is an immediate return system.

Modes of subsistence: the techniques used by the members of a society to obtain food. Anthropologists classify subsistence into four broad categories: foraging, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture.

Mono-cropping: the reliance on a single plant species as a food source. Mono-cropping leads to decreased dietary diversity and carries the risk of malnutrition compared to a more diverse diet.

Neolithic Revolution: a period of rapid innovation in subsistence technologies that began 10,000 years ago and led to the emergence of agriculture. Neolithic means "new stone age", a name referring to the stone tools produced during this time period.

Pastoralism: a subsistence system in which people raise herds of domesticated livestock.

Staple crops: foods that form the backbone of the subsistence system by providing the majority of the calories a society consumes.

Subsistence system: the set of skills, practices, and technologies used by members of a society to acquire and distribute food.

World system: a complex economic system through which goods circulate around the globe. The world system for food is characterized by a separation of the producers of goods from the consumers.

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6.8: About the Author

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Isaac Shearn earned his PhD in 2014 at the University of Florida and is an adjunct professor at the Community College of Baltimore County. His work focuses on the archaeology and ethnohistory of the Caribbean and South America, with a focus on public archaeology, developing inclusive and participatory methods. His ongoing research in Dominica allows him to pursue his second major passion in life besides archaeology: music. He has played drums for a Dominican reggae band since 2010.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Economics

Learning Objectives

- Define economic anthropology and identify ways in which economic anthropology differs from the field of Economics
- Describe the characteristics of the three modes of production: domestic production, tributary production, and capitalist production.
- Compare reciprocity, redistribution, and market modes of exchange.
- Assess the significance of general purpose money for economic exchange.
- Evaluate the ways in which commodities become personally and socially meaningful.
- Use a political economy perspective to assess examples of global economic inequality and structural violence.

7.1: Economics
7.2: Modes and Means of Production
7.3: Fair-trade and Informal Economies.
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Image: Street market in Marsaxlokk - dried goods, 2019, by Kritzolina under CC BY-SA 4.0.

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7.1: Economics

One of the hallmarks of the human species is our flexibility: culture enables humans to thrive in extreme arctic and desert environments, to make our homes in cities and rural settings alike. Yet amidst this great diversity there are also universals. For example, all humans, like all organisms, must eat. We all must make our living in the world, whether we do so through foraging, farming, or factory work. At its heart, economic anthropology is a study of livelihoods: how humans work to obtain the material necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter that sustain our lives. Across time and space, different societies have organized their economic lives in radically different ways. Economic anthropologists explore this diversity, focusing on how people produce, exchange, and consume material objects and the role that immaterial things such as labor, services, and knowledge play in our efforts to secure our livelihood.[1] As humans, we all have the same basic needs, but understanding how and why we meet those needs—in often shared but sometimes unique ways—is what shapes the field of economic anthropology.

Economic anthropology is always in dialog (whether implicitly or explicitly) with the discipline of economics.[2] However, there are several important differences between the two disciplines. Perhaps most importantly, economic anthropology encompasses the production, exchange, consumption, meaning, and uses of both material objects and immaterial services, whereas contemporary economics focuses primarily on market exchanges. In addition, economic anthropologists dispute the idea that all individual thoughts, choices, and behaviors can be understood through a narrow lens of rational, self-interested decision-making. When asking why people choose to buy a new shirt rather than shoes, anthropologists, and increasingly economists, look beyond the motives of *Homo economicus* to determine how social, cultural, political, and institutional forces shape humans' everyday decisions.[3]

As a discipline, economics studies the decisions made by people and businesses and how these decisions interact in the marketplace. Economists' models generally rest on several assumptions: that people know what they want, that their economic choices express these wants, and that their wants are defined by their culture. Economics is a normative theory because it specifies how people *should* act if they want to make efficient economic decisions. In contrast, anthropology is a largely descriptive social science; we analyze what people *actually do* and why they do it. Economic anthropologists do not necessarily assume that people know what they want (or *why* they want it) or that they are free to act on their own individual desires.

Rather than simply focusing on market exchanges and individual decision-making, anthropologists consider three distinct phases of economic activity: production, exchange, and consumption. **Production** involves transforming nature and raw materials into the material goods that are useful and/or necessary for humans. **Exchange** involves. Finally, **consumption** refers to how we use these material goods: for example, by eating food or constructing homes out of bricks. This chapter explores each of these dimensions of economic life in detail, concluding with an overview of how anthropologists understand and challenge the economic inequalities that structure everyday life in the twenty-first century.

Definition: production

Transforming nature and raw materials into the material goods that are useful and/or necessary for humans.

Definition: exchange

How goods are distributed among people.

Definition: consumption

The process of buying, eating, or using a resource, food, commodity, or service.

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2. Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 37. ↵
3. Carol Tarvis,"How Homo Economicus Went Extinct," *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-homo-economicus-went-extinct-1431721255↵

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7.2: Modes and Means of Production

MODES OF PRODUCTION

A key concept in anthropological studies of economic life is the **mode of production**, or the social relations through which human labor is used to transform energy from nature using tools, skills, organization, and knowledge. This concept originated with anthropologist Eric Wolf, who was strongly influenced by the social theorist Karl Marx. Marx argued that human consciousness is not determined by our cosmologies or beliefs but instead by our most basic human activity: work. Wolf identified three distinct modes of production in human history: domestic (kin-ordered), tributary, and capitalist.[4] Domestic or kin-ordered production organizes work on the basis of family relations and does not necessarily involve formal social domination, or the control of and power over other people. However, power and authority may be exerted on specific groups based on age and gender. In the tributary mode of production, the primary producer pays tribute in the form of material goods or labor to another individual or group of individuals who controls production through political, religious, or military force. The third mode, capitalism, is the one most familiar to us. The capitalist mode of production has three central features: (1) private property is owned by members of the capitalist class; (2) workers sell their labor power to the capitalists in order to survive; and (3) surpluses of wealth are produced, and these surpluses are either kept as profit or reinvested in production in order to generate further surplus. As we will see in the next section, Modes of Exchange, capitalism also links markets to trade and money in very unique ways. First, though, we will take a closer look at each of the three modes of production.

Definition: mode of production

The social relations through which human labor is used to transform energy from nature using tools, skills, organization, and knowledge.

Domestic Production

The domestic, or kin-ordered, mode of production characterizes the lives of foragers and small-scale **subsistence farmers** with social structures that are more egalitarian than those characterizing the other modes of production (though these structures are still shaped by age- and gender-based forms of inequality). In the domestic mode of production, labor is organized on the basis of kinship relations (which is why this form of production is also known as kin-ordered). In southern Mexico and parts of Central America, many indigenous people primarily make their living through small-scale subsistence maize farming. Subsistence farmers produce food for their family's own consumption (rather than to sell). In this family production system, the men generally clear the fields and the whole family works together to plant the seeds. Until the plants sprout, the children spend their days in the fields protecting the newly planted crops. The men then weed the crops and harvest the corn cobs, and, finally, the women work to dry the corn and remove the kernels from the cobs for storage. Over the course of the year mothers and daughters typically grind the corn by hand using a *metate*, or grinding stone (or, if they are lucky, they might have access to a mechanical grinder). Ultimately, the corn is used to make the daily tortillas the family consumes at each meal. This example demonstrates how the domestic mode of production organizes labor and daily activities within families according to age and gender.

Definition: subsistence farmers

People who raise plants and animals for their own consumption, but not for sale to others.



Figure 7.2.1: Woman Grinding Corn with a *Metate*

Foraging societies are also characterized by (1) the collective ownership of the primary **means of production**, (2) lower rates of social domination, and (3) sharing. For example, the Dobe Ju/'hoansi (also known as the !Kung), a society of approximately 45,000 people living in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana and Namibia, typically live in small groups consisting of siblings of both sexes, their spouses, and children. They all live in a single camp and move together for part of the year. Typically women collect plant foods and men hunt for meat. These resources are pooled within family groups and distributed within wider kin networks when necessary. However, women will also kill animals when the opportunity presents itself, and men spend time collecting plant foods, even when hunting.

Definition: means of production

The resources used to produce goods in a society such as land for farming or factories.

As discussed in the Marriage and Family chapter, kinship relations are determined by culture, not biology. Interestingly, in addition to genealogical kinship, the Dobe Ju/'hoansi recognize kinship relations on the basis of gender-linked names; there are relatively few names, and in this society the possession of common names trumps genealogical ties. This means that an individual would call anyone with his father's name "father." The Dobe Ju/'hoansi have a third kinship system that is based on the principle that an older person determines the kinship terms that will be used in relation with another individual (so, for example, an elderly woman may refer to a young male as her nephew or grandson, thus creating a kin relationship). The effect of these three simultaneous kinship systems is that virtually everyone is kin in Ju/'hoansi society—those who are biologically related and those who are not. This successfully expands the range of individuals with whom products of labor, such as meat from a kill, must be shared.[5] These beliefs and the behaviors they inspire reinforce key elements of the domestic mode of production: collective ownership, low levels of social domination, and sharing.

Tributary Production

The tributary mode of production is found in social systems divided into classes of rulers and subjects. Subjects, typically farmers and/or herders, produce for themselves and their families, but they also give a proportion of their goods or labor to their rulers as tribute. The tributary mode of production characterizes a variety of precapitalist, state-level societies found in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. These societies share several common features: (1) the dominant units of production are communities organized around kinship relations; (2) the state's society depends on the local communities, and the tribute collected is used by the ruling class rather than exchanged or reinvested; (3) relationships between producers and rulers are often conflictual; and (4) production is controlled politically rather than through the direct control of the means of production. Some historic tributary systems, such as those found in feudal Europe and medieval Japan, were loosely organized, whereas others, such as the pre-contact Inca Empire and imperial China, were tightly managed.

In the Chinese imperial system, rulers not only demanded tribute in the form of material goods but also organized large-scale production and state-organized projects such as irrigation, roads, and flood control. In addition to accumulating agricultural surpluses, imperial officials also controlled large industrial and commercial enterprises, acquiring necessary products, such as salt,

porcelain, or bricks, through nonmarket mechanisms. The rulers of most tributary systems were determined through descent and/or military and political service. However, the 1,000-year imperial Chinese system (CE 960–1911) was unique in that new members were accepted based on their performance in examinations that any male could take, even males of low status.[6] Despite this exception, the Chinese imperial system exhibits many hallmarks of the tributary mode of production, including the political control of production and the collection of tribute to support state projects and the ruling classes.

Capitalist Production

The capitalist mode of production is the most recent. While many of us may find it difficult to conceive of an alternative to capitalism, it has in fact only existed for a mere fraction of human history, first originating with the North American and western European industrial revolution during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Capitalism is distinguished from the other two modes of production as an economic system based on private property owned by a capitalist class. In the domestic and tributary modes of production, workers typically own their means of production (for example, the land they farm). However, in the capitalist mode of production, workers typically do not own the factories they work in or the businesses they work for, and so they sell their labor power to other people, the capitalists, in order to survive. By keeping wages low, capitalists are able to sell the products of the workers' labor for more than it costs to produce the products. This enables capitalists, or those who own the means of production, to generate a surplus that is either kept as profit or reinvested in production with the goal of generating additional surplus. Therefore, an important distinguishing feature of the capitalist mode of production is that workers are separated from the means of production (for example, from the factories they work in or the businesses they work for), whereas in the domestic and tributary modes workers are not separated from the means of production (they own their own land or they have free access to hunting and foraging grounds). In the domestic and tributary modes of production, workers also retain control over the goods they produce (or a portion of them), and they control their own labor, deciding when and when not to work.[7] However, this is not true within capitalism. A factory worker does not own the widget that she helps build in a factory, and she cannot decide when she would like to show up at work each day.

Economic anthropologists stress that people and communities are differentially integrated into the capitalist mode of production. For example, some subsistence farmers may also produce a small crop of agricultural commodities in order to earn cash income to pay for necessities, such as machetes or farm tools, that they cannot make themselves. Many of us have had "informal" jobs tending a neighbor's children or mowing someone's lawn. Informal work such as this, where one does not work on a full-time, contracted basis, is especially important in developing countries around the world where informal employment comprises one-half to three-quarters of nonagricultural employment.[8]

Even in our own capitalist society, many of us regularly produce and exchange goods and services outside of the so-called formal marketplace: baking zucchini bread for a cousin who shares her vegetable garden's produce, for example, or buying fair-trade chocolate from a cooperative grocery store. We might spend Sundays volunteering in a church's nursery, or perhaps moonlighting as a server for a friend's catering business, working "under the table" for cash. Each of these examples highlights how even in advanced capitalist societies, we engage in diverse economic practices every day. If, as some suggest, economic anthropology is at its heart a search for alternatives to capitalism, it is useful to explore the many diverse economies that are thriving alongside capitalist modes of production and exchange.[9]

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7.3: Fair-trade and Informal Economies.

FAIR-TRADE COFFEE GROWERS: 21ST CENTURY PEASANTS

Small-scale, semi-subsistence farmers make up the largest single group of people on the planet today. Once known as peasants, these people pose an interesting conundrum to economic anthropologists because they live their lives both inside and outside of global capitalism and state societies. These farmers primarily use their own labor to grow the food their families eat. They might also produce some type of commodity for sale. For example, many of the indigenous corn farmers in southern Mexico and Central America discussed earlier also produce small amounts of coffee that they sell in order to earn money to buy school supplies for their children, building supplies for their homes, clothing, and other things that they cannot produce themselves.

There are between 20 and 25 million small farmers growing coffee in more than 50 countries around the world. A portion of these small coffee farmers are organized into cooperatives in order to collectively sell their coffee as fair-trade certified. Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. According to Fairtrade International, fair trade supports farmers and workers to combat poverty and strengthen their livelihoods by establishing a minimum price for as many fair-trade products as possible; providing, on top of stable prices, a fair-trade premium; improving the terms of trade for farmers by providing access to information, clear contracts with pre-payments, access to markets and financing; and promoting better living wages and working conditions.[10] In order to certify their coffee, small farmers must belong to democratically run producers' associations in which participation is open to all eligible growers, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or political affiliation.

To better understand how indigenous farmers practice kin-organized subsistence maize production while simultaneously producing an agricultural commodity for global markets, I conducted long-term research in a highland Guatemala community.[11] In 1977 a small number of Tz'utujil Maya coffee farmers formed a cooperative, *La Voz Que Clama en el Desierto* (A Voice Crying Out in the Wilderness), with the goal of securing higher prices for their agricultural products and escaping the severe poverty they struggled against on a daily basis. Since the early 1990s the group has produced high-quality organic and fair-trade certified coffee for the U.S. market.

The farmers work tirelessly to ensure that their families have sufficient corn to eat *and* that their coffee meets the cooperative's high standards of quality. The members of La Voz refer to their coffee trees as their "children" who they have lovingly tended for decades. High-quality, organic coffee production is time consuming and arduous—it requires almost daily attention. During the coffee harvest between December and March, wives, husbands, and children work together to pick the coffee cherries by hand as they ripen and carry them to the wet mill each afternoon.



Figure 7.3.1: Sorting Coffee Beans

While these farmers are producing a product for the global market, it is not strictly a capitalist mode of production. They own their own land and they sell the fruits of their labor for guaranteed prices. They also work cooperatively with one another, pooling and exchanging their labor, in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of their organization. This cooperation, while essential, is hard work. Because the fair-trade system does not rely on anonymous market exchanges, members of La Voz must also dedicate time to nurturing their relationships with the coffee importers, roasters, advocates, and consumers who support all their hard work through

promotion and purchases. This means attending receptions when buyers visit, dressing up in traditional clothing to pick coffee on film for marketing materials, and putting up with questions from nosy anthropologists.

Because the coffee farmers also produce much of the food their families consume, they enjoy a great deal of flexibility. In times of hardship, they can redirect their labor to other activities by intensifying corn production, migrating in search of wage labor, or planting other crops. Their ultimate goal is to maintain the family's economic autonomy, which is rooted in ownership of the means of production—in this case, their land. A close examination of these farmers' lives reveals that they are not relics of a precapitalist system. Instead, their economic activity is uniquely adapted to the contemporary global economy in order to ensure their long-term survival.

SALAULA IN ZAMBIA: THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

The informal economy includes a diverse range of activities that are unregulated (and untaxed) by the state: rickshaw pullers in Calcutta, street vendors in Mexico City, and scrap-metal recyclers in Lexington, Kentucky, are all considered informal workers. Informal economies include people who are informally self-employed *and* those working informally for other people's enterprises. In some parts of the world the informal economy is a significant source of income and revenue. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the informal economy generates nearly 40 percent as much revenue as that included in the "official" gross domestic product.[12] Consequently, the informal economy is of great interest to economic anthropologists. However, the term "informal economy" is critiqued by some scholars since often what we refer to as informal economies are actually quite formal and organized, even though this organization is not regulated by the state and may be based on an internal logic that makes the most sense to those who participate in the exchanges.

Karen Hansen provides an in-depth look at the lives of vendors in the *salaula*, the secondhand clothing markets in Zambia in southern Africa.[13] Salaula, a term that literally means "to rummage through a pile," is an unusual industry that begins in many of our own homes. In today's era of fast fashion in which Americans buy more than 20 billion garments each year (that's 68 garments per person!), many of us regularly bag up our gently used, unfashionable clothing and drop it off at a nearby Goodwill shop.[14] Only about half of these donated clothes actually end up in charity thrift stores. The rest are sold to one of the nearly 300 firms that specialize in the global clothing recycling business. The textile recycling firms sort the clothing by grades; the higher-quality items are sent to Central America, and the lowest grades go to African and Asian countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa an estimated 50 percent of purchased clothing consists of these secondhand imports, referred to by some consumers as "dead man's clothes" because of the belief that they come from the deceased.[15] In Zambia the secondhand clothes are imported in bulk by 40 wholesale firms that, in turn, sell the clothes to salaula traders. The traders sell the clothes out of their homes and in large public markets.

Typically the people working as salaula traders have either never had formal-sector jobs or have lost their jobs in the public or private sector. Often they start selling in order to accumulate money for other activities or as a sideline business. Hansen found that there were slightly more female sellers and that women were more likely to be single heads of households. Successful salaula trading requires business acumen and practical skills. Flourishing traders cultivate their consumer knowledge, develop sales strategies, and experiment with display and pricing. While salaula trading has relatively low barriers to entry (one simply has to purchase a bale of clothing from a wholesale importer in order to get started), in this informal market scale is important: salaula moves best when traders have a lot of it on offer. Traders also have to understand the local cultural politics in order to successfully earn a living in this sector. For example, salaula is different from used clothing from people someone knows. In fact, secondhand clothing with folds and wrinkles from the bale is often the most desirable because it is easily identifiable as "genuine" salaula.[16]



Figure 7.3.2: Roadside Salaula Trader, Zambia

The global salaula commodity chain presents an interesting example of how material goods can flow in and out of capitalist modes of production and exchange. For example, I might buy a dress that was produced in a factory to give (not sell!) to my young niece. After wearing the dress for several months, Maddie will probably outgrow it, and her Mom will drop it off at the nearby Goodwill shop. There is a 50 percent chance that the dress will be sold by the charity to a clothing recycler who will export it to Zambia or a nearby country. From there the dress will end up in a bale of clothing that is purchased by a salaula trader in Lusaka. At this point the dress enters the informal economy as the salaula markets are unregulated and untaxed. A consumer might buy the dress and realize that it does not quite fit her own daughter. She might then take it to her neighbor, who works informally as a tailor, for alternations. Rather than paying her neighbor for the work on the dress, the consumer might instead arrange to reciprocate at a later date by cleaning the tailor's home. This single item of clothing that has traveled the globe and moved in and out of formal and informal markets highlights how diverse our economic lives really are, a theme that we will return to at the end of this chapter.

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7.4: Modes of Exchange and Reciprocity

MODES OF EXCHANGE

There are three distinct ways to integrate economic and social relations and distribute material goods. Contemporary economics only studies the first, market exchange. Most economic models are unable to explain the second two, reciprocity and redistribution, because they have different underlying logics. Economic anthropology, on the other hand, provides rich and nuanced perspective into how diverse modes of exchange shape, and are shaped by, everyday life across space and time. Anthropologists understand market exchange to be a form of trade that today most commonly involves general purpose money, bargaining, and supply and demand price mechanisms. In contrast, reciprocity involves the exchange of goods and services and is rooted in a mutual sense of obligation and identity. Anthropologists have identified three distinct types of reciprocity, which we will explore shortly: generalized, balanced, and negative.[17] Finally, redistribution occurs when an authority of some type (a temple priest, a chief, or even an institution such as the Internal Revenue Service) collects economic contributions from all community members and then redistributes these back in the form of goods and services. Redistribution requires centralized social organization, even if at a small scale (for example, within the foraging societies discussed above). As we will see, various modes of exchange can and do coexist, even within capitalism.

RECIPROCITY

While early economic anthropology often seemed focused on detailed investigations of seemingly exotic economic practices, anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss used ethnographic research and findings to critique Western, capitalist economic systems. Today, many follow in this tradition and some would agree with Keith Hart's statement that economic anthropology "at its best has always been a search for an alternative to capitalism."[18] Mauss, a French anthropologist, was one of the first scholars to provide an in-depth exploration of reciprocity and the role that gifts play in cultural systems around the world.[19] Mauss asked why humans feel obliged to reciprocate when they receive a gift. His answer was that giving and reciprocating gifts, whether these are material objects or our time, creates links between the people involved.[20]

Over the past century, anthropologists have devoted considerable attention to the topic of reciprocity. It is an attractive one because of the seemingly moral nature of gifts: many of us hope that humans are not solely self-interested, antisocial economic actors. Gifts are about social relations, not just about the gifts themselves; as we will see, giving a gift that contains a bit of oneself builds a social relationship with the person who receives it.[21] Studying reciprocity gives anthropologists unique insights into the moral economy, or the processes through which customs, cultural values, beliefs, and social coercion influence our economic behavior. The economy can be understood as a symbolic reflection of the cultural order and the sense of right and wrong that people adhere to within that cultural order.[22] This means that economic behavior is a unique cultural practice, one that varies across time and space.

Generalized Reciprocity

Consider a young child. Friends and family members probably purchase numerous gifts for the child, small and large. People give freely of their time: changing diapers, cooking meals, driving the child to soccer practice, and tucking the child in at night. These myriad gifts of toys and time are not written down; we do not keep a running tally of everything we give our children. However, as children grow older they begin to reciprocate these gifts: mowing an elderly grandmother's yard, cooking dinner for a parent who has to work late, or buying an expensive gift for an older sibling. When we gift without reckoning the exact value of the gift or expecting a specific thing in return we are practicing **generalized reciprocity**. This form of reciprocity occurs within the closest social relationships where exchange happens so frequently that monitoring the value of each item or service given and received would be impossible, and to do so would lead to tension and quite possibly the eventual dissolution of the relationship.

Definition: generalized reciprocity

Giving without expecting a specific thing in return.

However, generalized reciprocity is not necessarily limited to households. In my own suburban Kentucky neighborhood we engage in many forms of generalized reciprocity. For example, we regularly cook and deliver meals for our neighbors who have a new baby, a sick parent, or recently deceased relative. Similarly, at Halloween we give out handfuls of candy (sometimes spending $50 or more in the process). I do not keep a close tally of which kid received which candy bar, nor do my young daughters pay close attention to which houses gave more or less desirable candy this year. In other cultures, generalized reciprocity is the norm rather

than the exception. Recall the Dobe Ju/'hoansi foragers who live in the Kalahari Desert: they have a flexible and overlapping kinship system which ensures that the products of their hunting and gathering are shared widely across the entire community. This generalized reciprocity reinforces the solidarity of the group; however, it also means that Dobe Ju/'hoansi have very few individual possessions and generosity is a prized personality trait.

Balanced Reciprocity

Unlike generalized reciprocity, **balanced reciprocity** is more of a direct exchange in which something is traded or given with the expectation that something of equal value will be returned within a specific time period. This form of reciprocity involves three distinct stages: the gift must be given, it has to be received, and a reciprocal gift has to be returned. A key aspect of balanced reciprocity is that without reciprocation within an appropriate time frame, the exchange system will falter and the social relationship might end. Balanced reciprocity generally occurs at a social level more distant than the family, but it usually occurs among people who know each other. In other words, complete strangers would be unlikely to engage in balanced reciprocity because they would not be able to trust the person to reciprocate within an acceptable period of time.

Definition: balanced reciprocity

The exchange of something with the expectation that something of equal value will be returned within a specific time period.

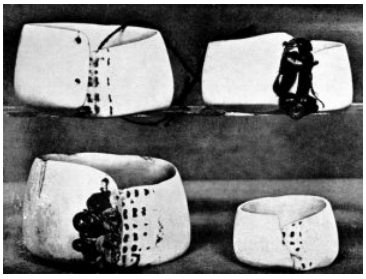


Figure 7.4.1: Mwali from the Kula Exchange

The Kula ring system of exchange found in the Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific is one example of balanced reciprocity. A Kula ring involves the ceremonial exchange of shell and bead necklaces *(soulava)* for shell arm bands *(mwali)* between trading partners living on different islands. The arm bands and necklaces constantly circulate and only have symbolic value, meaning they bring the temporary owner honor and prestige but cannot be bought or sold for money. Malinowski was the first anthropologist to study the Kula ring, and he found that although participants did not profit materially from the exchange, it served several important functions in Trobriand society.[23] Because participants formed relationships with trading participants on other islands, the Kula ring helped solidify alliances among tribes, and overseas partners became allies in a land of danger and insecurity. Along with arm bands and necklaces, Kula participants were also engaging in more mundane forms of trade, bartering from one island to another. Additionally, songs, customs, and cultural influences also traveled along the Kula route. Finally, although ownership of the arm bands and necklaces was always temporary (for eventually participants are expected to gift the items to other partners in the ring), Kula participants took great pride and pleasure in the items they received. The Kula ring exhibits all the hallmarks of balanced reciprocity: necklaces are traded for armbands with the expectation that objects of equal value will be returned within a specific time period.

The Work of Reciprocity at Christmas

How many of us give and receive gifts during the holiday season? Christmas is undeniably a religious celebration, yet while nine in ten Americans say they celebrate Christmas, about half view it to be more of a secular holiday. Perhaps this is why eight in ten non-Christians in the United States now celebrate Christmas.[24] How and why has this one date in the liturgical calendar come to be so central to U.S. culture and what does gift giving have to do with it? In 1865, Christmas was declared a national holiday; just 25 years later, *Ladies' Home Journal* was already complaining that the holiday had become overly commercialized.[25] A recent survey of U.S. citizens found that we continue to be frustrated with the commercialization of the season: one-third say they dislike the materialism of the holidays, one-fifth are unhappy with the expenses of the season, and one in ten dislikes holiday shopping in crowded malls and stores.[26]

When asked what they like most about the holiday season, 70 percent of U.S. residents say spending time with family and friends. This raises the question of how and why reciprocal gift giving has become so central to the social relationships we hope to nurture at Christmas. The anthropologist James Carrier argues that the affectionate giving at the heart of modern Christmas is in fact a celebration of personal social relations. [27] Among our family members and closest friends this gift giving is *generalized* and more about the expression of sentiment. When we exchange gifts with those outside this small circle it tends to be more *balanced*, and we expect some form of equivalent reciprocation. If I spend $50 on a lavish gift for a friend, my feelings will undoubtedly be hurt when she reciprocates with a $5 gift card to Starbucks.

Christmas shopping is arduous–we probably all know someone who heads to the stores at midnight on Black Friday to get a jumpstart on their consumption. Throughout the month of December we complain about how crowded the stores are and how

tired we are of wrapping presents. Let's face it: Christmas is a lot of work! Recall how the reciprocity of the Kula ring served many functions in addition to the simple exchange of symbolic arm bands and shell necklaces. Similarly, Christmas gift giving is about more than exchanging commodities. In order to cement our social relationships we buy and wrap gifts (even figuratively by placing a giant red bow on oversize items like a new bicycle) in order to symbolically transform the impersonal commodities that populate our everyday lives into meaningful gifts. The ritual of shopping, wrapping, giving, and receiving proves to us that we can create a sphere of love and intimacy alongside the world of anonymous, monetary exchange. The ritualistic exchange of gifts is accompanied by other traditions, such as the circulation of holiday cards that have no economic or practical value, but instead are used to reinforce social relationships. When we view Christmas through a moral economy lens, we come to understand how our economic behavior is shaped by our historical customs, cultural values, beliefs, and even our need to maintain appearances. Christmas is hard work, but with any luck we will reap the rewards of strong relational bonds.[28]

Negative Reciprocity

Unlike balanced and generalized reciprocity, **negative reciprocity** is an attempt to get something for nothing. It is the most impersonal of the three forms of reciprocity and it commonly exists among people who do not know each other well because close relationships are incompatible with attempts to take advantage of other people. Gambling is a good example of negative reciprocity, and some would argue that market exchange, in which one participant aims to buy low while the other aims to sell high, can also be a form of negative reciprocity.

Definition: negative reciprocity

An attempt to get something for nothing; exchange in which both parties try to take advantage of the other.

The emails always begin with a friendly salutation: "Dear Beloved Friend, I know this message will come to you as surprised but permit me of my desire to go into business relationship with you." The introduction is often followed by a long involved story of deaths and unexpected inheritances: "I am Miss Naomi Surugaba, a daughter to late Al-badari Surugaba of Libya whom was murdered during the recent civil war in Libya in March 2011….my late Father came to Cotonou Benin republic with USD 4,200,000.00 (US$4.2M) which he deposited in a Bank here…for safe keeping. I am here seeking for an avenue to transfer the fund to you….Please I will offer you 20% of the total sum for your assistance….."[29] The emails are crafted to invoke a sense of balanced reciprocity: the authors tell us how trustworthy and esteemed we are and offer to give us a percentage of the money in exchange for our assistance. However, most savvy recipients immediately recognize that these scams are in fact a form of negative reciprocity since they know they will never actually receive the promised money and, in fact, will probably lose money if they give their bank account information to their correspondent.

The anthropologist Daniel Smith studied the motives and practices of Nigerian email scammers who are responsible for approximately one-fifth of these types of emails that flood Western inboxes.[30] He found that 419 scams, as they are known in Nigeria (after the section of the criminal code outlawing fraud), emerged in the largest African state (Nigeria has more than 130 million residents, nearly 70 percent of whom live below the poverty line) in the late 1990s when there were few legitimate economic opportunities for the large number of educated young people who had the English skills and technological expertise necessary for successful scams. Smith spoke with some of the Nigerians sending these emails and found that they dreamed of a big payoff someday. They reportedly felt bad for people who were duped, but said that if Americans were greedy enough to fall for it they got what they deserved.

The typical email correspondence always emphasizes the urgency, confidentiality, and reciprocity of the proposed arrangement. Smith argues that the 419 scams mimic long-standing cultural practices around kinship and patronage relations. While clearly 419 scammers are practicing negative reciprocity by trying to get something for nothing (unfortunately we will never receive the 20 percent of the $4.2 million that Miss Naomi Surugaba promised us), many in the United States continue to be lured in by the veneer of balanced reciprocity. The FBI receives an estimated 4,000 complaints about advance fee scams each year, and annual victim losses total over $55 million.[31]

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7.5: Redistribution and Market Economy

REDISTRIBUTION

Redistribution is the accumulation of goods or labor by a particular person or institution for the purpose of dispersal at a later date. Redistribution is found in all societies. For example, within households we pool our labor and resources, yet we rarely distribute these outside of our family. For redistribution to become a central economic process, a society must have a centralized political apparatus to coordinate and enforce the practice.

Definition: redistribution

The accumulation of goods or labor by a particular person or institution for the purpose of dispersal at a later date.

Redistribution can occur alongside other forms of exchange. For example, in the United States everyone who works in the formal sector pays federal taxes to the Internal Revenue Service. During the 2015 fiscal year the IRS collected $3.3 trillion in federal revenue. It processed 243 million returns, and 119 million of these resulted in a tax refund. In total, $403.3 billion tax dollars were redistributed by this central political apparatus.[32] Even if I did not receive a cash refund from the IRS, I still benefited from the redistribution in the form of federal services and infrastructure.

Sometimes economic practices that appear to be merely reciprocal gift exchanges are revealed to be forms of redistribution after closer inspection. The potlatch system of the Native American groups living in the United States and Canadian northwestern coastal area was long understood as an example of functional gift giving. Traditionally, two groups of clans would perform highly ritualized exchanges of food, blankets, and ritual objects. The system produced status and prestige among participants: by giving away more goods than another person, a chief could build his reputation and gain new respect within the community. After contact with settlers, the excessive gift giving during potlatches escalated to the point that early anthropologists described it as a "war of property."[33]

Later anthropological studies of the potlatch revealed that rather than wasting, burning, or giving away their property to display their wealth, the groups were actually giving away goods that other groups could use and then waiting for a later potlatch when they would receive things not available in their own region. This was important because the availability of food hunted, fished, and foraged by native communities could be highly variable. The anthropologist Stuart Piddocke found that the potlatch primarily served a livelihood function by ensuring the redistribution of goods between groups with surpluses and those with deficits.[34]

MARKET EXCHANGE

The third way that societies distribute goods and services is through **market exchange**. Markets are social institutions with prices or exchange equivalencies. Markets do not necessarily have to be localized in a geographic place (e.g., a marketplace), but they cannot exist without institutions to govern the exchanges. Market and reciprocal exchange appear to share similar features: one person gives something and the other receives something. A key distinction between the two is that market exchanges are regulated by supply and demand mechanisms. The forces of supply and demand can create risk for people living in societies that largely distribute goods through market exchange. If we lose our jobs, we may not be able to buy food for our families. In contrast, if a member of a Dobe Ju/'hoansi community is hurt and unable to gather foods today, she will continue to eat as a result of generalized reciprocal exchanges.

Definition: market exchange

Goods and services are bought and sold with prices or set exchange equivalencies.

Market exchanges are based on transactions, or changes in the status of a good or service between people, such as a sale. While market exchange is generally less personal than reciprocal exchange, personalized transactions between people who have a relationship that endures beyond a single exchange do exist. Atomized transactions are impersonal ones between people who have no relationship with each other beyond the short term of the exchange. These are generally short-run, closed-ended transactions with few implications for the future. In contrast, personalized transactions occur between people who have a relationship that endures past the exchange and might include both social and economic elements. The transactors are embedded in networks of social relations and might even have knowledge of the other's personality, family, or personal circumstances that helps them trust

that the exchange will be satisfactory. Economic exchanges within families, for example when a child begins to work for a family business, are extreme examples of personalized market exchange.

To better understand the differences between transactions between relative strangers and those that are more personalized, consider the different options one has for a haircut: a person can stop by a chain salon such as Great Clips and leave twenty minutes later after spending $15 to have his hair trimmed by someone he has never met before, or he can develop an ongoing relationship with a hair stylist or barber he regularly visits. These appointments may last an hour or even longer, and he and his stylist probably chat about each other's lives, the weather, or politics. At Christmas he may even bring a small gift or give an extra tip. He trusts his stylist to cut his hair the way he likes it because of their long history of personalized transactions.

Money

While general purpose money is not a prerequisite for market exchanges, most commercial transactions today do involve the exchange of money. In our own society, and in most parts of the world, general purpose money can be exchanged for all manner of goods and services. **General purpose money** serves as a medium of exchange, a tool for storing wealth, and as a way to assign interchangeable values. It reflects our ideas about the generalized interchangeability of all things—it makes products and services from all over the world commensurable in terms of a single metric. In so doing, it increases opportunities for unequal exchange.[36] As we will see, different societies have attempted to challenge this notion of interchangeability and the inequalities it can foster in different ways.

Definition: general purpose money

A medium of exchange that can be used in all economic transactions.

Maine Lobster Markets

To better understand the nature of market transactions, anthropologist James Acheson studied the economic lives of Maine fishermen and lobster dealers.[35] The lobster market is highly sensitive to supply and demand: catch volumes and prices change radically over the course of the year. For example, during the winter months, lobster catches are typically low because the animals are inactive and fishermen are reluctant to go out into the cold and stormy seas for small catches. Beginning in April, lobsters become more active and, as the water warms, they migrate toward shore and catch volumes increase. In May prices fall dramatically; supply is high but there are relatively few tourists and demand is low. In June and July catch volume decreases again when lobsters molt and are difficult to catch, but demand increases due to the large influx of tourists, which, in turn, leads to higher prices. In the fall, after the tourists have left, catch volume increases again as a new class of recently molted lobsters become available to the fishermen. In other words, catch and price are inversely related: when the catch is lowest, the price is highest, and when the catch is highest, the price is lowest.

The fishermen generally sell their lobsters to wholesalers and have very little idea where the lobsters go, how many hands they pass through on their way to the consumer, how prices are set, or why they vary over the course of the year. In other words, from the fisherman's point of view the process is shrouded in fog, mystery, and rumor. Acheson found that in order to manage the inherent risk posed by this variable market, fishermen form long-term, personalized economic relationships with particular dealers. The dealers' goal is to ensure a large, steady supply of lobsters for as low a price as possible. In order to do so, they make contracts with fishermen to always buy all of the lobster they have to sell no matter how glutted the market might be. In exchange, the fishermen agree to sell their catches for the going rate and forfeit the right to bargain over price. The dealers provide added incentives to the fishermen: for example, they will allow fishermen to use their dock at no cost and supply them with gasoline, diesel fuel, paint, buoys, and gloves at cost or with only a small markup. They also often provide interest-free loans to their fishermen for boats, equipment, and traps. In sum, the Maine fishermen and the dealers have, over time, developed highly personalized exchange relations in order to manage the risky lobster market. While these market exchanges last over many seasons and rely on a certain degree of trust, neither the fishermen nor the dealers would characterize the relationship as reciprocal—they are buying and selling lobster, not exchanging gifts.

Tiv Spheres of Exchange

Prior to colonialism, the Tiv people in Nigeria had an economic system governed by a moral hierarchy of values that challenged the idea that all objects can be made commensurable through general purpose money. The anthropologists Paul and Laura Bohannan developed the theory of spheres of exchange after recognizing that the Tiv had three distinct economic arenas and that each arena had its own form of money.[37] The subsistence sphere included locally produced foods (yams, grains, and

vegetables), chickens, goats, and household utensils. The second sphere encompassed slaves, cattle, white cloth, and metal bars. Finally, the third, most prestigious sphere was limited to marriageable females. Excluded completely from the Tiv spheres of exchange were labor (because it was always reciprocally exchanged) and land (which was not owned per se, but rather communally held within families).

The Tiv were able to convert their wealth upwards through the spheres of exchange. For example, a Tiv man could trade a portion of his yam harvest for slaves that, in turn, could be given as bridewealth for a marriageable female. However, it was considered immoral to convert wealth downwards: no honorable man would exchange slaves or brass rods for food.[38] The Bohannans found that this moral economy quickly collapsed when it was incorporated into the contemporary realm of general purpose money. When items in any of the three spheres could be exchanged for general purpose money, the Tiv could no longer maintain separate categories of exchangeable items. The Bohannans concluded that the moral meanings of money—in other words, how exchange is culturally conceived—can have very significant material implications for people's everyday lives.[39]

Local Currency Systems: Ithaca HOURS

While we may take our general purpose currency for granted, as the Tiv example demonstrates, money is profoundly symbolic and political. Money is not only the measure of value but also the purpose of much of our activity, and money shapes economic relations by creating inequalities and obliterating qualitative differences.[40] In other words, I might pay a babysitter $50 to watch my children for the evening, and I might spend $50 on a new sweater the next day. While these two expenses are commensurable through general purpose money, qualitatively they are in fact radically different in terms of the sentiment I attach to each (and I would not ever try to pay my babysitter in sweaters).

Some communities explicitly acknowledge the political and symbolic components of money and develop complementary currency systems with the goal of maximizing transactions in a geographically bounded area, such as within a single city. The goal is to encourage people to connect more directly with each other than they might do when shopping in corporate stores using general purpose money.[41] For example, the city of Ithaca, New York, promotes its local economy and community self-reliance through the use of Ithaca HOURS.[42] More than 900 participants accept Ithaca HOURS for goods and services, and some local employers and employees even pay or receive partial wages in the complementary currency. The currency has been in circulation since 1991, and the system was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1998. Today it is administered by a board of elected volunteers. Ithaca HOURS circulate in denominations of two, one, one-half, one-fourth, one-eighth, and one-tenth HOURS ($20, $10, $5, $2.50, $1.25, and $1, respectively). The HOURS are put into circulation through "disbursements" given to registered organization members, through small interest-free loans to local businesses, and through grants to community organizations. The name "HOURS" evokes the principle of labor exchange and the idea that a unit of time is equal for everyone.[43]



Figure 7.5.1: An Ithaca Hour Note

The anthropologist Faidra Papavasiliou studied the impact of the Ithaca HOURS currency system. She found that while the complementary currency does not necessarily create full economic equality, it does create deeper connections among community members and local businesses, helping to demystify and personalize exchange (much as we saw with the lobstermen and dealers).[44] The Ithaca HOURS system also offers important networking opportunities for locally owned businesses and, because it provides zero interest business loans, it serves as a form of security against economic crisis.[45] Finally, the Ithaca HOURS complementary currency system encourages community members to shop at locally owned businesses. As we will see in the next section, where we choose to shop and what we choose to buy forms a large part of our lives and cultural identity. The HOURS system demonstrates a relatively successful approach to challenging the inequalities fostered by general purpose money.

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7.6: Consumption and Global Capitalism

CONSUMPTION

Consumption refers to the process of buying, eating, or using a resource, food, commodity, or service. Anthropologists understand consumption more specifically as the forms of behavior that connect our economic activity with the cultural symbols that give our lives meaning.[46] People's consumption patterns are a large part of their lives, and economic anthropologists explore why, how, and when people consume what they do. The answers to these questions lie in people's ideologies and identities as members of a social group; each culture is different and each consumes in its own way. Consumption is always social even when it addresses physical needs. For example, all humans need to eat, but people around the world have radically different ideas of what foods and flavors are most desirable and appropriate.

We use our material possessions to meet our needs (for example, we wear clothing to protect us from the environment), regulate our social lives, and affirm the rightful order of things.[47] Anthropologists understand that the commodities we buy are not just good for eating or shelter, they are good for *thinking*: in acquiring and possessing particular goods, people make visible and stable the categories of culture.[48] For example, consumption helps us establish and defend differences among people and occasions: I might wear a specific t-shirt and cap to a baseball game with friends in order to distinguish myself as a fan of a particular team. In the process, I make myself easily identifiable within the larger fan community. However, I probably would not wear this same outfit to a job interview because it would be inappropriate for the occasion.

Economic anthropologists are also interested in why objects become status symbols and how these come to be experienced as an aspect of the self.[49] Objects have a "social life" during which they may pass through various statuses: a silver cake server begins its life as a commodity for sale in a store. [50] However, imagine that someone's great-grandmother used that server to cut the cake at her wedding, and it became a cherished family heirloom passed down from one generation to the next. Unfortunately, the server ended up in the hands of a cousin who did not feel a sentimental attachment to this object. She sold it to a gold and silver broker for currency and it was transformed into an anonymous commodity. That broker in turn sold it to a dealer who melted it down, turning the once cherished cake server back into a raw material.

Transforming Barbie Dolls

We have already learned about the hard work that Americans devote to converting impersonal commodities into sentimental gifts at Christmastime with the goal of nourishing their closest social bonds. Consumers in capitalist systems continuously attempt to reshape the meaning of the commodities that businesses brand, package, and market to us.[51] The anthropologist Elizabeth Chin conducted ethnographic research among young African American children in a poor neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut, exploring the intersection of consumption, inequality, and cultural identity.

Chin specifically looked at "ethnically correct" Barbie dolls, arguing that while they may represent some progress in comparison to the past when only white Barbies were sold, they also reinforce outdated understandings of biological race and ethnicity. Rather than dismantling race and class boundaries, the "ethnic" dolls create segregated toy shelves that in fact mirror the segregation that young black children experience in their schools and neighborhoods.

The young black girls that Chin researched were unable to afford these $20 brand-name dolls and typically played with less expensive, generic Barbie dolls that were white.[52] The girls used their imaginations and worked to transform their dolls by giving them hairstyles like their own, braiding and curling the dolls' long straight hair in order to integrate the dolls into their own worlds. [53] A quick perusal of the Internet reveals numerous tutorials and blogs devoted to black Barbie hairstyling, demonstrating that the young New Haven girls are not the only ones working to transform these store-bought commodities in socially meaningful ways. [54]

CONSUMPTION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Consumption provides us with a window into globalization, which we will learn more about in the Globalization chapter. Over the past several decades, as global capitalism expanded its reach into developing countries around the world, many people fretted that the growing influx of Western products would lead to cultural homogeneity and even cultural imperialism. Some argued that with every McDonald's constructed, the values and beliefs of the West were being imposed on non-Western societies. However, anthropologists have systematically challenged this thesis by providing a more sophisticated understanding of local cultural contexts. They demonstrate that people do not become Westernized simply by buying Western commodities, any more than I become somehow more Japanese after eating at my favorite neighborhood hibachi restaurant. In fact, anthropological research

shows that Western commodities can sometimes lead to a resurgence of local identities and an affirmation of local processes over global patterns.

The Children Cry for Bread

The anthropologist Mary Wesimantel researched how families adapt to changing economic circumstances, including the introduction of Western products into their indigenous community of Zumbagua, Ecuador. Once subsistence barley farmers, men from Zumbagua began to migrate to cities in search of work while the women stayed home to care for the children and continue to farm barley for home consumption. The men periodically returned home, bringing cash earnings and urban luxuries such as bread. The children associated this bread with modernity and city life, and they preferred to eat it rather than the traditional staple food of toasted ground barley, grown and cooked by their mothers. The children "cried" for the bread their fathers brought home. Yet, their mothers resisted their pleas and continued to feed them grains from their own fields because barley consumption was considered a core component of indigenous identity.[55] This example illustrates the complex negotiations that emerge within families and communities when they are increasingly integrated into a global economy and exposed to Western goods.

Consumption, Status, and Recognition among the Elite in China

In other parts of the world, the consumption of Western goods can be used to cement social and economic status within local networks. John Osburg studied the "new elite" in China, the class of entrepreneurs who have successfully navigated the recent transitions in the Chinese economy since the early 1990s when private businesses and foreign investment began to steadily expand their reach in this communist country.[56] Osburg found that the new elite do not constitute a coherent class defined by income level or occupation. Instead, they occupy an unstable and contested category and consequently rely on the consumption of Western-style goods and services in order to stabilize their identities.

Osburg argues that the whole point of elite consumption in Chengdu, China, is to make one's economic, social, and cultural capital as transparent and legible as possible to the widest audience in order to let everyone know one is wealthy and well connected. Consequently, the Chengdu elite favor easily recognizable and pricey brand names. However, consumption is not simply an arena of status display. Instead, Osburg shows how it is a form of social practice through which relationships with other elites are forged: the shared consumption of conventional luxury objects like liquor and tobacco solidifies relationships among the privileged.[57]

COMMODITIES AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

In his 1967 speech "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us that all life is interrelated:

> *We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. . . Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and reach over for the sponge, and that's handed to you by a Pacific Islander. You reach for a bar of soap, given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by a South American. . . And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world.*[58]

King's words are even truer today than they were in the late 1960s. Due to the intensification of global capitalism, the vast majority of the commodities we buy and the food we consume come to us from distant places; while such global supply chains are not new, they have become increasingly dense in an age of container shipping and overnight air deliveries.

Recall that a commodity is any good that is produced for sale or exchange for other goods. However, commodities are more than just a means to acquire general purpose money. They also embody social relations of production, the identities of businesses, and particular geographic locales. Many economic anthropologists today study global flows through the lens of a concrete substance that makes a circuit through various locales, exploring the social lives of agrifood commodities such as mutton, coffee, sushi, and sugar.[59] In following these commodities along their supply chains, anthropologists highlight not only relations of production but

also the power of ideas, images, and noneconomic actors. These studies of specific commodities are a powerful method to show how capitalism has grown, spread, and penetrated agrarian societies around the world.[60]

Darjeeling Tea

The anthropologist Sarah Besky researched Darjeeling tea production in India to better understand how consumer desires are mapped onto distant locations.[61] In India, tea plantation owners are attempting to reinvent their product for 21st century markets through the use of fair-trade certification (discussed earlier in this chapter) and Geographical Indication Status (GI). GI is an international property-rights system, regulated by the World Trade Organization, that legally protects the rights of people in certain places to produce certain commodities. For example, bourbon must come from Kentucky, Mezcal can only be produced in certain parts of Mexico, and sparkling wine can only be called champagne if it originated in France. Similarly, in order to legally be sold as "Darjeeling tea," the tea leaves must come from the Darjeeling district of the Indian state of West Bengal.



Figure 7.6.1: Tea Workers in Darjeeling, India

Besky explores how the meaning of Darjeeling tea is created through three interrelated processes: (1) extensive marketing campaigns aimed at educating consumers about the unique Darjeeling taste, (2) the application of international law to define the geographic borders within which Darjeeling tea can be produced, and (3) the introduction of tea plantation-based tourism. What the Darjeeling label hides is the fact that tea plantations are highly unequal systems with economic relationships that date back to the colonial era: workers depend upon plantation owners not just for money but also for food, medical care, schools, and housing. Even when we pay more for Darjeeling tea, the premium price is not always returned to the workers in the form of higher wages. Besky's research shows how capitalism and market exchange shapes the daily lives of people around the world. The final section of this chapter explores the ways in which economic anthropologists understand and question structural inequalities in the world today.

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7.7: Political Economy- Understanding Inequality

Humans are fundamentally social, and our culture is always shared and patterned: we live our lives in groups. However, not all groups serve the needs of their members, and some people have more power than others, meaning they can make the weak consent through threats and coercion. Within all societies there are classes of people defined by the kinds of property they own and/or the kinds of work they engage in.[62] Beginning in the 1960s, an increasing number of anthropologists began to study the world around them through the lens of **political economy**. This approach recognizes that the economy is central to everyday life but contextualizes economic relations within state structures, political processes, social structures, and cultural values.[63] Some political economic anthropologists focus on how societies and markets have historically evolved while others ask how individuals deal with the forces that oppress them, focusing on historical legacies of social domination and marginalization. [64]

Definition: political economy

An approach in anthropology that investigates the historical evolution of economic relationships as well as the contemporary political processes and social structures that contribute to differences in income and wealth.

Karl Marx famously wrote, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."[65] In other words, while humans are inherently creative, our possibilities are limited by the structural realities of our everyday lives.

Consider a typical college student. Is this student happy with the courses her department or college is offering? Are there courses that she needs to graduate that are not being offered yet? She is free to choose among the listed courses, but she cannot choose which courses are available. This depends on factors beyond her control as a student: who is available to teach which topics or what the administration has decided is important enough to offer. So, her agency and ability to choose is highly constrained by the structures in place. In the same way, political economies constrain people's choices and define the terms by which we must live. Importantly, it is not simply structures that determine our choices and actions; these are also shaped by our community.

Just as our college student may come to think of the requirements she has to fulfill for her degree as just the way it is (even if she does not want to take that theory course!), people come to think of their available choices in everyday life as simply the natural order of things. However, the degree of agency one has depends on the amount of power one has and the degree to which one understands the structural dimensions of one's life. This focus on power and structural relations parallels an anthropological understanding of culture as a holistic system: economic relations never exist by themselves, apart from social and political institutions.

Structural Violence and the Politics of Aid in Haiti

Anthropologists interested in understanding economic inequalities often research forms of structural violence present in the communities where they work.[66]**Structural violence** is a form of violence in which a social structure or institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. In other words, how political and economic forces structure risk for various forms of suffering within a population. Structural violence can include things like infectious disease, hunger, and violence (torture, rape, crime, etc.).

Definition: structural violence

A form of violence in which a social structure or institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.

In the United States we tend to focus on individuals and personal experiences. A popular narrative holds that if you work hard enough you can "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" in this country of immigrants and economic opportunity. The converse of this ideology is victim blaming: the logic is that if people are poor it is their own fault.[67] However, studying structural violence helps us understand that for some people there simply is no getting ahead and all one can hope for is survival.

The conditions of everyday life in Haiti, which only worsened after the 2010 earthquake, are a good example of how structural violence limits individual opportunities. Haiti is the most unequal country in Latin America and the Caribbean: the richest 20 percent of its population holds more than 64 percent of its total wealth, while the poorest 20 percent hold barely one percent. The starkest contrast is between the urban and rural areas: almost 70 percent of Haiti's rural households are chronically poor (vs. 20 percent in cities), meaning they survive on less than $2 a day and lack access to basic goods and services.[68] Haiti suffers from widespread unemployment and underemployment, and more than two-thirds of people in the labor force do not have formal jobs.

The population is not well educated, and more than 40 percent of the population over the age of 15 is illiterate.[69] According to the World Food Programme, more than 100,000 Haitian children under the age of five suffer from acute malnutrition and one in three children is stunted (or irreversibly short for their age). Only 50 percent of households have access to safe water, and only 25 percent have adequate sanitation.[70]

On January 12, 2010, a devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck this highly unequal and impoverished nation, killing more than 160,000 people and displacing close to 1.5 million more. Because the earthquake's epicenter was near the capital city, the National Palace and the majority of Haiti's governmental offices were almost completely destroyed. The government lost an estimated 17 percent of its workforce. Other vital infrastructure, such as hospitals, communication systems, and roads, was also damaged, making it harder to respond to immediate needs after the quake.[71]

The world responded with one of its most generous outpourings of aid in recent history. By March 1, 2010, half of all U.S. citizens had donated a combined total of $1 billion for the relief effort (worldwide $2.2 billion was raised), and on March 31, 2010 international agencies pledged $5.3 billion over the next 18 months.[72] The anthropologist Mark Schuller studied the aftermath of the earthquake and the politics of humanitarianism in Haiti. He found that little of this aid ever reached Haiti's most vulnerable people, the 1.5 million people living in the IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. Less than one percent of the aid actually was given to the Haitian government. The largest single recipient was the U.S. military (33 percent), and the majority of the aid was dispersed to foreign-run non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Haiti.

Because so little of this aid reached the people on the ground who needed it most, seven months following the disaster 40 percent of the IDP camps did not have access to water, and 30 percent did not have toilets of any kind. Only ten percent of families in the camps had a tent and the rest slept under tarps or bedsheets. Only 20 percent of the camps had education, health care, or mental health facilities on-site.[73] Schuller argues that this failure constitutes a violation of the Haitian IDP's human rights, and it is linked to a long history of exploitative relations between Haiti and the rest of the world.

Haiti is the second oldest republic in the Western Hemisphere (after the United States), having declared its independence from France in 1804. Years later, in order to earn diplomatic recognition from the French government, Haiti agreed to pay financial reparations to the powerful nation from 1825 to 1947. In order to do so, Haiti was forced to take out large loans from U.S. and European banks at high interest rates. During the twentieth century, the country suffered at the hands of brutal dictatorships, and its foreign debts continued to increase. Schuller argues that the world system continually applied pressure to Haiti, draining its resources and forcing it into the debt bondage that kept it from developing. In the process, this system contributed to the very surplus that allowed powerful Western nations to develop.[74]

When the earthquake struck, Haiti's economy already revolved around international aid and foreign remittances sent by migrants (which represented approximately 25 percent of the gross domestic product).[75] Haiti had become a republic of NGOs that attract the nation's most educated, talented workers (because they can pay significantly higher wages than the national government, for example). Schuller argues that the NGOs constitute a form of "trickle-down imperialism" as they reproduce the world system.[76] The relief money funneled through these organizations ended up supporting a new elite class rather than the impoverished multitudes that so desperately need the assistance.

CONCLUSION

Anthropologists have identified forms of structural inequality in countless places around the world. As we will learn in the Public Anthropology chapter, anthropology can be a powerful tool for addressing the pressing social issues of our times. When anthropological research is presented in an accessible and easily understood form, it can effectively encourage meaningful public conversations about questions such as how to best disperse relief aid after natural disasters.

One of economic anthropology's most important lessons is that multiple forms of economic production and exchange structure our daily lives and social relationships. As we have seen throughout this chapter, people simultaneously participate in both market and reciprocal exchanges on a regular basis. For example, I may buy lunch for a friend today with the idea that she will return the favor next week when she cooks me supper. Building on this anthropological idea of economic diversity, some scholars argue that in order to address the economic inequalities surrounding us we should collectively work to construct a community economy, or a space for economic decision-making that recognizes and negotiates our interdependence with other humans, other species, and our environment. J. K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy argue that in the process of recognizing and negotiating this interdependence, we become a community.[77]

At the heart of the community economies framework is an understanding of economic diversity that parallels anthropological perspectives. The economic iceberg is a visual that nicely illustrates this diversity.[78] Above the waterline are economic activities

that are visible in mainstream economic accounts, things like formal wage labor and shopping for groceries in a supermarket. Below the waterline we find the wide range of people, places, and activities that contribute to our well-being. This conceptual tool helps us to explore interrelationships that cannot be captured through mechanical market feedback loops.[79]

The most prevalent form of labor around the world is the unpaid work that is conducted within the household, the family, and the neighborhood or wider community. When we include these activities in our understanding of the diverse economy, we also reposition many people who may see themselves (or are labeled by others) as unemployed or economically inactive subjects.[80] When we highlight these different kinds of labor and forms of compensation we expand the scope of economic identities that fall outside the narrow range valued by market production and exchange (employer, employee, or entrepreneur).[81] Recognizing our mutual connections and the surplus possibilities in our own community is an important first step toward building an alternative economy, one that privileges community spheres rather than market spheres and supports equality over inequality. This also resonates with one of economic anthropology's central goals: searching for alternatives to the exploitative capitalist relations that structure the daily lives of so many people around the world today. [82]

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7.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. Why are the economic activities of people like the fair trade coffee farmers described in this chapter challenging to characterize? What benefits do the coffee farmers hope to achieve by participating in a fair trade cooperative? Why would participating in the global economy actually make these farming families more independent?
2. This chapter includes several examples of the ways in which economic production, consumption, and exchange link our lives to those of people in other parts of the world. Thinking about your own daily economic activities, how is your lifestyle dependent on people in other places? In what ways might your consumption choices be connected to global economic inequality?
3. General purpose money is used for most transactions in our society. How is the act of purchasing an object with money different from trading or gift-giving in terms of the social and personal connections involved? Would an alternative like the Ithaca HOURS system be beneficial to your community?
4. The Barbie doll is a product that represents rigid cultural ideas about race, but Elizabeth Chin discovered in her research that girls who play with these dolls transform the dolls' appearance and racial identity. What are some other examples of products that people purchase and modify as a form of personal expression or social commentary?

GLOSSARY

Balanced reciprocity: the exchange of something with the expectation that something of equal value will be returned within a specific time period.

Consumption: the process of buying, eating, or using a resource, food, commodity, or service.

Exchange: How goods are distributed among people.

Generalized reciprocity: giving without expecting a specific thing in return.

General purpose money: a medium of exchange that can be used in all economic transactions.

Market exchange: how goods are distributed among people.

Means of production: the resources used to produce goods in a society such as land for farming or factories.

Mode of production: the social relations through which human labor is used to transform energy from nature using tools, skills, organization, and knowledge.

Negative reciprocity: an attempt to get something for nothing; exchange in which both parties try to take advantage of the other.

Production: Transforming nature and raw materials into the material goods that are useful and/or necessary for humans.

Political economy: an approach in anthropology that investigates the historical evolution of economic relationships as well as the contemporary political processes and social structures that contribute to differences in income and wealth.

Redistribution: the accumulation of goods or labor by a particular person or institution for the purpose of dispersal at a later date.

Structural violence: a form of violence in which a social structure or institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.

Subsistence farmers: people who raise plants and animals for their own consumption, but not for sale to others.

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7.9: About the Author

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Sarah Lyon is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Her work is situated at the juncture of development studies, economic anthropology and food studies. She is particularly interested in how alternative food networks such as fair trade work to create and sustain diverse economies in the United States and Latin America.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Political Organization

Learning Objectives

- Identify the four levels of socio-cultural integration (band, tribe, chiefdom, and state) and describe their characteristics.
- Compare systems of leadership in egalitarian and non-egalitarian societies.
- Describe systems used in tribes and chiefdoms to achieve social integration and encourage connections between people.
- Assess the benefits and problems associated with state-level political organizations.

8.1: Political Organization and Socio-cultural Integration
8.2: Egalitarian Societies
8.3: Tribal Integration, Law, and Warfare
8.4: Ranked Societies and Chiefdoms
8.5: Stratified Societies and States
8.6: States, Law, and Warfare
8.7: Social Control
8.8: End of Chapter Discussion
8.9: About the Author

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8.1: Political Organization and Socio-cultural Integration

LEVELS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION

If cultures of various sizes and configurations are to be compared, there must be some common basis for defining political organization. In many small communities, the family functions as a political unit. As Julian Steward wrote about the Shoshone, a Native American group in the Nevada basin, "all features of the relatively simple culture were integrated and functioned on a family level. The family was the reproductive, economic, educational, political, and religious unit."[6] In larger more complex societies, however, the functions of the family are taken over by larger social institutions. The resources of the economy, for example, are managed by authority figures outside the family who demand taxes or other tribute. The educational function of the family may be taken over by schools constituted under the authority of a government, and the authority structure in the family is likely to be subsumed under the greater power of the state. Therefore, anthropologists need methods for assessing political organizations that can be applied to many different kinds of communities. This concept is called levels of socio-cultural integration.

Elman Service (1975) developed an influential scheme for categorizing the political character of societies that recognized four levels of socio-cultural integration: **band**, **tribe**, **chiefdom**, and **state**.[7] A band is the smallest unit of political organization, consisting of only a few families and no formal leadership positions. Tribes have larger populations but are organized around family ties and have fluid or shifting systems of temporary leadership. Chiefdoms are large political units in which the chief, who usually is determined by heredity, holds a formal position of power. States are the most complex form of political organization and are characterized by a central government that has a monopoly over legitimate uses of physical force, a sizeable bureaucracy, a system of formal laws, and a standing military force.

Definition: band

The smallest unit of political organization, consisting of only a few families and no formal leadership positions.

Definition: tribe

Political units organized around family ties that have fluid or shifting systems of temporary leadership.

Definition: chiefdom

Large political units in which the chief, who usually is determined by heredity, holds a formal position of power.

Definition: state

The most complex form of political organization characterized by a central government that has a monopoly over legitimate uses of physical force, a sizeable bureaucracy, a system of formal laws, and a standing military force.

Each type of political integration can be further categorized as **egalitarian**, **ranked**, or **stratified**. Band societies and tribal societies generally are considered egalitarian—there is no great difference in status or power between individuals and there are as many valued status positions in the societies as there are persons able to fill them. Chiefdoms are ranked societies; there are substantial differences in the wealth and social status of individuals based on how closely related they are to the chief. In ranked societies, there are a limited number of positions of power or status, and only a few can occupy them. State societies are stratified. There are large differences in the wealth, status, and power of individuals based on unequal access to resources and positions of power. Socio-economic classes, for instance, are forms of stratification in many state societies.[8]

Definition: egalitarian

Societies in which there is no great difference in status or power between individuals and there are as many valued status positions in the societies as there are persons able to fill them.

Definition: ranked

Societies in which there are substantial differences in the wealth and social status of individuals; there are a limited number of positions of power or status, and only a few can occupy them.

Definition: stratified

Societies in which there are large differences in the wealth, status, and power of individuals based on unequal access to resources and positions of power.

EGALITARIAN SOCIETIES

We humans are not equal in all things. The status of women is low relative to the status of men in many, if not most, societies as we will see. There is also the matter of age. In some societies, the aged enjoy greater prestige than the young; in others, the aged are subjected to discrimination in employment and other areas. Even in Japan, which has traditionally been known for its respect for elders, the prestige of the aged is in decline. And we vary in terms of our abilities. Some are more eloquent or skilled technically than others; some are expert craft persons while others are not; some excel at conceptual thought, whereas for the rest of us, there is always the *For Dummies* book series to manage our computers, software, and other parts of our daily lives such as wine and sex.

In a complex society, it may seem that **social classes**—differences in wealth and status—are, like death and taxes, inevitable: that one is born into wealth, poverty, or somewhere in between and has no say in the matter, at least at the start of life, and that social class is an involuntary position in society. However, is social class universal? As they say, let's look at the record, in this case ethnographies. We find that among foragers, there is no advantage to hoarding food; in most climates, it will rot before one's eyes. Nor is there much personal property, and leadership, where it exists, is informal. In forager societies, the basic ingredients for social class do not exist. Foragers such as the !Kung, Inuit, and aboriginal Australians, are egalitarian societies in which there are few differences between members in wealth, status, and power. Highly skilled and less skilled hunters do not belong to different strata in the way that the captains of industry do from you and me. The less skilled hunters in egalitarian societies receive a share of the meat and have the right to be heard on important decisions. Egalitarian societies also lack a government or centralized leadership. Their leaders, known as headmen or big men, emerge by consensus of the group. Foraging societies are always egalitarian, but so are many societies that practice horticulture or pastoralism. In terms of political organization, egalitarian societies can be either bands or tribes.

Definition: social classes

The division of society into groups based on wealth and status.

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8.2: Egalitarian Societies

BAND-LEVEL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Societies organized as a band typically comprise foragers who rely on hunting and gathering and are therefore nomadic, are few in number (rarely exceeding 100 persons), and form small groups consisting of a few families and a shifting population. Bands lack formal leadership. Richard Lee went so far as to say that the Dobe! Kung had no leaders. To quote one of his informants, "Of course we have headmen. Each one of us is headman over himself."[9]At most, a band's leader is *primus inter pares* or "first among equals" assuming anyone is first at all. Modesty is a valued trait; arrogance and competitiveness are not acceptable in societies characterized by reverse dominance. What leadership there is in band societies tends to be transient and subject to shifting circumstances. For example, among the Paiute in North America, "rabbit bosses" coordinated rabbit drives during the hunting season but played no leadership role otherwise. Some "leaders" are excellent mediators who are called on when individuals are involved in disputes while others are perceived as skilled shamans or future-seers who are consulted periodically. There are no formal offices or rules of succession.[10]

Bands were probably the first political unit to come into existence outside the family itself. There is some debate in anthropology about how the earliest bands were organized. Elman Service argued that patrilocal bands organized around groups of related men served as the prototype, reasoning that groups centered on male family relationships made sense because male cooperation was essential to hunting.[11] M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies pointed out in rebuttal that gathering vegetable foods, which typically was viewed as women's work, actually contributed a greater number of calories in most cultures and thus that matrilocal bands organized around groups of related women would be closer to the norm.[12] Indeed, in societies in which hunting is the primary source of food, such as the Inuit, women tend to be subordinate to men while men and women tend to have roughly equal status in societies that mainly gather plants for food.

Law in Band Societies

Within bands of people, disputes are typically resolved informally. There are no formal mediators or any organizational equivalent of a court of law. A good mediator may emerge—or may not. In some cultures, duels are employed. Among the Inuit, for example, disputants engage in a duel using songs in which, drum in hand, they chant insults at each other before an audience. The audience selects the better chanter and thereby the winner in the dispute.[13] The Mbuti of the African Congo use ridicule; even children berate adults for laziness, quarreling, or selfishness. If ridicule fails, the Mbuti elders evaluate the dispute carefully, determine the cause, and, in extreme cases, walk to the center of the camp and criticize the individuals by name, using humor to soften their criticism—the group, after all, must get along.[14]

Warfare in Band Societies

Nevertheless, conflict does sometimes break out into war between bands and, sometimes, within them. Such warfare is usually sporadic and short-lived since bands do not have formal leadership structures or enough warriors to sustain conflict for long. Most of the conflict arises from interpersonal arguments. Among the Tiwi of Australia, for example, failure of one band to reciprocate another band's wife-giving with one of its own female relative led to abduction of women by the aggrieved band, precipitating a "war" that involved some spear-throwing (many did not shoot straight and even some of the onlookers were wounded) but mostly violent talk and verbal abuse.[15] For the Dobe !Kung, Lee found 22 cases of homicide by males and other periodic episodes of violence, mostly in disputes over women—not quite the gentle souls Elizabeth Marshall Thomas depicted in her *Harmless People* (1959).[16]

TRIBAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Whereas bands involve small populations without structure, tribal societies involve at least two well-defined groups linked together in some way and range in population from about 100 to as many as 5,000 people. Though their social institutions can be fairly complex, there are no centralized political structures or offices in the strict sense of those terms. There may be headmen, but there are no rules of succession and sons do not necessarily succeed their fathers as is the case with chiefdoms. Tribal leadership roles are open to anyone—in practice, usually men, especially elder men who acquire leadership positions because of their personal abilities and qualities. Leaders in tribes do not have a means of coercing others or formal powers associated with their positions. Instead, they must persuade others to take actions they feel are needed. A Yanomami headsman, for instance, said that he would never issue an order unless he knew it would be obeyed. The headman Kaobawä exercised influence by example and by making suggestions and warning of consequences of taking or not taking an action.[17]

Like bands, tribes are egalitarian societies. Some individuals in a tribe do sometimes accumulate personal property but not to the extent that other tribe members are deprived. And every (almost always male) person has the opportunity to become a headman or leader and, like bands, one's leadership position can be situational. One man may be a good mediator, another an exemplary warrior, and a third capable of leading a hunt or finding a more ideal area for cultivation or grazing herds. An example illustrating this kind of leadership is the **big man** of New Guinea; the term is derived from the languages of New Guinean tribes (literally meaning "man of influence"). The big man is one who has acquired followers by doing favors they cannot possibly repay, such as settling their debts or providing bride-wealth. He might also acquire as many wives as possible to create alliances with his wives' families. His wives could work to care for as many pigs as possible, for example, and in due course, he could sponsor a pig feast that would serve to put more tribe members in his debt and shame his rivals. It is worth noting that the followers, incapable of repaying the Big Man's gifts, stand metaphorically as beggars to him.[18]

Definition: big man

A form of temporary or situational leadership; influence results from acquiring followers.

Still, a big man does not have the power of a monarch. His role is not hereditary. His son must demonstrate his worth and acquire his own following—he must become a big man in his own right. Furthermore, there usually are other big men in the village who are his potential rivals. Another man who proves himself capable of acquiring a following can displace the existing big man. The big man also has no power to coerce—no army or police force. He cannot prevent a follower from joining another big man, nor can he force the follower to pay any debt owed. There is no New Guinean equivalent of a U.S. marshal. Therefore, he can have his way only by diplomacy and persuasion—which do not always work.[19]

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9. Richard Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 109–111. ↵
10. Julian Steward, *The Theory of Culture Change.*↵
11. Elman Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York: Random House, 1962). ↵
12. M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies, *Female of the Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975). ↵
13. E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man*, 168. ↵
14. See Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People: A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) and Colin Turnbull, *The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983). ↵
15. C.W. Merton Hart, Arnold R. Pilling, and Jane Goodale. *The Tiwi of North Australia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988). ↵
16. Richard Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 112–118. ↵
17. Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamo* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1997), 133–137. ↵
18. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1925]). ↵
19. Douglas Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society: Kinship and Leadership among the Siuai of Bougainville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955). For an account of Ongka, the big man in a Kawelka village, see Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, *Collaborations and Conflict: A Leader through Time* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999). ↵

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8.3: Tribal Integration, Law, and Warfare

TRIBAL SYSTEMS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Tribal societies have much larger populations than bands and thus must have mechanisms for creating and maintaining connections between tribe members. The family ties that unite members of a band are not sufficient to maintain solidarity and cohesion in the larger population of a tribe. Some of the systems that knit tribes together are based on family (kin) relationships, including various kinds of marriage and family lineage systems, but there are also ways to foster tribal solidarity outside of family arrangements through systems that unite members of a tribe by age or gender.

Integration through Age Grades and Age Sets

Tribes use various systems to encourage solidarity or feelings of connectedness between people who are not related by family ties. These systems, sometimes known as **sodalities**, unite people across family groups. In one sense, all societies are divided into age categories. In the U.S. educational system, for instance, children are matched to grades in school according to their age—six-year-olds in first grade and thirteen-year-olds in eighth grade. Other cultures, however, have established complex age-based social structures. Many pastoralists in East Africa, for example, have age grades and age sets. **Age sets** are named categories to which men of a certain age are assigned at birth. **Age grades** are groups of men who are close to one another in age and share similar duties or responsibilities. All men cycle through each age grade over the course of their lifetimes. As the age sets advance, the men assume the duties associated with each age grade.

Definition: sodality

A system used to encourage solidarity or feelings of connectedness between people who are not related by family ties.

Definition: age sets

Named categories to which men of a certain age are assigned at birth.

Definition: age grades

Groups of men who are close to one another in age and share similar duties or responsibilities.

An example of this kind of tribal society is the Tiriki of Kenya. From birth to about fifteen years of age, boys become members of one of seven named age sets. When the last boy is recruited, that age set closes and a new one opens. For example, young and adult males who belonged to the “Juma” age set in 1939 became warriors by 1954. The “Mayima” were already warriors in 1939 and became elder warriors during that period. In precolonial times, men of the warrior age grade defended the herds of the Tiriki and conducted raids on other tribes while the elder warriors acquired cattle and houses and took on wives. There were recurring reports of husbands who were much older than their wives, who had married early in life, often as young as fifteen or sixteen. As solid citizens of the Tiriki, the elder warriors also handled decision-making functions of the tribe as a whole; their legislation affected the entire village while also representing their own kin groups. The other age sets also moved up through age grades in the fifteen-year period. The elder warriors in 1939, “Nyonje,” became the judicial elders by 1954. Their function was to resolve disputes that arose between individuals, families, and kin groups, of which some elders were a part. The “Jiminigayi,” judicial elders in 1939, became ritual elders in 1954, handling supernatural functions that involved the entire Tiriki community. During this period, the open age set was “Kabalach.” Its prior members had all grown old or died by 1939 and new boys joined it between 1939 and 1954. Thus, the Tiriki age sets moved in continuous 105-year cycles. This age grade and age set system encourages bonds between men of similar ages. Their loyalty to their families is tempered by their responsibilities to their fellows of the same age.[20]

Traditional Duties of Age Grade	Age Sets 1939	Age Sets 1954	Age Sets 1979	Age Sets 1994
Retired or Deceased: 91-105	Kabalach	Golongolo	Jiminigayi	Nyonje
Ritual Elders: 76-90	Golongolo	Jiminigayi	Nyonje	Mayina
Judicial Elders: 61-750	Jiminigayi	Nyonje	Mayina	Juma
Elder Warriors : 46-60	Nyonje	Mayina	Juma	Sawe
Warriors: 31-45	Mayina	Juma	Sawe	Kabalach
Initiated and Uninitiated Youths: 16-30	Juma	Sawe	Kabalach	Golongolo
Small Boys: 0-15	Sawe	Kabalach	Golongolo	Jiminigayi

Figure 8.3.1: Grades and age sets among the Tiriki. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

Integration through Bachelor Associations and Men's Houses

Among most, if not all, tribes of New Guinea, the existence of men's houses serves to cut across family lineage groups in a village. Perhaps the most fastidious case of male association in New Guinea is the bachelor association of the Mae-Enga, who live in the northern highlands. In their culture, a boy becomes conscious of the distance between males and females before he leaves home at age five to live in the men's house. Women are regarded as potentially unclean, and strict codes that minimize male-female relations are enforced. *Sanggai* festivals reinforce this division. During the festival, every youth of age 15 or 16 goes into seclusion in the forest and observes additional restrictions, such as avoiding pigs (which are cared for by women) and avoiding gazing at the ground lest he see female footprints or pig feces.[21] One can see, therefore, that every boy commits his loyalty to the men's house early in life even though he remains a member of his birth family. Men's houses are the center of male activities. There, they draw up strategies for warfare, conduct ritual activities involving magic and honoring of ancestral spirits, and plan and rehearse periodic pig feasts.

Integration through Gifts and Feasting

Exchanges and the informal obligations associated with them are primary devices by which bands and tribes maintain a degree of order and forestall armed conflict, which was viewed as the "state of nature" for tribal societies by Locke and Hobbes, in the absence of exercises of force by police or an army. Marcel Mauss, nephew and student of eminent French sociologist Emile Durkheim, attempted in 1925 to explain gift-giving and its attendant obligations cross-culturally in his book, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies.* He started with the assumption that two groups have an imperative to establish a relationship of some kind. There are three options when they meet for the first time. They could pass each other by and never see each other again. They may resort to arms with an uncertain outcome. One could wipe the other out or, more likely, win at great cost of men and property or fight to a draw. The third option is to "come to terms" with each other by establishing a more or less permanent relationship.[22] Exchanging gifts is one way for groups to establish this relationship.

These gift exchanges are quite different from Western ideas about gifts. In societies that lack a central government, formal law enforcement powers, and collection agents, the gift exchanges are obligatory and have the force of law in the absence of law. Mauss referred to them as "total prestations." Though no Dun and Bradstreet agents would come to collect, the potential for conflict that could break out at any time reinforced the obligations.[23] According to Mauss, the first obligation is to give; it must be met if a group is to extend social ties to others. The second obligation is to receive; refusal of a gift constitutes rejection of the offer of friendship as well. Conflicts can arise from the perceived insult of a rejected offer. The third obligation is to repay. One who fails to make a gift in return will be seen as in debt—in essence, a beggar. Mauss offered several ethnographic cases that illustrated these obligations. Every gift conferred power to the giver, expressed by the Polynesian terms *mana* (an intangible supernatural force) and *hau* (among the Maori, the "spirit of the gift," which must be returned to its owner).[24] Marriage and its associated obligations also can be viewed as a form of gift-giving as one family "gives" a bride or groom to the other.

Integration through Marriage

Most tribal societies' political organizations involve marriage, which is a logical vehicle for creating alliances between groups. One of the most well-documented types of marriage alliance is bilateral cross-cousin marriage in which a man marries his cross-cousin —one he is related to through two links, his father's sister and his mother's brother. These marriages have been documented among the Yanomami, an indigenous group living in Venezuela and Brazil. Yanomami villages are typically populated by two or more extended family groups also known as lineages. Disputes and disagreements are bound to occur, and these tensions can potentially escalate to open conflict or even physical violence. Bilateral cross-cousin marriage provides a means of linking lineage groups

together over time through the exchange of brides. Because cross-cousin marriage links people together by both marriage and blood ties (kinship), these unions can reduce tension between the groups or at least provide an incentive for members of rival lineages to work together.

LAW IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

Tribal societies generally lack systems of **codified law** whereby damages, crimes, remedies, and punishments are specified. Only state-level political systems can determine, usually by writing formal laws, which behaviors are permissible and which are not (discussed later in this chapter). In tribes, there are no systems of law enforcement whereby an agency such as the police, the sheriff, or an army can enforce laws enacted by an appropriate authority. And, as already noted, headman and big men cannot force their will on others.

Definition: codified law

Formal legal systems in which damages, crimes, remedies, and punishments are specified.

In tribal societies, as in all societies, conflicts arise between individuals. Sometimes the issues are equivalent to crimes—taking of property or commitment of violence—that are not considered legitimate in a given society. Other issues are civil disagreements—questions of ownership, damage to property, an accidental death. In tribal societies, the aim is not so much to determine guilt or innocence or to assign criminal or civil responsibility as it is to resolve conflict, which can be accomplished in various ways. The parties might choose to avoid each other. Bands, tribes, and kin groups often move away from each other geographically, which is much easier for them to do than for people living in complex societies.

One issue in tribal societies, as in all societies, is guilt or innocence. When no one witnesses an offense or an account is deemed unreliable, tribal societies sometimes rely on the supernatural. **Oaths**, for example, involve calling on a deity to bear witness to the truth of what one says; the oath given in court is a holdover from this practice. An **ordeal** is used to determine guilt or innocence by submitting the accused to dangerous, painful, or risky tests believed to be controlled by supernatural forces. The poison oracle used by the Azande of the Sudan and the Congo is an ordeal based on their belief that most misfortunes are induced by witchcraft (in this case, witchcraft refers to ill feeling of one person toward another). A chicken is force fed a strychnine concoction known as *benge* just as the name of the suspect is called out. If the chicken dies, the suspect is deemed guilty and is punished or goes through reconciliation.[30]

Definition: oaths

The practice of calling on a deity to bear witness to the truth of what one says.

Definition: ordeal

A test used to determine guilt or innocence by submitting the accused to dangerous, painful, or risky tests believed to be controlled by supernatural forces.

A more commonly exercised option is to find ways to resolve the dispute. In small groups, an unresolved question can quickly escalate to violence and disrupt the group. The first step is often negotiation; the parties attempt to resolve the conflict by direct discussion in hope of arriving at an agreement. Offenders sometimes make a ritual apology, particularly if they are sensitive to community opinion. In Fiji, for example, offenders make ceremonial apologies called *i soro*, one of the meanings of which is "I surrender." An intermediary speaks, offers a token gift to the offended party, and asks for forgiveness, and the request is rarely rejected.[31]

When negotiation or a ritual apology fails, often the next step is to recruit a third party to mediate a settlement as there is no official who has the power to enforce a settlement. A classic example in the anthropological literature is the Leopard Skin Chief among the Nuer, who is identified by a leopard skin wrap around his shoulders. He is not a chief but is a mediator. The position is hereditary, has religious overtones, and is responsible for the social well-being of the tribal segment. He typically is called on for serious matters such as murder. The culprit immediately goes to the residence of the Leopard Skin Chief, who cuts the culprit's arm until blood flows. If the culprit fears vengeance by the dead man's family, he remains at the residence, which is considered a sanctuary, and the Leopard Skin Chief then acts as a go-between for the families of the perpetrator and the dead man.

The Leopard Skin Chief cannot force the parties to settle and cannot enforce any settlement they reach. The source of his influence is the desire for the parties to avoid a feud that could escalate into an ever-widening conflict involving kin descended from different ancestors. He urges the aggrieved family to accept compensation, usually in the form of cattle. When such an agreement is reached, the chief collects the 40 to 50 head of cattle and takes them to the dead man's home, where he performs various sacrifices of cleansing and atonement.[32]

This discussion demonstrates the preference most tribal societies have for mediation given the potentially serious consequences of a long-term feud. Even in societies organized as states, mediation is often preferred. In the agrarian town of Talea, Mexico, for example, even serious crimes are mediated in the interest of preserving a degree of local harmony. The national authorities often tolerate local settlements if they maintain the peace.[33]

WARFARE IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

What happens if mediation fails and the Leopard Skin Chief cannot convince the aggrieved clan to accept cattle in place of their loved one? War. In tribal societies, wars vary in cause, intensity, and duration, but they tend to be less deadly than those run by states because of tribes' relatively small populations and limited technologies.

Tribes engage in warfare more often than bands, both internally and externally. Among pastoralists, both successful and attempted thefts of cattle frequently spark conflict. Among pre-state societies, pastoralists have a reputation for being the most prone to warfare. However, horticulturalists also engage in warfare, as the film *Dead Birds*, which describes warfare among the highland Dani of west New Guinea (Irian Jaya), attests. Among anthropologists, there is a "protein debate" regarding causes of warfare. Marvin Harris in a 1974 study of the Yanomami claimed that warfare arose there because of a protein deficiency associated with a scarcity of game, and Kenneth Good supported that thesis in finding that the game a Yanomami villager brought in barely supported the village.[34] He could not link this variable to warfare, however. In rebuttal, Napoleon Chagnon linked warfare among the Yanomami with abduction of women rather than disagreements over hunting territory, and findings from other cultures have tended to agree with Chagnon's theory.[35]

Tribal wars vary in duration. **Raids** are short-term uses of physical force that are organized and planned to achieve a limited objective such as acquisition of cattle (pastoralists) or other forms of wealth and, often, abduction of women, usually from neighboring communities.[36]**Feuds** are longer in duration and represent a state of recurring hostilities between families, lineages, or other kin groups. In a feud, the responsibility to avenge rests with the entire group, and the murder of any kin member is considered appropriate because the kin group as a whole is considered responsible for the transgression. Among the Dani, for example, vengeance is an obligation; spirits are said to dog the victim's clan until its members murder someone from the perpetrator's clan.[37]

Definition: raids

Short-term uses of physical force organized and planned to achieve a limited objective.

Definition: feuds

Disputes of long duration characterized by a state of recurring hostilities between families, lineages, or other kin groups.

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20. Walter Sangree, "The Bantu Tiriki of Western Kenya," in *Peoples of Africa*, James Gibbs, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 71. The reader will notice the discrepancies between Sangree's description of age grades and sets—15 year for each, totaling a cycle of 105 years—and his chart from which the one shown here is extrapolated to 1994. First, the age grade "small boys," is 10 years, not 15. Second, the age grade "ritual elders" is 20 years, not 15. Why this discrepancy exists, Sangree does not answer. This discrepancy demonstrates the questions raised when ideal types do not match all the ethnographic

information. For example, if the Jiminigayi ranged 15 years in 1939, why did they suddenly expand to a range of 20 years in 1954? By the same token, why did the Sawe age set cover 10 years in 1939 and expand to 15 years in 1954? It is discrepancies such as this that raise questions and drive further research ↵

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23. Ibid. ↵
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8.4: Ranked Societies and Chiefdoms

RANKED SOCIETIES

Unlike egalitarian societies, ranked societies (sometimes called “rank societies”) involve greater differentiation between individuals and the kin groups to which they belong. These differences can be, and often are, inherited, but there are no significant restrictions in these societies on access to basic resources. All individuals can meet their basic needs. The most important differences between people of different ranks are based on **sumptuary rules—**norms that permit persons of higher rank to enjoy greater social status by wearing distinctive clothing, jewelry, and/or decorations denied those of lower rank. Every family group or lineage in the community is ranked in a hierarchy of prestige and power. Furthermore, within families, siblings are ranked by birth order and villages can also be ranked.

Definition: sumptuary rules

Norms that permit persons of higher rank to enjoy greater social status by wearing distinctive clothing, jewelry, and/or decorations denied those of lower rank.

CHIEFDOMS

The concept of a ranked society leads us directly to the characteristics of chiefdoms. Unlike the position of headman in a band, the position of **chief** is an **office**—a permanent political status that demands a successor when the current chief dies. There are, therefore, two concepts of chief**:** the man (women rarely, if ever, occupy these posts) and the office. Thus the expression “The king is dead, long live the king.” With the New Guinean big man, there is no formal succession. Other big men will be recognized and eventually take the place of one who dies, but there is no rule stipulating that his eldest son or any son must succeed him. For chiefs, there *must* be a successor and there are rules of succession.

Definition: chief

The person (women rarely occupy these posts) who holds the *office* of chief.

Definition: office

A permanent political status that must be filled when vacated through retirement or death.

Political chiefdoms usually are accompanied by an economic exchange system known as redistribution in which goods and services flow from the population at large to the central authority represented by the chief. It then becomes the task of the chief to return the flow of goods in another form. The chapter on economics provides additional information about redistribution economies.

These political and economic principles are exemplified by the potlatch custom of the Kwakwaka’wakw and other indigenous groups who lived in chiefdom societies along the northwest coast of North America from the extreme northwest tip of California through the coasts of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and southern Alaska. Potlatch ceremonies observed major events such as births, deaths, marriages of important persons, and installment of a new chief. Families prepared for the event by collecting food and other valuables such as fish, berries, blankets, animal skins, carved boxes, and copper. At the potlatch, several ceremonies were held, dances were performed by their “owners,” and speeches delivered. The new chief was watched very carefully. Members of the society noted the eloquence of his speech, the grace of his presence, and any mistakes he made, however egregious or trivial. Next came the distribution of gifts, and again the chief was observed. Was he generous with his gifts? Was the value of his gifts appropriate to the rank of the recipient or did he give valuable presents to individuals of relatively low rank? Did his wealth allow him to offer valuable objects?

The next phase of the potlatch was critical to the chief’s validation of his position. Visitor after visitor would arise and give long speeches evaluating the worthiness of this successor to the chieftainship of his father. If his performance had so far met their expectations, if his gifts were appropriate, the guests’ speeches praised him accordingly. They were less than adulatory if the chief had not performed to their expectations and they deemed the formal eligibility of the successor insufficient. He had to perform. If he did, then the guests’ praise not only legitimized the new chief in his role, but also it ensured some measure of peace between villages. Thus, in addition to being a festive event, the potlatch determined the successor’s legitimacy and served as a form of diplomacy between groups.[38]

Much has been made among anthropologists of rivalry potlatches in which competitive gifts were given by rival pretenders to the chieftainship. Philip Drucker argued that competitive potlatches were a product of sudden demographic changes among the indigenous groups on the northwest coast.[39] When smallpox and other diseases decimated hundreds, many potential successors to the chieftainship died, leading to situations in which several potential successors might be eligible for the chieftainship. Thus, competition in potlatch ceremonies became extreme with blankets or copper repaid with ever-larger piles and competitors who destroyed their own valuables to demonstrate their wealth. The events became so raucous that the Canadian government outlawed the displays in the early part of the twentieth century.[40] Prior to that time, it had been sufficient for a successor who was chosen beforehand to present appropriate gifts.[41]

Kin-Based Integrative Mechanisms: Conical Clans

With the centralization of society, kinship is most likely to continue playing a role, albeit a new one. Among Northwest Coast Indians, for example, the ranking model has every lineage ranked, one above the other, siblings ranked in order of birth, and even villages in a ranking scale. Drucker points out that the further north one goes, the more rigid the ranking scheme is. The most northerly of these coastal peoples trace their descent matrilineally; indeed, the Haida consist of four clans. Those further south tend to be patrilineal, and some show characteristics of an ambilineal descent group. It is still unclear, for example, whether the Kwakiutl *numaym* are patrilineal clans or ambilineal descent groups.

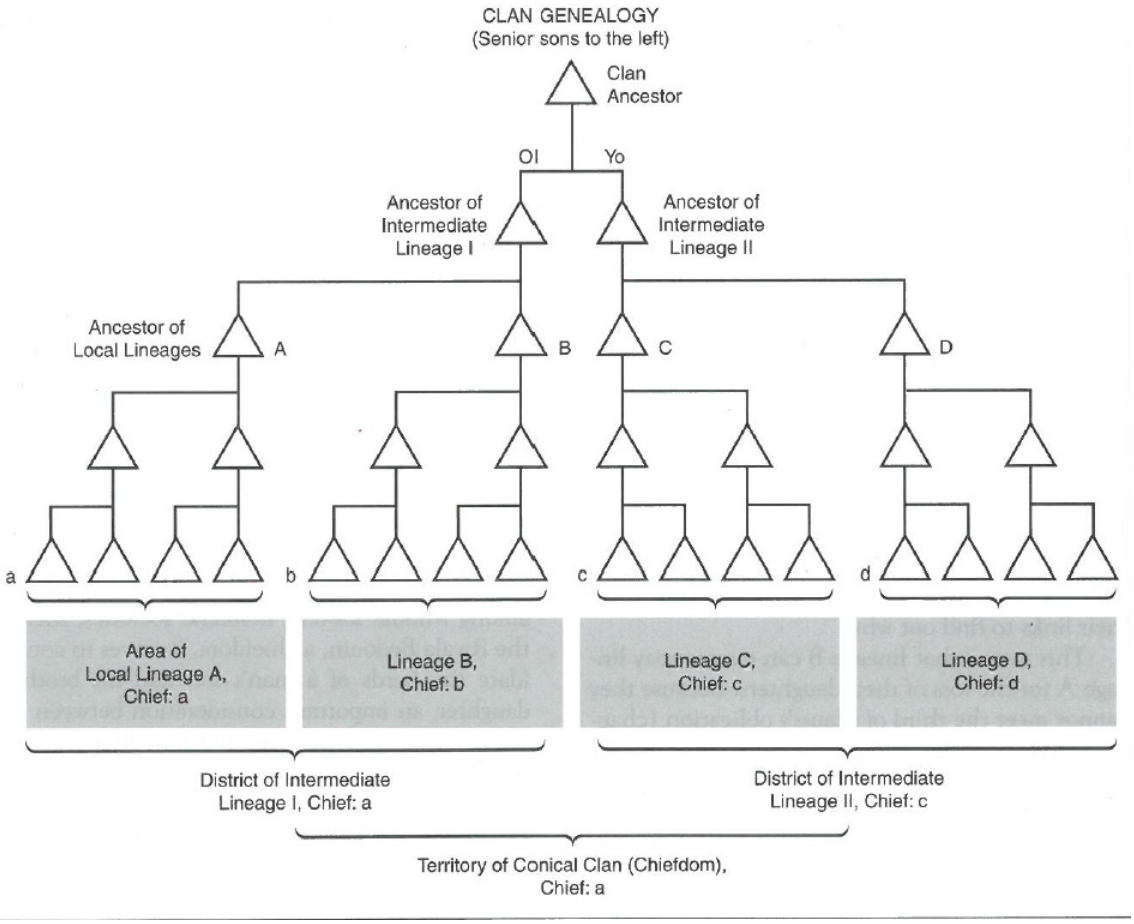


Figure 8.4.1: Conical clan design of a chiefdom. Scheme is based on relative siblings age and patrilineal descent. Eldest sons appear to the left. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

In the accompanying diagram (Figure 8.4.1), assuming patrilineal descent, the eldest male within a given lineage becomes the chief of his district , that is, Chief a in the area of Local Lineage A, which is the older intermediate lineage (Intermediate Lineage I) relative to the founding clan ancestor. Chief b is the oldest male in Local Lineage B, which, in turn, is the oldest intermediate lineage (again Intermediate Lineage I) relative to the founding clan ancestor. Chief c is the oldest male of local Lineage C descended from the second oldest intermediate lineage (Intermediate Lineage II) relative to the founding clan ancestor, and Chief d is the oldest male of Local Lineage D, descended from the second oldest intermediate Lineage (Intermediate Lineage II) relative to the founding clan ancestor.

Nor does this end the process. Chief a, as head of Local Lineage A, also heads the district of Intermediate Lineage I while Chief c heads Local Lineage C in the district of Intermediate lineage II. Finally, the entire chiefdom is headed by the eldest male (Chief a) of the entire district governed by the descendants of the clan ancestor.

Integration through Marriage

Because chiefdoms cannot enforce their power by controlling resources or by having a monopoly on the use of force, they rely on integrative mechanisms that cut across kinship groups. As with tribal societies, marriage provides chiefdoms with a framework for encouraging social cohesion. However, since chiefdoms have more-elaborate status hierarchies than tribes, marriages tend to reinforce ranks.

Integration through Secret Societies

Poro and *sande* secret societies for men and women, respectively, are found in the Mande-speaking peoples of West Africa, particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Guinea. The societies are illegal under Guinea's national laws. Elsewhere, they are legal and membership is universally mandatory under local laws. They function in both political and religious sectors of society. So how can such societies be secret if all men and women must join? According to Beryl Bellman, who is a member of a *poro* association, the standard among the Kpelle of Liberia is an *ability* to keep secrets. Members of the community are entrusted with the political and religious responsibilities associated with the society only after they learn to keep secrets.[45] There are two political structures in *poros* and *sandes*: the "secular" and the "sacred." The secular structure consists of the town chief, neighborhood and kin group headmen, and elders. The sacred structure (the *zo*) is composed of a hierarchy of "priests" of the *poro* and the *sande* in the neighborhood, and among the Kpelle the *poro* and *sande zo* take turns dealing with in-town fighting, rapes, homicides, incest, and land disputes. They, like leopard skin chiefs, play an important role in mediation. The *zo* of both the *poro* and *sande* are held in great respect and even feared. Some authors have suggested that sacred structure strengthens the secular political authority because chiefs and landowners occupy the most powerful positions in the *zo*.[46] Consequently, these chiefdoms seem to have developed formative elements of a stratified society and a state, as we see in the next section.

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38. Philip Drucker, *Indians of the Northwest Coast* (New York: Natural History Press, 1955). ↵
39. Ibid. ↵
40. For more information about the reasons for the potlatch ban, see Douglas Cole and Ira Chaiken, *An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990). The website of the U'Mista Cultural Society in Alert Bay, British Columbia, Canada offers more information about potlatch traditions and the impact of the ban: http://www.umista.ca. ↵
41. Philip Drucker, *Indians of the Northwest Coast*. ↵
42. Edmund Leach, cited in Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage*, 215–216. ↵
43. Raymond Scupin, *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012). ↵
44. The information comes from William Lancaster, *The Rwala Bedouin Today* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1997) and Elman Service, *Profiles of Ethnology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978). ↵
45. Beryl Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984). ↵
46. Kenneth Little, "The Political Function of the Poro, Part 1." *Africa* 35 (1965):349–365. See also Caroline Bledsoe, *Women and Marriage in Kpelle Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980). ↵

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8.5: Stratified Societies and States

STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

Opposite from egalitarian societies in the spectrum of social classes is the stratified society, which is defined as one in which elites who are a numerical minority control the strategic resources that sustain life. Strategic resources include water for states that depend on irrigation agriculture, land in agricultural societies, and oil in industrial societies. Capital and products and resources used for further production are modes of production that rely on oil and other fossil fuels such as natural gas in industrial societies. (Current political movements call for the substitution of solar and wind power for fossil fuels.)

Operationally, **stratification** is, as the term implies, a social structure that involves two or more largely mutually exclusive populations. An extreme example is the caste system of traditional Indian society, which draws its legitimacy from Hinduism. In **caste systems**, membership is determined by birth and remains fixed for life, and social mobility—moving from one social class to another—is not an option. Nor can persons of different castes marry; that is, they are endogamous. Although efforts have been made to abolish castes since India achieved independence in 1947, they still predominate in rural areas.

Definition: stratification

A social structure that involves two or more largely mutually exclusive populations.

Definition: caste system

The division of society into hierarchical levels; one's position is determined by birth and remains fixed for life.

India's caste system consists of four *varna*, pure castes, and one collectively known as *Dalit* and sometimes as *Harijan*—in English, "untouchables," reflecting the notion that for any *varna* caste member to touch or even see a *Dalit* pollutes them. The topmost *varna* caste is the *Brahmin* or priestly caste. It is composed of priests, governmental officials and bureaucrats at all levels, and other professionals. The next highest is the *Kshatriya*, the warrior caste, which includes soldiers and other military personnel and the police and their equivalents. Next are the *Vaishyas*, who are craftsmen and merchants, followed by the *Sudras* (pronounced "shudra"), who are peasants and menial workers. Metaphorically, they represent the parts of *Manu*, who is said to have given rise to the human race through dismemberment. The head corresponds to *Brahmin*, the arms to *Kshatriya*, the thighs to *Vaishya*, and the feet to the *Sudra*.

There are also a variety of subcastes in India. The most important are the hundreds, if not thousands, of occupational subcastes known as *jatis*. Wheelwrights, ironworkers, landed peasants, landless farmworkers, tailors of various types, and barbers all belong to different *jatis*. Like the broader castes, *jatis* are endogamous and one is born into them. They form the basis of the *jajmani* relationship, which involves the provider of a particular service, the *jajman*, and the recipient of the service, the *kamin*. Training is involved in these occupations but one cannot change vocations. Furthermore, the relationship between the *jajman* and the *kamin* is determined by previous generations. If I were to provide you, my *kamin*, with haircutting services, it would be because my father cut your father's hair. In other words, you would be stuck with me regardless of how poor a barber I might be. This system represents another example of an economy as an instituted process, an economy embedded in society.[47]

Similar restrictions apply to those excluded from the *varna* castes, the "untouchables" or *Dalit*. Under the worst restrictions, *Dalits* were thought to pollute other castes. If the shadow of a *Dalit* fell on a *Brahmin*, the *Brahmin* immediately went home to bathe. Thus, at various times and locations, the untouchables were also unseeable, able to come out only at night.[48] *Dalits* were born into jobs considered polluting to other castes, particularly work involving dead animals, such as butchering (Hinduism discourages consumption of meat so the clients were Muslims, Christians, and believers of other religions), skinning, tanning, and shoemaking with leather. Contact between an upper caste person and a person of any lower caste, even if "pure," was also considered polluting and was strictly forbidden.

The theological basis of caste relations is *karma*—the belief that one's caste in this life is the cumulative product of one's acts in past lives, which extends to all beings, from minerals to animals to gods. Therefore, though soul class mobility is nonexistent during a lifetime, it is possible between lifetimes. *Brahmins* justified their station by claiming that they must have done good in their past lives. However, there are indications that the untouchable *Dalits* and other lower castes are not convinced of their legitimation.[49]

Although India's system is the most extreme, it not the only caste system. In Japan, a caste known as *Burakumin* is similar in status to *Dalit*s. Though they are no different in physical appearance from other Japanese people, the *Burakumin* people have been forced to live in ghettos for centuries. They descend from people who worked in the leather tanning industry, a low-status occupation, and still work in leather industries such as shoemaking. Marriage between *Burakumin* and other Japanese people is restricted, and their children are excluded from public schools.[50]

Some degree of social mobility characterizes all societies, but even so-called open-class societies are not as mobile as one might think. In the United States, for example, actual movement up the social latter is rare despite Horatio Alger and rags-to-riches myths. Stories of individuals "making it" through hard work ignore the majority of individuals whose hard work does not pay off or who actually experience downward mobility. Indeed, the Occupy Movement, which began in 2011, recognizes a dichotomy in American society of the 1 percent (millionaires and billionaires) versus the 99 percent (everyone else), and self-styled socialist Bernie Sanders made this the catch phrase of his campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. In India (a closed-class society), on the other hand, there are exceptions to the caste system. In Rajasthan, for example, those who own or control most of the land are not of the warrior caste as one might expect; they are of the lowest caste and their tenants and laborers are *Brahmins*.[51]

Editor's Note: Max Weber's Three Dimensions of Social Stratification

Sociologist Max Weber suggests that there are three dimensions of social stratification: wealth (class), power, and prestige (status) (Pandey). *Wealth*, or economic status, (class) refers to "all of a person's material assets" (Kottak123). *Power*, political status, is "the ability to exercise one's will over others" (Kottak 123). And, the basis of social status in society, *prestige*, includes "esteem, respect, or approval for acts deeds, or qualities considered exemplary" (Kottak123). Each of these dimensions plays a part in determining an individual's status within society.

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STATE LEVEL OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The state is the most formal of the four levels of political organization under study here. In states, political power is centralized in a government that exercises a monopoly over the legitimate use of force.[52] It is important to understand that the exercise of force constitutes a last resort; one hallmark of a weak state is frequent use of physical force to maintain order. States develop in societies with large, often ethnically diverse populations—hundreds of thousands or more—and are characterized by complex economies that can be driven by command or by the market, social stratification, and an intensive agricultural or industrial base.

Several characteristics accompany a monopoly over use of legitimate force in a state. First, like tribes and chiefdoms, states occupy a more or less clearly defined territory or land defined by boundaries that separate it from other political entities that may or not be states (exceptions are associated with the Islamic State and are addressed later). Ancient Egypt was a state bounded on the west by desert and possibly forager or tribal nomadic peoples. Mesopotamia was a series of city-states competing for territory with other city-states.

Heads of state can be individuals designated as kings, emperors, or monarchs under other names or can be democratically elected, in fact or in name—military dictators, for example, are often called presidents. Usually, states establish some board or group of councilors (e.g., the cabinet in the United States and the politburo in the former Soviet Union.) Often, such councils are supplemented with one or two legislative assemblies. The Roman Empire had a senate (which originated as a body of councilors) and as many as four assemblies that combined *patrician* (elite) and *plebian* (general population) influences. Today, nearly all of the world's countries have some sort of an assembly, but some merely rubber-stamp the executive's decisions.

States also have an administrative bureaucracy that handles public functions provided for by executive orders and/or legislation. Formally, the administrative offices are typically arranged in a hierarchy and the top offices delegate specific functions to lower ones. Similar hierarchies are established for the personnel in a branch. In general, agricultural societies tend to rely on inter-personal relations in the administrative structure while industrial states rely on rational hierarchical structures.[53]

An additional state power is taxation—a system of redistribution in which all citizens are required to participate. This power is exercised in various ways. Examples include the *mitá* or labor tax of the Inca, the tributary systems of Mesopotamia, and monetary taxes familiar to us today and to numerous subjects throughout the history of the state. Control over others' resources is an influential mechanism undergirding the power of the state.

A less tangible but no less powerful characteristic of states is their ideologies, which are designed to reinforce the right of powerholders to rule. Ideologies can manifest in philosophical forms, such as the divine right of kings in pre-industrial Europe, karma and the caste system in India, consent of the governed in the United States, and the metaphorical family in Imperial China. More often, ideologies are less indirect and less perceptible as propaganda. We might watch the Super Bowl or follow the latest antics of the Kardashians, oblivious to the notion that both are diversions from the reality of power in this society. Young Americans, for example, may be drawn to military service to fight in Iraq by patriotic ideologies just as their parents or grandparents were drawn to service during the Vietnam War. In a multitude of ways across many cultures, Plato's parable of the shadows in the cave—that watchers misperceive shadows as reality—has served to reinforce political ideologies.

Finally, there is delegation of the state's coercive power. The state's need to use coercive power betrays an important weakness—subjects and citizens often refuse to recognize the powerholders' right to rule. Even when the legitimacy of power is not questioned, the use and/or threat of force serves to maintain the state, and that function is delegated to agencies such as the police to maintain internal order and to the military to defend the state against real and perceived enemies and, in many cases, to expand the state's territory. Current examples include a lack of accountability for the killing of black men and women by police officers; the killing of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, is a defining example.

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50. Harumi Befu, *Japan: An Anthropological Introduction* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1971). ↵
51. William Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge*. ↵
52. Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) and Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1997 [1947]). ↵
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8.6: States, Law, and Warfare

LAW AND ORDER IN STATES

At the level of the state, the law becomes an increasingly formal process. Procedures are more and more regularly defined, and categories of breaches in civil and criminal law emerge, together with remedies for those breaches. Early agricultural states formalized legal rules and punishments through codes, formal courts, police forces, and legal specialists such as lawyers and judges. Mediation could still be practiced, but it often was supplanted by adjudication in which a judge's decision was binding on all parties. Decisions could be appealed to a higher authority, but any final decision must be accepted by all concerned.

The first known system of codified law was enacted under the warrior king Hammurabi in Babylon (present day Iraq). This law was based on standardized procedures for dealing with civil and criminal offenses, and subsequent decisions were based on precedents (previous decisions). Crimes became offenses not only against other parties but also against the state. Other states developed similar codes of law, including China, Southeast Asia, and state-level Aztec and Inca societies. Two interpretations, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, have arisen about the political function of codified systems of law. Fried (1978) argued, based on his analysis of the Hammurabi codes, that such laws reinforced a system of inequality by protecting the rights of an elite class and keeping peasants subordinates.[64] This is consistent with the theory of a stratified society as already defined. Another interpretation is that maintenance of social and political order is crucial for agricultural states since any disruption in the state would lead to neglect of agricultural production that would be deleterious to all members of the state regardless of their social status. Civil laws ensure, at least in theory, that all disputing parties receive a hearing—so long as high legal expenses and bureaucratic logjams do not cancel out the process. Criminal laws, again in theory, ensure the protection of all citizens from offenses ranging from theft to homicide.

Inevitably, laws fail to achieve their aims. The United States, for example, has one of the highest crime rates in the industrial world despite having an extensive criminal legal system. The number of homicides in New York City in 1990 exceeded the number of deaths from colon and breast cancer and all accidents combined.[65] Although the rate of violent crime in the United States declined during the mid-1990s, it occurred thanks more to the construction of more prisons per capita (in California) than of schools. Nationwide, there currently are more than one million prisoners in state and federal correctional institutions, one of the highest national rates in the industrial world.[66] Since the 1990s, little has changed in terms of imprisonment in the United States. Funds continue to go to prisons rather than schools, affecting the education of minority communities and expanding "slave labor" in prisons, according to Michelle Alexander who, in 2012, called the current system the school-to-prison pipeline.[67]

WARFARE IN STATES

Warfare occurs in all human societies but at no other level of political organization is it as widespread as in states. Indeed, warfare was integral to the formation of the agricultural state. As governing elites accumulated more resources, warfare became a major means of increasing their surpluses.[68] And as the wealth of states became a target of nomadic pastoralists, the primary motivation for warfare shifted from control of resources to control of neighboring populations.[69]

A further shift came with the advent of industrial society when industrial technologies driven by fossil fuels allowed states to invade distant countries. A primary motivation for these wars was to establish economic and political hegemony over foreign populations. World War I, World War II, and lesser wars of the past century have driven various countries to develop ever more sophisticated and deadly technologies, including wireless communication devices for remote warfare, tanks, stealth aircraft, nuclear weapons, and unmanned aircraft called drones, which have been used in conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Competition among nations has led to the emergence of the United States as the most militarily powerful nation in the world.

The expansion of warfare by societies organized as states has not come without cost. Every nation-state has involved civilians in its military adventures, and almost everyone has been involved in those wars in some way—if not as militarily, then as member of the civilian workforce in military industries. World War II created an unprecedented armament industry in the United States, Britain, Germany, and Japan, among others, and the aerospace industry underwent expansion in the so-called Cold War that followed. Today, one can scarcely overlook the role of the process of globalization to explain how the United States, for now an empire, has influenced the peoples of other countries in the world.

STABILITY AND DURATION OF STATES

It should be noted that states have a clear tendency toward instability despite trappings designed to induce awe in the wider population. Few states have lasted a thousand years. The American state is more than 240 years old but increases in extreme wealth

and poverty, escalating budget and trade deficits, a war initiated under false pretenses, escalating social problems, and a highly controversial presidential election suggest growing instability. Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* (2004) compared the decline and fall of Easter Island, Chaco Canyon, and the Maya with contemporary societies such as the United States, and he found that overtaxing the environment caused the collapse of those three societies.[70] Chalmers Johnson (2004) similarly argued that a state of perpetual war, loss of democratic institutions, systematic deception by the state, and financial overextension contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire and will likely contribute to the demise of the United States "with the speed of FedEx."[71]

Why states decline is not difficult to fathom. Extreme disparities in wealth, use of force to keep populations in line, the stripping of people's resources (such as the enclosures in England that removed peasants from their land), and the harshness of many laws all should create a general animosity toward the elite in a state.

Yet, until recently (following the election of Donald Trump), no one in the United States was taking to the streets calling for the president to resign or decrying the government as illegitimate. In something of a paradox, widespread animosity does not necessarily lead to dissolution of a state or to an overthrow of the elite. Thomas Frank addressed this issue in *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004). Despite the fact that jobs have been shipped abroad, that once-vibrant cities like Wichita are virtual ghost towns, and that both congress and the state legislature have voted against social programs time and again, Kansans continued to vote the Republicans whose policies are responsible for these conditions into office.

Nor is this confined to Kansas or the United States. That slaves tolerated slavery for hundreds of years (despite periodic revolts such as the one under Nat Turner in 1831), that workers tolerated extreme conditions in factories and mines long before unionization, that there was no peasant revolt strong enough to reverse the enclosures in England—all demand an explanation. Frank discusses reinforcing variables, such as propaganda by televangelists and Rush Limbaugh but offers little explanation beside them.[72] However, recent works have provided new explanations. Days before Donald Trump won the presidential election on November 8, 2016, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild released a book that partially explains how Trump appealed to the most marginalized populations of the United States, residents around Lake Charles in southwestern Louisiana. In the book, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016), Hochschild contends that the predominantly white residents there saw the federal government providing preferential treatment for blacks, women, and other marginalized populations under affirmative action programs while putting white working-class individuals further back in line for governmental assistance. The people Hochschild interviewed were fully aware that a corporate petroleum company had polluted Lake Charles and hired nonlocal technicians and Filipino workers to staff local positions, but they nonetheless expressed their intent to vote for a billionaire for president based on his promise to bring outsourced jobs back to "America" and to make the country "great again." Other books, including Thomas Frank's *Listen Liberal* (2016), Nancy Isenberg's *White Trash* (2016), and Matt Wray's *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (2006), address the decline of the United States' political power domestically and worldwide. These books all link Trump's successful election to marginalization of lower-class whites and raise questions about how dissatisfaction with the state finds expression in political processes.

Editor's Note: Nation, State, and Nationalities

Although the term **nation** once referred to a tribe or ethnic group, it has become synonymous with **state** - "an independent, centrally organized political unit or government" (Kottak 249). When the two terms are used together, **nation-state**, it is referring to "an autonomous political entity" (Kottak 249),such as a country like the United States. The term **nationalities** refers to "ethnic groups that once had, or wish to have or regain, autonomous political status" (Kottak 250).

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8.7: Social Control

BASIC CONCEPTS IN POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Like the “invisible hand” of the market to which Adam Smith refers in analyzing the workings of capitalism, two forces govern the workings of politics: power—the ability to induce behavior of others in specified ways by means of coercion or use or threat of physical force—and authority—the ability to induce behavior of others by persuasion.[1] Extreme examples of the exercise of power are the gulags (prison camps) in Stalinist Russia, the death camps in Nazi-ruled Germany and Eastern Europe, and so-called Supermax prisons such as Pelican Bay in California and the prison for “enemy combatants” in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, by the United States. In all of these settings, prisoners comply or are punished or executed. At the other extreme are most forager societies, which typically exercise authority more often than power. Groups in those societies comply with the wishes of their most persuasive members.

In actuality, power and authority are points on a continuum and both are present in every society to some degree. Even Hitler, who exercised absolute power in many ways, had to hold the Nuremberg rallies to generate popular support for his regime and persuade the German population that his leadership was the way to national salvation. In the Soviet Union, leaders had a great deal of coercive and physical power but still felt the need to hold parades and mass rallies on May Day every year to persuade people to remain attached to their vision of a communal society. At the other end of the political spectrum, societies that tend to use persuasion through authority also have some forms of coercive power. Among the Inuit, for example, individuals who flagrantly violated group norms could be punished, including by homicide.[2]

A related concept in both politics and law is **legitimacy:** the perception that an individual has a valid right to leadership. Legitimacy is particularly applicable to complex societies that require centralized decision-making. Historically, the right to rule has been based on various principles. In agricultural states such as ancient Mesopotamia, the Aztec, and the Inca, justification for the rule of particular individuals was based on hereditary succession and typically granted to the eldest son of the ruler. Even this principle could be uncertain at times, as was the case when the Inca emperor Atahualpa had just defeated his rival and brother Huascar when the Spaniards arrived in Peru in 1533.[3]

Definition: legitamacy

The perception that an individual has a valid right to leadership.

In many cases, supernatural beliefs were invoked to establish legitimacy and justify rule by an elite. Incan emperors derived their right to rule from the Sun God and Aztec rulers from Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird-to-the-Left). European monarchs invoked a divine right to rule that was reinforced by the Church of England in Britain and by the Roman Catholic Church in other countries prior to the Reformation. In India, the dominance of the Brahmin elite over the other castes is justified by karma, cumulative forces created by good and evil deeds in past lives. Secular equivalents also serve to justify rule by elites; examples include the promise of a worker’s paradise in the former Soviet Union and racial purity of Aryans in Nazi Germany. In the United States and other democratic forms of government, legitimacy rests on the consent of the governed in periodic elections (though in the United States, the incoming president is sworn in using a Christian Bible despite alleged separation of church and state).

In some societies, dominance by an individual or group is viewed as unacceptable. Christopher Boehm (1999) developed the concept of **reverse dominance** to describe societies in which people rejected attempts by any individual to exercise power.[4] They achieved this aim using ridicule, criticism, disobedience, and strong disapproval and could banish extreme offenders. Richard Lee encountered this phenomenon when he presented the !Kung with whom he had worked over the preceding year with a fattened ox.[5] Rather than praising or thanking him, his hosts ridiculed the beast as scrawny, ill fed, and probably sick. This behavior is consistent with reverse dominance.

Definition: reverse dominance

Societies in which people reject attempts by any individual to exercise power.

Even in societies that emphasize equality between people, decisions still have to be made. Sometimes particularly persuasive figures such as headmen make them, but persuasive figures who lack formal power are not free to make decisions without coming to a consensus with their fellows. To reach such consensus, there must be general agreement. Essentially, then, even if in a backhanded way, legitimacy characterizes societies that lack institutionalized leadership.

Another set of concepts refers to the reinforcements or consequences for compliance with the directive and laws of a society. **Positive reinforcements** are the rewards for compliance; examples include medals, financial incentives, and other forms of public recognition. **Negative reinforcements** punish noncompliance through fines, imprisonment, and death sentences. These reinforcements can be identified in every human society, even among foragers or others who have no written system of law. Reverse dominance is one form of negative reinforcement.

Definition: positive reinforcements

Rewards for compliance; examples include medals, financial incentives, and other forms of public recognition.

Definition: negative reinforcements

Punishments for noncompliance through fines, imprisonment, and death sentences.

Editor's Note: Informal Social Control

Shame and gossip can be used as an informal process of social control. Gossip, and the resulting shame or guilt felt by an individual, is often used when a formal sanction is not possible or could be risky. Although they are not part of a formal authoritative structure, they can be a powerful social sanction in a culture, especially in small-scale societies.

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2. E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man* (New York: Atheneum, 1968 [1954]). For a critique of Hoebel see John Steckley, *White Lies about the Inuit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). ↵
3. Elman Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975). ↵
4. Christopher Boehm. *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. ↵

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8.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. In large communities, it can be difficult for people to feel a sense of connection or loyalty to people outside their immediate families. Choose one of the social-integration techniques used in tribes and chiefdoms and explain why it can successfully encourage solidarity between people. Can you identify similar systems for encouraging social integration in your own community?
2. Although state societies are efficient in organizing people and resources, they also are associated with many disadvantages, such as extreme disparities in wealth, use of force to keep people in line, and harsh laws. Given these difficulties, why do you think the state has survived? Do you think human populations can develop alternative political organizations in the future?

GLOSSARY

Age grades: groups of men who are close to one another in age and share similar duties or responsibilities.

Age sets: named categories to which men of a certain age are assigned at birth.

Band: the smallest unit of political organization, consisting of only a few families and no formal leadership positions.

Big man: a form of temporary or situational leadership; influence results from acquiring followers.

Caste system: the division of society into hierarchical levels; one's position is determined by birth and remains fixed for life.

Chief: The person (women rarely occupy these posts) who holds the office of chief.

Chiefdom: large political units in which the chief, who usually is determined by heredity, holds a formal position of power.

Codified law: formal legal systems in which damages, crimes, remedies, and punishments are specified.

Egalitarian: societies in which there is no great difference in status or power between individuals and there are as many valued status positions in the societies as there are persons able to fill them.

Feuds: disputes of long duration characterized by a state of recurring hostilities between families, lineages, or other kin groups.

Legitimacy: the perception that an individual has a valid right to leadership.

Nation-state: an autonomous political entity.

Negative reinforcements: punishments for noncompliance through fines, imprisonment, and death sentences.

Oaths: the practice of calling on a deity to bear witness to the truth of what one says.

Office: A permanent political status that must be filled when vacated through retirement or death.

Ordeal: a test used to determine guilt or innocence by submitting the accused to dangerous, painful, or risky tests believed to be controlled by supernatural forces.

Positive reinforcements: rewards for compliance; examples include medals, financial incentives, and other forms of public recognition.

Raids: short-term uses of physical force organized and planned to achieve a limited objective.

Ranked: societies in which there are substantial differences in the wealth and social status of individuals; there are a limited number of positions of power or status, and only a few can occupy them.

Reverse dominance: societies in which people reject attempts by any individual to exercise power.

Social classes: the division of society into groups based on wealth and status.

Sodality: a system used to encourage solidarity or feelings of connectedness between people who are not related by family ties.

State: the most complex form of political organization characterized by a central government that has a monopoly over legitimate uses of physical force, a sizeable bureaucracy, a system of formal laws, and a standing military force; an independent, centrally organized political unit or government.

Stratification: A social structure that involves two or more largely mutually exclusive populations.

Stratified: societies in which there are large differences in the wealth, status, and power of individuals based on unequal access to resources and positions of power.

Sumptuary rules: norms that permit persons of higher rank to enjoy greater social status by wearing distinctive clothing, jewelry, and/or decorations denied those of lower rank.

Tribe: political units organized around family ties that have fluid or shifting systems of temporary leadership.

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8.9: About the Author

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Paul McDowell (Ph.D. University of British Columbia, 1974) examined the transition of the civil-religious hierarchy in a factory and peasant community in Guatemala to a secular town government and church organization called Accion Catolica. He is the author of Cultural Anthropology: A Concise Introduction and Cultures Around the World: An Ethnographic Reader; he has also read several papers on the political globalization of Guatemala.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Family and Marriage

Learning Objectives

- Describe the variety of human families cross-culturally with examples.
- Discuss variation in parental rights and responsibilities.
- Distinguish between matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilateral kinship systems.
- Identify the differences between kinship established by blood and kinship established by marriage
- Evaluate the differences between dowry and bridewealth as well as between the types of post-marital residence.
- Recognize patterns of family and marriage and explain why these patterns represent rational decisions within the cultural contexts.

9.1: Family
9.2: Kinship and Descent
9.3: Kinship Systems and Terms
9.4: Marriage
9.5: Families and Households
9.6: Families and Cultural Change
9.7: End of Chapter Discussion
9.8: About the Author

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9.1: Family

FAMILY

Family and marriage may at first seem to be familiar topics. Families exist in all societies and they are part of what makes us human. However, societies around the world demonstrate tremendous variation in cultural understandings of family and marriage. Ideas about how people are related to each other, what kind of marriage would be ideal, when people should have children, who should care for children, and many other family-related matters differ cross-culturally. While the function of families is to fulfill basic human needs such as providing for children, defining parental roles, regulating sexuality, and passing property and knowledge between generations, there are many variations or patterns of family life that can meet these needs. This chapter introduces some of the more common patterns of family life found around the world. It is important to remember that within any cultural framework variation does occur. Some variations on the standard pattern fall within what would be culturally considered the "range of acceptable alternatives." Other family forms are not entirely accepted, but would still be recognized by most members of the community as reasonable.

Definition: family

The smallest group of individuals who see themselves as connected to one another.

RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, STATUSES, AND ROLES IN FAMILIES

Some of the earliest research in cultural anthropology explored differences in ideas about family. Lewis Henry Morgan, a lawyer who also conducted early anthropological studies of Native American cultures, documented the words used to describe family members in the Iroquois language.[1] In the book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871), he explained that words used to describe family members, such as "mother" or "cousin," were important because they indicated the rights and responsibilities associated with particular family members both within **households** and the larger community. This can be seen in the labels we have for family members—titles like father or aunt—that describe how a person fits into a family as well as the obligations he or she has to others.

Definition: household

Family members who reside together.

The concepts of status and role are useful for thinking about the behaviors that are expected of individuals who occupy various positions in the family. The terms were first used by anthropologist Ralph Linton and they have since been widely incorporated into social science terminology.[2] For anthropologists, a **status** is any culturally-designated position a person occupies in a particular setting. Within the setting of a family, many statuses can exist such as "father," "mother," "maternal grandparent," and "younger brother." Of course, cultures may define the statuses involved in a family differently. **Role** is the set of behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a particular status. A person who has the status of "mother," for instance, would generally have the role of caring for her children.

Definition: status

Any culturally-designated position a person occupies in a particular setting.

Definition: role

The set of behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a particular status.

Roles, like statuses, are cultural ideals or expectations and there will be variation in how individuals meet these expectations. Statuses and roles also change within cultures over time. In the not-so-distant past in the United States, the roles associated with the status of "mother" in a typical Euro-American middle-income family included caring for children and keeping a house; they probably did not include working for wages outside the home. It was rare for fathers to engage in regular, day-to-day housekeeping or childcare roles, though they sometimes "helped out," to use the jargon of the time. Today, it is much more common for a father to be an equal partner in caring for children or a house or to sometimes take a primary role in child and house care as a "stay at home father" or as a "single father." The concepts of status and role help us think about cultural ideals and what the majority within

a cultural group tends to do. They also help us describe and document culture change. With respect to family and marriage, these concepts help us compare family systems across cultures.

NOTES

1. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1871). ↵
2. Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company,1936). ↵

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9.2: Kinship and Descent

Kinship is the word used to describe culturally recognized ties between members of a family. Kinship includes the terms, or social statuses, used to define family members and the roles or expected behaviors family associated with these statuses. Kinship encompasses relationships formed through blood connections (**consanguineal**), such as those created between parents and children, as well as relationships created through marriage ties (**affinal**), such as in-laws (see Figure 9.2.1). Kinship can also include "chosen kin," who have no formal blood or marriage ties but consider themselves to be family. Adoptive parents, for instance, are culturally recognized as parents to the children they raise even though they are not related by blood.

Definition: kinship

The term used to describe culturally recognized ties between members of a family, the social statuses used to define family members, and the expected behaviors associated with these statuses.

Definition: consanguineal

Relationships formed through blood connections (parents and children).

Definition: affinal

Relationships created through marriage or other social ties (in-laws, adopted children, domestic partners).



Figure 9.2.1: These young Maasai women from Western Tanzania are affinal kin, who share responsibilities for childcare. Maasai men often have multiple wives who share domestic responsibilities. Photo used with permission of Laura Tubelle de González.

While there is quite a bit of variation in families cross-culturally, it is also true that many families can be categorized into broad types based on what anthropologists call a kinship system. The **kinship system** refers to the pattern of culturally recognized relationships between family members. Some cultures create kinship through only a single parental line or "side" of the family. For instance, families in many parts of the world are defined by **patrilineal** descent**:** the paternal line of the family, or fathers and their children. In other societies, **matrilineal** descent defines membership in the kinship group through the maternal line of relationships between mothers and their children. Both kinds of kinship are considered **unilineal** because they involve descent through only one line or side of the family. It is important to keep in mind that systems of descent define culturally recognized "kin," but these rules do not restrict relationships or emotional bonds between people. Mothers in patrilineal societies have close and loving relationships with their children even though they are not members of the same patrilineage.[3] In the United States, for instance, last names traditionally follow a pattern of patrilineal descent: children receive last names from their fathers. This does not mean that the bonds between mothers and children are reduced. **Bilateral** descent is another way of creating kinship. Bilateral descent means that families are defined by descent from both the father and the mother's sides of the family. In bilateral descent, which is common in the United States, children recognize both their mother's and father's family members as relatives.

Definition: kinship system

The pattern of culturally recognized relationships between family members.

Definition: patrilineal

A kinship group created through the paternal line (fathers and their children).

Definition: matrilineal

A kinship group created through the maternal line (mothers and their children).

Definition: unilineal

Descent is recognized through only one line or side of the family.

Definition: bilateral

Descent is recognized through both the father and the mother's sides of the family.

As we will see below, the **descent groups** that are created by these kinship systems provide members with a sense of identity and social support. Kinship groups may also control economic resources and dictate decisions about where people can live, who they can marry, and what happens to their property after death. Anthropologists use kinship diagrams to help visualize descent groups and kinship. Figure 9.2.2 is a simple example of a kinship diagram. This diagram has been designed to help you see the difference between the kinship groups created by a bilateral descent system and a unilineal system.

Definition: descent groups

Relationships that provide members with a sense of identity and social support based on ties of shared ancestry.

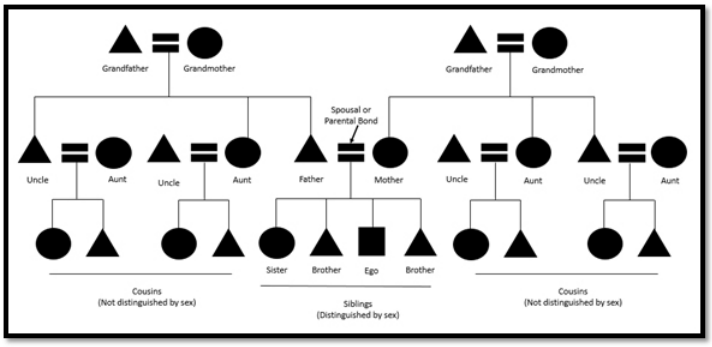


Figure 9.2.2: This kinship chart illustrates bilateral descent.

Kinship diagrams use a specific person, who by convention is called **Ego**, as a starting point. The people shown on the chart are Ego's relatives. In Figure 9.2.2, Ego is in the middle of the bottom row. Most kinship diagrams use a triangle to represent males and a circle to represent females. Conventionally, an "equals sign" placed between two individuals indicates a marriage. A single line, or a hyphen, can be used to indicate a recognized union without marriage such as a couple living together or engaged and living together, sometimes with children.

Definition: ego

A person who is the starting point of a kinship chart.

Children are linked to their parents by a vertical line that extends down from the equals sign. A sibling group is represented by a horizontal line that encompasses the group. Usually children are represented from left to right–oldest to youngest. Other conventions for these charts include darkening the symbol or drawing a diagonal line through the symbol to indicate that a person is deceased. A diagonal line may be drawn through the equals sign if a marriage has ended.

Figure 9.2.2 shows a diagram of three generations of a typical bilateral (two sides) kinship group, focused on parents and children, with aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and grandchildren. Note that everyone in the diagram is related to everyone else in the diagram, even though they may not interact on a regular basis. The group could potentially be very large, and everyone related through blood, marriage, or adoption is included.

The next two kinship diagrams show how the descent group changes in unilineal kinship systems like a patrilineal system (father's line) or a matrilineal system (mother's line). The roles of the family members in relationship to one another are also likely to be different because descent is based on **lineage**: descent from a common ancestor. In a patrilineal system, children are always members of their father's lineage group (Figure 9.2.3). In a matrilineal system, children are always members of their mother's lineage group (Figure 9.2.4). In both cases, individuals remain a part of their birth lineage throughout their lives, even after marriage. Typically, people must marry someone outside their own lineage. In figures 9.2.3 and 9.2.4, the shaded symbols represent people who are in the same lineage. The unshaded symbols represent people who have married into the lineage.

In general, bilateral kinship is more focused on individuals rather than a single lineage of ancestors as seen in unlineal descent. Each person in a bilateral system has a slightly different group of relatives. For example, my brother's relatives through marriage (his in-laws) are included in his kinship group, but are not included in mine. His wife's siblings and children are also included in his group, but not in mine. If we were in a patrilineal or matrilineal system, my brother and I would largely share the same group of relatives.

Definition: lineage

A term used to describe any form of descent from a common ancestor.

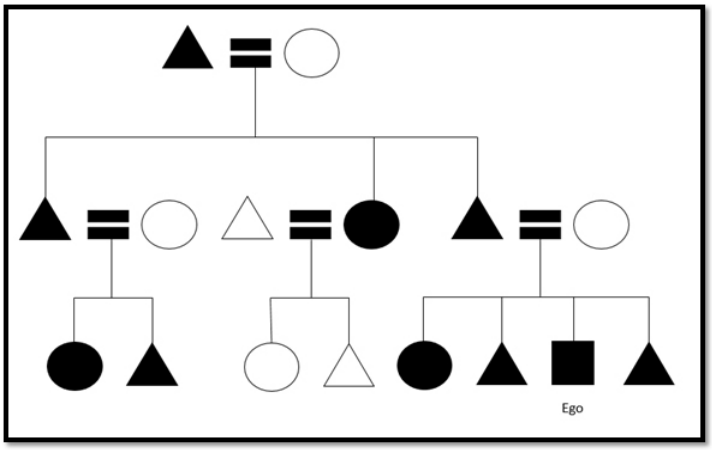


Figure 9.2.3: This kinship chart shows a patrilineal household with Ego in father's lineage.

Matrilineages and patrilineages are not just mirror images of each other. They create groups that behave somewhat differently. Contrary to some popular ideas, matrilineages are not matriarchal. The terms "matriarchy" and "patriarchy" refer to the power structure in a society, which are covered in another chapter of this text. In a patriarchal society, men have more authority and the ability to make more decisions than do women. A father may have the right to make certain decisions for his wife or wives, and for his children, or any other dependents. In matrilineal societies, men usually still have greater power, but women may be subject more to the power of their brothers or uncles (relatives through their mother's side of the family) rather than their fathers.

Among the matrilineal Hopi, for example, a mothers' brother is more likely to be a figure of authority than a father. The mother's brothers have important roles in the lives of their sisters' children. These roles include ceremonial obligations and the responsibility to teach the skills that are associated with men and men's activities. Men are the keepers of important ritual knowledge so while women are respected, men are still likely to hold more authority.

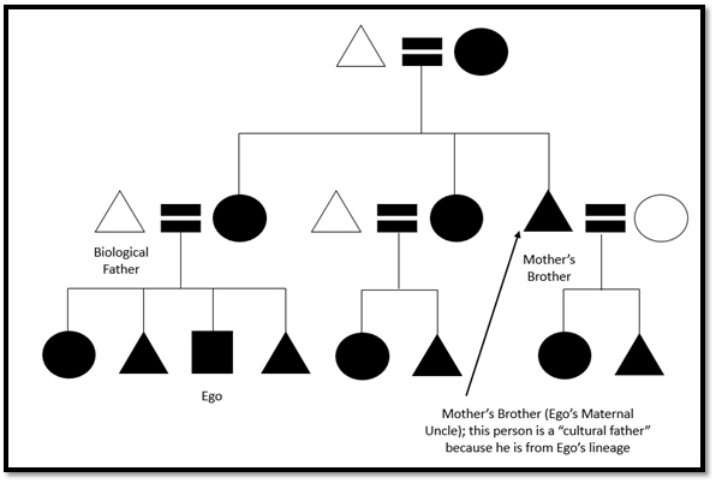


Figure 9.2.4: This kinship chart shows a matrilineal household with Ego in mother's lineage.

The Nayar of southern India offer an interesting example of gender roles in a matrilineal society. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men and women did not live together after marriage because the husbands, who were not part of the matrilineage, were not considered relatives. Women lived for their entire lives in extended family homes with their mothers and siblings. The male siblings in the household had the social role of father and were important father figures in the lives of their sisters' children. The biological fathers of the children had only a limited role in their lives. Instead, these men were busy raising their own sisters' children. Despite the matrilineal focus of the household, Nayar communities were not matriarchies. The position of power in the household was held by an elder male, often the oldest male sibling.

The consequences of this kind of system are intriguing. Men did not have strong ties to their biological offspring. Marriages were fluid and men and women could have more than one spouse, but the children always remained with their mothers. [4] Cross-culturally it does seem to be the case that in matrilineal societies women tend to have more freedom to make decisions about to sex and marriage. Children are members of their mother's kinship group, whether the mother is married or not, so there is often less concern about the social legitimacy of children or fatherhood.

Some anthropologists have suggested that marriages are less stable in matrilineal societies than in patrilineal ones, but this varies as well. Among the matrilineal Iroquois, for example, women owned the longhouses. Men moved into their wives' family houses at marriage. If a woman wanted to divorce her husband, she could simply put his belongings outside. In that society, however, men and women also spent significant time apart. Men were hunters and warriors, often away from the home. Women were the farmers and tended to the home. This, as much as matrilineality, could have contributed to less formality or disapproval of divorce. There was no concern about the division of property. The longhouse belonged to the mother's family, and children belonged to their mother's clan. Men would always have a home with their sisters and mother, in their own matrilineal longhouse.[5]

Kinship charts can be useful when doing field research and particularly helpful when documenting changes in families over time. In my own field research, it was easy to document changes that occurred in a relatively short time, likely linked to urbanization, such as changes in family size, in prevalence of divorce, and in increased numbers of unmarried adults. These patterns had emerged in the surveys and interviews I conducted, but they jumped off the pages when I reviewed the kinship charts. Creating kinship charts was a very helpful technique in my field research. I also used them as small gifts for the people who helped with my research and they were very much appreciated.

NOTES

3. In a patrilineal society, children are members of their father's patrilineage. A mother belongs to her own father's patrilineage, while the children belong to their father's patrilinage. ↵
4. Kathleen Gough, "Variation in Matrilineal Systems," in D. Schneider and K. Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship, Part 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961). See also Kathleen Gough, The Traditional Kinship System of the Nayars of Malabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954). ↵
5. See for example Merlin Myers, *Households and Families of the Longhouse Iroquois at Six Nations Reserve* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). ↵

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9.3: Kinship Systems and Terms

KINSHIP TERMS

Another way to compare ideas about family across cultures is to categorize them based on **kinship terminology**: the terms used in a language to describe relatives. George Murdock was one of the first anthropologists to undertake this kind of comparison and he suggested that the kinship systems of the world could be placed in six categories based on the kinds of words a society used to describe relatives.[6] In some kinship systems, brothers, sisters, and all first cousins call each other brother and sister. In such a system, not only one's biological father, but all one's father's brothers would be called "father," and all of one's mother's sisters, along with one's biological mother, would be called "mother." Murdock and subsequent anthropologists refer to this as the *Hawaiian system* because it was found historically in Hawaii. In Hawaiian kinship terminology there are a smaller number of kinship terms and they tend to reflect generation and gender while merging nuclear families into a larger grouping. In other words, you, your brothers and sisters, and cousins would all be called "child" by your parents and your aunts and uncles.

Definition: kinship terminology

The terms used in a language to describe relatives.

Other systems are more complicated with different terms for father's elder brother, younger brother, grandparents on either side and so on. Each pattern was named for a cultural group in which this pattern was found. The system that most Americans follow is referred to as the *Eskimo system*, a name that comes from the old way of referring to the Inuit, an indigenous people of the Arctic. Placing cultures into categories based on kinship terminology is no longer a primary focus of anthropological studies of kinship. Differences in kinship terminology do provide insight into differences in the way people think about families and the roles people play within them.

Sometimes the differences in categorizing relatives and in terminology reflect patrilineal and matrilineal systems of descent. For example, in a patrilineal system, your father's brothers are members of your lineage or clan; your mother's brothers do not belong to the same lineage or clan and may or may not be counted as relatives. If they are counted, they likely are called something different from what you would call your father's brother. Similar differences would be present in a matrilineal society.

An Example from Croatia

In many U.S. families, any brother of your mother or father is called "uncle." In other kinship systems, however, some uncles and aunts count as members of the family and others do not. In Croatia, which was historically a patrilineal society, all uncles are recognized by their nephews and nieces regardless of whether they are brothers of the mother or the father. But, the uncle is called by a specific name that depends on which side of the family he is on; different roles are associated with different types of uncles.

A child born into a traditional Croatian family will call his aunts and uncles *stric* and *strina* if they are his father's brothers and their wives. He will call his mother's brothers and their wives *ujak* and *ujna*. The words *tetka* or *tetak* can be used to refer to anyone who is a sister of either of his parents or a husband of any of his parents' sisters. The third category, *tetka* or *tetak*, has no reference to "side" of the family; all are either *tetka* or *tetak*.

These terms are not simply words. They reflect ideas about belonging and include expectations of behavior. Because of the patrilineage, individuals are more likely to live with their father's extended family and more likely to inherit from their father's family, but mothers and children are very close. Fathers are perceived as authority figures and are owed deference and respect. A father's brother is also an authority figure. Mothers, however, are supposed to be nurturing and a mother's brother is regarded as having a mother-like role. This is someone who spoils his sister's children in ways he may not spoil his own. A young person may turn to a maternal uncle, or mother's brother in a difficult situation and expects that a maternal uncle will help him and maintain confidentiality. These concepts are so much a part of the culture that one may refer to a more distant relative or an adult friend as a "mother's brother" if that person plays this kind of nurturing role in one's life. These terms harken back to an earlier agricultural society in which a typical family, household, and economic unit was a joint patrilineal and extended family. Children saw their maternal uncles less frequently, usually only on special occasions. Because brothers are also supposed to be very fond of sisters and protective of them, those additional associations are attached to the roles of maternal uncles. Both father's sisters and mother's sisters move to their own husbands' houses at marriage and are seen even less often. This probably reflects the more generic, blended term for aunts and uncles in both these categories.[7]

Similar differences are found in Croatian names for other relatives. Side of the family is important, at least for close relatives. Married couples have different names for in-laws if the in-law is a husband's parent or a wife's parent. Becoming the mother of a married son is higher in social status than becoming the mother of a married daughter. A man's mother gains authority over a new daughter-in-law, who usually leaves her own family to live with her husband's family and work side by side with her mother-in-law in a house.

An Example from China

In traditional Chinese society, families distinguished terminologically between mother's side and father's side with different names for grandparents as well as aunts, uncles, and in-laws. Siblings used terms that distinguished between siblings by gender, as we do in English with "brother" and "sister," but also had terms to distinguish between older and younger siblings. Intriguingly, however, the Chinese word for "he/she/it" is a single term, *ta* with no reference to gender or age. The traditional Chinese family was an extended patrilineal family, with women moving into the husband's family household. In most regions, typically brothers stayed together in adulthood. Children grew up knowing their fathers' families, but not their mothers' families. Some Chinese families still live this way, but urbanization and changes in housing and economic livelihood have made large extended families increasingly less practical.

An Example from the Navajo

In Navajo (or *Diné)* society, children are "born for" their father's families but "born to" their mother's families, the clan to which they belong primarily. The term **clan** refers to a group of people who have a general notion of common descent that is not attached to a specific ancestor. Some clans trace their common ancestry to a common mythological ancestor. Because clan membership is so important to identity and to social expectations in Navajo culture, when people meet they exchange clan information first to find out how they stand in relationship to each other. People are expected to marry outside the clans of their mothers or fathers. Individuals have responsibilities to both sides of the family, but especially to the matrilineal clan. Clans are so large that people may not know clan every individual member, and may not even live in the same vicinity as all clan members, but rights and obligations to any clan members remain strong in people's thinking and in practical behavior. I recently had the experience at the community college where I work in Central Arizona of hearing a young Navajo woman introduce herself in a public setting. She began her address in Navajo, and then translated. Her introduction included reference to her clan memberships, and she concluded by saying that these clan ties are part of what makes her a Navajo woman.

Definition: clan

A group of people who have a general notion of common descent that is not attached to a specific biological ancestor.

An Example from the United States

In many cases, cultures assign "ownership" of a child, or responsibilities for that child anyway, to some person or group other than the mother. In the United States, if one were to question people about who is in their families, they would probably start by naming both their parents, though increasingly single parent families are the norm. Typically, however, children consider themselves equally related to a mother and a father even if one or both are absent from their life. This makes sense because most American families organize themselves according to the principles of bilateral descent, as discussed above, and do not show a preference for one side of their family or the other. So, on further inquiry, we might discover that there are siblings (distinguished with different words by gender, but not birth order), and grandparents on either side of the family who count as family or extended family. Aunts, uncles, and cousins, along with in-laws, round out the typical list of U.S. family members. It is not uncommon for individuals to know more about one side of the family than the other, but given the nature of bilateral descent the idea that people on each side of the family are equally "related" is generally accepted. The notion of bilateral descent is built into legal understandings of family rights and responsibilities in the United States. In a divorce in most states, for example, parents are likely to share time somewhat equally with a minor child and to have joint decision-making and financial responsibility for that child's needs as part of a parental agreement, unless one parent is unable or unwilling to participate as an equal.

NOTES

6. George P. Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: MacMillan, 1949). ↵
7. Vera St. Ehrlich, Family in Transition: A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966. See also Gilliland, M. 1986. The Maintenance of Family Values in a Yugoslav Town. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI International. ↵

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9.4: Marriage

CREATING FAMILIES: PATTERNS OF MARRIAGE

Families can be created in many different ways. A **marriage** is a cultural, social, and legal process that brings two or more individuals together to create a new family unit. Most cultures have ideas about how marriages should be arranged (whether by families or by the individuals involved), at what age this should occur, what the married partners should have in common (including economic status, religion, ethnicity and so on), and what cultural, religious and legal processes make a marriage valid. In the United States, strong cultural norms suggest that individuals should marry for love and not for other reasons. It is not unusual, however, for communities to teach children to follow certain group norms in choosing a marriage partner. Some religious communities, for example, will not recognize marriages contracted across religious lines. Some families strongly prefer that their children marry individuals with similar economic, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. Because families tend to socialize with other families similar to themselves, young people are more likely to meet others similar to themselves.

Definition: marriage

A cultural, social, and legal process that brings two or more individuals together to create a new family unit.

Who Can You Marry?

Cultural expectations define appropriate potential marriage partners. Cultural rules emphasizing the need to marry within a cultural group are known as **endogamy**. People are sometimes expected to marry within religious communities, to marry someone who is ethnically or racially similar or who comes from a similar economic or educational background. These are endogamous marriages: marriages within a group. Cultural expectations for marriage outside a particular group are called **exogamy**. Many cultures require that individuals marry only outside their own kinship groups, for instance. In the United States laws prevent marriage between close relatives such as first cousins. There was a time in the not so distant past, however, when it was culturally preferred for Europeans, and Euro-Americans to marry first cousins. Royalty and aristocrats were known to betroth their children to relatives, often cousins. Charles Darwin, who was British, married his first cousin Emma. This was often done to keep property and wealth in the family.

Definition: endogamy

A term describing expectations that individuals must marry within a particular group.

Definition: exogamy

A term describing expectations that individuals must marry outside a particular group.

In some societies, however, a cousin might be a preferred marriage partner. In some Middle Eastern societies, patrilateral cousin marriage – marrying a male or female cousin on your father's side – is preferred. Some cultures prohibit marriage with a cousin who is in your lineage but, prefer that you marry a cousin who is not in your lineage. For example, if you live in a society that traces kinship patrilineally, cousins from your father's brothers or sisters would be forbidden as marriage partners, but cousins from your mother's brothers or sisters might be considered excellent marriage partners.

Arranged marriages were typical in many cultures around the world in the past including in the United States. Marriages are arranged by families for many reasons: because the families have something in common, for financial reasons, to match people with others from the "correct" social, economic or religious group, and for many other reasons. In India today, some people practice a kind of modified arranged marriage practice that allows the potential spouses to meet and spend time together before agreeing to a match. The meeting may take place through a mutual friend, a family member, community matchmaker, or even a Marriage Meet even in which members of the same community (caste) are invited to gather (see Figure 9.4.1). Although arranged marriages still exist in urban cities such as Mumbai, love matches are increasingly common. In general, as long as the social requirements are met, love matches may be accepted by the families involved.

Marriage Practices

In a basic biological sense, women give birth and the minimal family unit in most, though not all societies, is mother and child. Cultures elaborate that basic relationship and build on it to create units that are culturally considered central to social life. Families



Figure 9.4.1: This advertisement for "Marriage Meet" in Mumbai, India welcomes "boys" and "girls" from the community to participate in a Marriage Meet, in which young people can mingle with and get to know potential spouses in a fun atmosphere. Photo used with permission of Laura Tubelle de González.

grow through the birth or adoption of children and through new adult relationships often recognized as marriage. In our own society, it is only culturally acceptable to be married to one spouse at a time though we may practice what is sometimes called **serial monogamy**, or, marriage to a succession of spouses one after the other. This is reinforced by religious systems, and more importantly in U.S. society, by law. Plural marriages are not allowed; they are illegal although they do exist because they are encouraged under some religions or ideologies. In the United States, couples are legally allowed to divorce and remarry, but not all religions cultural groups support this practice.

Definition: serial monogamy

A marriage to a succession of spouses one after the other.

Polygamy refers to any marriage in which there are multiple partners. There are two kinds of polygamy: polygyny and polyandry. **Polygyny** refers to marriages in which there is one husband and multiple wives. In some societies that practice polygyny, the preference is for *sororal polygyny*, or the marriage of one man to several sisters. In such cases, it is sometimes believed that sisters will get along better as co-wives. **Polyandry** describes marriages with one wife and multiple husbands. As with polygyny, *fraternal polyandry* is common and involves the marriage of a woman to a group of brothers.

Definition: polygamy

Marriage with multiple spouses.

Definition: polygyny

Marriages in which there is one husband and multiple wives.

Definition: polyandry

Marriages with one wife and multiple husbands.

Marriage Exchanges: Dowry and Bridewealth

In many societies, marriages are affirmed with an exchange of property. This is usually the case in places where families have a hand in arranging a marriage. A property exchange recognizes the challenges faced by a family that loses a member and by a family that takes on a new member. These practices also reflect different notions about the value of the new family member.

Dowry payments are known from U.S. and Western European history. A **dowry** is a gift given by a bride's family to either the bride or to the groom's family at the time of the marriage. In societies that practice dowry, families often spend many years accumulating the gift. In some villages in the former Yugoslavia, the dowry was meant to provide for a woman if she became a widow. The dowry was her share of her family's property and reflected the tradition that land was usually inherited by a woman's

brothers. The dowry might include coins, often woven together in a kind of apron and worn on her wedding day. This form of dowry also represented a statement of wealth, prestige or high status for both families; her family's ability to give this kind of wealth, and the prestige of the family who was acquiring a desirable new bride. Her dowry also could include linens and other useful items to be used during her years as a wife. In more recent times, dowries have become extravagant, including things like refrigerators, cars, and houses.

Definition: dowry

Payments made to the groom's family by the bride's family before marriage.

A dowry can also represent the higher status of the groom's family and its ability to demand a payment for taking on the economic responsibility of a young wife. This was of thinking about dowry is more typical of societies in which women are less valued than men. A good dowry enables a woman's family to marry into a better family. In parts of India, a dowry could sometimes be so large that it would be paid in installments. Bride burnings, killing a bride, could happen if her family did not continue to make the agreed upon payments (though there may be other reasons for this awful crime in individual cases). This of course is illegal, but does sometimes occur.[13]

Historically, dowry was most common in agricultural societies. Land was the most valuable commodity and usually land stayed in the hands of men. Women who did not marry were sometimes seen as a burden on their own families because they were not perceived as making an economic contribution and they represented another mouth to feed. A dowry was important for a woman to take with her into a marriage because the groom's family had the upper economic hand. It helped ease the tension of her arrival in the household, especially if the dowry was substantial.

Bridewealth, by contrast, often represents a higher value placed on women and their ability to work and produce children. Bridewealth is an exchange of valuables given from a man's family to the family of his new wife. Bridewealth is common in pastoralist societies in which people make their living by raising domesticated animals. The Masaai are example of one such group. A cattle-herding culture located in Kenya and Tanzania, the Maasai pay bridewealth based on the desirability of the woman. Culturally defined attributes such as her age, beauty, virginity, and her ability to work contribute to a woman's value. The economic value placed on women does not mean that women in such societies necessarily have much freedom, but it does sometimes give them some leverage in their new domestic situations. In rare cases, there might be simultaneous exchanges of dowry and bridewealth. In such cases, often the bridewealth gift was more of a token than a substantial economic contribution.

Definition: bridewealth

Payments made to the bride's family by the groom's family before marriage.

Same Sex Marriage

In the United States, Canada as well as other countries, two individuals of the same sex may be legally married, but in these countries as well as other places, same-sex couples have been creating households and families for centuries, long before legal recognition. Same-sex marriages are documented, for instance, in the history of Native American groups from the Great Plains. On the Plains, men who preferred to dress and take on the roles of women were allowed to marry other men. It was assumed that if one partner gathered plant food and prepared food, the other partner should have a complementary role like hunting. Androgynous individuals, males who preferred female roles or dress, and females who took on male roles, were not condemned but regarded as "two-spirits," a label that had positive connotations.

Two-spirits were considered embody a third gender combining elements of both male and female. The key to the two-spirit gender identity was behavior: what individuals did in their communities.[16] If a person who was born with a male biological sex felt his identity and chosen lifestyle best matched the social role recognized as female, he could move into a third gender two-spirit category. Today, Native American groups set their own laws regarding same-sex marriage. Many recognize two-spirit individuals, and accept marriage of a two-spirit person to a person of the same biological sex. Although some nations still do not permit same-sex marriage between tribal members, one of the largest tribal nations, the Cherokee legalized same-sex marriages in 2016.

NOTES

13. There are many news reports about this practice. See for instance Subodh Varnal, "Dowry Death: One Bride Burnt Every Hour," *The Times of India*, January 27, 2012 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Dowry-death-One-bride-burnt-every-

hour/articleshow/11644691.cms↵

14. Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988). ↵
15. Reo Fortune, *Sorcerers of Dobu* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1932). ↵
16. See for instance Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998). ↵

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9.5: Families and Households

When anthropologists talk of family structures, we distinguish among several standard family types any of which can be the typical or preferred family unit in a culture. First is the **nuclear family**: parents who are in a culturally-recognized relationship, such as marriage, along with their minor or dependent children. This family type is also known as a *conjugal family*. A *non-conjugal* nuclear family might be a single parent with dependent children, because of the death of one spouse or divorce or because a marriage never occurred. Next is the **extended family**: a family of at least three-generations sharing a household. A *stem family* is a version of an extended family that includes an older couple and one of their adult children with a spouse (or spouses) and children. In situations where one child in a family is designated to inherit, it is more likely that only the inheriting child will remain with the parents when he or she becomes an adult and marries. While this is often an oldest male, it is sometimes a different child. In Burma or Myanmar for example, the youngest daughter was considered the ideal caretaker of elderly parents, and was generally designated to inherit.[8] The other children will "marry out" or find other means to support themselves.

Definition: nuclear family

A parent or parents who are in a culturally-recognized relationship, such as marriage, along with minor or dependent children.

Definition: extended family

A family of at least three-generations sharing a household.

A **joint family** is a very large extended family that includes multiple generations. Adult children of one gender, often the males, remain in the household with their spouses and children and they have collective rights to family property. Unmarried adult children of both genders may also remain in the family group. For example, a household could include a set of grandparents, all of their adult sons with their wives and children, and unmarried adult daughters. A joint family in rare cases could have dozens of people, such as the traditional *zadruga* of Croatia, discussed in greater detail below.

Definition: joint family

A very large extended family that includes multiple generations.

FAMILY SIZE

Cultural rules generally define not only who makes up a family but also how many people should be in it. In some cultures, larger families are considered ideal. In others, smaller families are preferred. These ideas are often linked to both practical and ideological considerations. Practical considerations might include the availability of housing, work patterns, childcare, the economic contribution children make to a family, or the cost of raising children. Ideological considerations include religious values related to families. In the 1990s, I carried out field research in Croatia, investigating ideas about families. An overwhelming majority of the people I interviewed believed that the ideal family would include three children. Most of these families commented that in their own living memories people preferred as many children as possible so that there would be assistance for farm work. When I was there, however, large families were no longer regarded as practical. Within the same general region, families in urban settings overwhelmingly said that one child was ideal. A shortage of housing was the single most important factor for limiting family size to one child in cities. In both the rural and urban settings in Croatia, most people were Roman Catholic and may have been ideologically predisposed to larger families, but practical considerations were more important to both groups when it came to matters of family size.

During the same period in the 1990s, it was common for families in the United States to say that the ideal family included two children and preferably one of each gender (anecdotal). This of course varies based on factors which include, but are not limited to the ethnicity and religion of the family. In another example, the People's Republic of China, where I lived and worked, had an official one-child policy.[10] A family that included only one child was not a widespread cultural ideal. Most families wished for more children, but had to settle for less.

POST-MARITAL RESIDENCE

Every culture has ideas about where a newly married couple should live. In the United States and in Western Europe, it is usually expected that a new couple create a new domestic unit or household. Ideally, they should live together in a place separate from

either of their **families of orientation**: the families in which they were raised. They are expected to create a new **family of procreation**: a new household for raising children. The goal of most couples is to eventually live separately from their original families so that they can focus on their new relationship and be independent. This kind of residence after marriage is called **neolocal residence** (new location). Increasingly, many couples establish a residence together before marriage or may skip the formal marriage altogether.

Definition: family of orientation

The family in which an individual is raised.

Definition: family of procreation

A new household formed for the purpose of conceiving and raising children.

Definition: neolocal residence

Newly married individuals establish a household separate from other family members.

Another common pattern around the world is **patrilocal residence** (father's location). This means that a couple generally resides with the husband's father's family after marriage. This is a multi-generational practice. The new husband's own mother likely moved into the household when she married his father. Patrilocal residence is common around the world. It creates larger households that can be useful in farming economies. Today, with increasing urbanization and with the very different kinds of jobs associated with industrial capitalism, patrilocal residence has become less common.

Definition: patrilocal residence

Married individuals live with or near the husband's father's family.

A less common pattern worldwide is matrilocal residence. In **matrilocal residence** societies, men leave their matrilineal families at marriage and move in with their wives' mothers' families. Quite a few Native American groups practiced matrilocal residence, including the Hopi and the Navajo (or *Diné*) in the Southwest, and the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) tribes in the Great Lakes region. A very interesting residence pattern found within matrilineal societies is **avunculocal residence** (uncle's location). It means that a couple will live with the wife's mother's brother. In matrilineal societies, in which important property, knowledge, or social position are linked with men, the preference is to keep wealth within the matrilineal household. Property and other cultural items are passed not from biological fathers to sons, but from maternal uncles to nephews. In doing so, property is kept within the matriline.

Definition: matrilocal residence

Married individuals live with or near the wife's mother's family.

Definition: avunculocal residence

Married individuals live with or near an uncle.

An excellent example of avunculocal residence is found in the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. In families where there was position of authority or significant wealth it was common for a young man to go live with or near his mother's brother at the time of his marriage. Trobriand Islanders passed important magical knowledge and political positions through the mother's lineage. The son of a chief would not become a chief. Instead, the chief's maternal nephew would inherit the position. Trobriand kinship and family life is rich and complicated. Anthropologist Annette Weiner describes men and women as carrying out complementary roles and both men and women are valued culturally. This is not a matriarchy, nor is it a true patriarchy.

The avunculocal arrangement is so important that a man or woman without a cross-gender sibling will adopt one. A woman must have a brother to plant yam gardens for her husband when she marries. A man must have a sister to participate in exchanges of women's wealth on his behalf to enhance his position, and also to ensure that his soul is eventually reborn, after death, into the matrilineage. Family life and the passing of knowledge was changing rapidly in the Trobriand Islands at the end of Weiner's work; more people were converting to Christianity, and while belief in magic was not yet disappearing, Christians could not inherit their

uncles' magic. This is an example of a culture in transition. At the same time, however, Trobriand Islanders valued their traditions, culture, and language, and were loathe to lose them altogether.[14]

Patrilocal residence is usually associated with patrilineal descent. Property, knowledge, and positions are inherited through the father's family or the husband's father's family. In the case of patrilocal residence, it was sometimes difficult for a woman to return to her original family if her marriage ended due to death or divorce. The latter was often considered socially shaming and in patrilineal societies women were often blamed for ending the marriage regardless of the actual circumstances. Matrilocal residence is usually associated with matrilineal descent. Property, knowledge, and positions are inherited through the mother's family, or the wife's mother's family. Matrilineal and matrilocal societies tended to be less concerned with divorce. Men always had a home with their mothers, aunts, and sisters and might even come and go during a marriage, carrying out responsibilities to their maternal relatives and staying with them from time to time. Explaining the differences between patrilocal and matrilocal residences risks stereotyping. That said, it is likely that those cultures in which women marry "out" are less likely to value women while those in which men leave their families at marriage are more inclusive of women. This may have something to do with economics and ideologies, but must be examined in each cultural context.

Bilocal residence (two locations) or *ambilocal* residence (either location) represent two additional and related residential patterns. They are essentially the same and mean that a couple may live with or near either the husband's or wife's family after marriage. A striking example comes from the island of Dobu, a place that is not far from the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. In Dobu society, which was traditionally matrilineal and practiced village exogamy, a married couple would alternate years living in the husband's village and in the wife's village.[15] In cases of bilocal or ambilocal residence while a couple has the choice to live with either the husband's or wife's family, a choice is made based on which location is best able to accommodate new members or which location needs the additional labor that comes from new members. Once the choice of residence is made, the married couple usually remains in one place.

INHERITANCE

The inheritance of family property is often a part of cultural values and roles for families. In 1991, when Croatia was on the verge of war, I remember a woman speaking about her house going to her eldest son. Her young daughter was sitting with us at the time, and said to her mother in surprise, "Mama, why not me?" Her mother stroked her head and smiled at her, but was firm when she said "Because you are female." It is typical worldwide, particularly in agricultural societies, for men to inherit family property. The best-known pattern is inheritance by the oldest male. Joint inheritance by brothers, with the oldest brother nominally in charge of the family, is also fairly wide-spread in joint and extended families. As mentioned above, however, other patterns are found, including property that passes from maternal uncle to maternal nephew in the Trobriand Islands, and inheritance of the family house and corresponding responsibility to care for the older generation by the youngest daughter in Burmese families. This is a further reminder that family organization and expectations are linked to economic systems and to the resources available to the family. Pattern of family life and marriage do not exist apart from the physical and economic environment, and other cultural practices.

ADOPTION

Adoption is another way that people form family ties. In the United States, usually it is infants or minor children who are adopted by a non-parental family member like a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, or an older sibling, or by a non-family member. This is usually done when a biological parent is unable or unwilling to raise a child. The decision to give up a child through adoption is a complicated one, and one that parents do not make easily.

In other societies, adoption is viewed differently. In some Pacific Island societies, children who are adopted are considered fortunate because they have two sets of parents; children are not given for adoption because a parent is unwilling or unable to care for them, but rather to honor the adoptive parents. Martha Ward described a young woman in Pohnpei, Micronesia, who had a child for her grandmother, to keep her company in her older years. In another case she described a child who went to dinner at a relative's house and stayed for a number of years in a kind of adoptive situation. In such cases, children retain relationships with biological and adoptive family members, and may even move fluidly between them.[17]

One of the more unusual forms of adoption is adopted-daughter marriage, or *sim pua* marriage. It is found in Taiwan and described by anthropologist Margery Wolf. Wolf worked in Taiwan in the mid-1900s. At that time, Taiwanese families strongly preferred sons over daughters. Sons stayed with their families in adulthood, produced the next generation, cared for parents in old age, and carried on the tradition of ancestor veneration so that one would not become a "wandering ghost" after death. Daughters were regarded as expensive. People believed that they raised daughters for someone else. Dowries and weddings for grown daughters

were expensive. Families worried that they would not be able to find suitable husbands for their grown daughters, who would remain a burden on their natal families in their later years, not producers of children or contributors in any other way.[18]

As a result a custom developed of giving up daughters to other families as future daughters-in-law. Mothers would give up their own daughters as infants, only to take in very quickly an adopted daughter from someone else. Sometimes the future wife was adopted before the family had a son. It was said that an adopted daughter/daughter-in-law would "lead in a son." Adopted daughters were reportedly not treated well. They had to do housework, help with childcare, and were not given any privileges such as education. They were often older than their eventual husbands, and had a lower status in the family than their adoptive brothers. There were reports of an adopted daughter being treated badly by adopted siblings, and then being expected to later marry one of them. Wolf reports a very low birth rate among couples who were raised as siblings. Pressure to engage in these kinds of adoptions usually came from a mother-in-law, or the husband's mother, or a grandmother of the infant girl who had decision-making power in the family because she was the mother of an adult son. Grandmothers saw this kind of arrangement as advantageous to the family, according to Wolf, because birth mothers were more likely to be unhappy about losing a baby daughter, and because caring for another child brought in a future daughter-in-law.[19]

NOTES

8. Melford Spiro, *Kinship and Marriage in Burma: A Cultural and Psychodynamic Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977). ↵
9. Laura Tubelle de González, "Modern Arranged Marriage in Mumbai" *Teaching Anthropology: SACC Notes* 19 (2015). http://sacc-dev.americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/TASN-191-192-spring-fall-20131.pdf. ↵
10. The one-child policy was introduced in 1979. It was phased out beginning in 2015 and was replaced by a two-child policy. ↵
11. see Vera St. Ehrlich, Family in Transition: A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966. ↵
12. Luka Lukic, Varos: Zbornik za narodi zivot i obicaje muznih slavena. Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti. Zagreb. god. 24, str. 32.238, 1919. ↵
13. There are many news reports about this practice. See for instance Subodh Varnal, "Dowry Death: One Bride Burnt Every Hour," *The Times of India*, January 27, 2012 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Dowry-death-One-bride-burnt-every-hour/articleshow/11644691.cms↵
14. Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988). ↵
15. Reo Fortune, *Sorcerers of Dobu* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1932). ↵
16. See for instance Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998). ↵
17. Martha Ward, *Nest in the Wind: Adventures in Anthropology on a Tropical Island* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2005). ↵
18. Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972). ↵
19. Ibid. ↵

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9.6: Families and Cultural Change

Families are adaptive groups that help address common societal concerns related to child-rearing, sexual relationships between adults, and gender roles within the household. While there are norms and ideals, expectations and understandings regarding families in all cultures, there are also always situations that represent variations on that norm. Sometimes these are areas where we begin to see culture change. In the United States in the 1960s, young people began to live together openly outside of marriage as couples. Those relationships were often socially disapproved, but today it is much more socially acceptable and common for people to live together prior to marriage or even instead of marriage. Often the couple will also have children before they decide to marry. An ideological variation that began nearly sixty years ago has led to a widespread culture change in attitudes toward marriage.

In the Croatian Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1980s, shortly after the death of long-time leader Josip Broz "Tito," it was still expected that a young couple would live with a husband's family at marriage. At that time, I was engaged in fieldwork that focused on social change. The socialist government had implemented legislation and social programs to support women moving out of traditional roles, becoming educated and productive members of the workforce, and participating in the professional class. There was state-funded daycare and liberal legislation regarding birth control and abortion among other efforts to improve or change the traditional roles of women.

In reality, however, marriage and parenthood were still highly valued. Couples often married at a young age and women tended to still be responsible for all housework. Women themselves valued keeping a clean house, cooking homemade food from scratch without using prepared foods, and caring for their families. Most young wives and mothers lived with their husbands' families. Traditionally, mothers of sons gained power and respect in the family from their married son and daughter-in-law. In the past this relationship was sometimes described as a difficult one, with a daughter-in-law having little say in family and household life. Some of that seemed to persist in the 1980s. Women living with mothers-in-law did not have a great deal of freedom of choice and had to prove themselves at home, leaving less time to think about progressing in education or work.[20]

In an urban environment, however, housing was in short supply. If a family had two sons and one was already married and still living with his natal family, the second son might live with the wife's family at marriage if that family had the space. In these situations, which were not considered ideal but still were in the range of acceptable alternatives, young married women found themselves living with their own mothers rather than a mother-in-law. A mother tended to make life easier for her own daughter rather than insisting that she do quite so much household work. Mothers and daughters were more often easy partners in a household. The mother-in-law of a young man tended not to make his life difficult, but rather to regard him fondly. Women who lived with their own families after marriage were more likely to be able to continue their education, take promotions at work, make more of the opportunities that were provided under socialism.

In Croatia, government engineered policies alone did not produce changes in family patterns or gender roles. It was a variety of factors, including economic pressures and housing shortages, which combined to create an environment in which families changed. It became increasingly common for couples to live with the wife's family and eventually to live on their own. Today in Croatia, women have a great deal of freedom of choice, are likely to live alone with their husbands or, like in the United States, Canada, and European countries, to live with a partner outside of marriage. Change occurs in family life when social and cultural conditions also change.

CONCLUSION

The institutions of the family and marriage are found in all societies and are part of cultural understandings of the way the world should work. In all cultures there are variations that are acceptable as well as situations in which people cannot quite meet the ideal. How people construct families varies greatly from one society to another, but there are patterns across cultures that are linked to economics, religion, and other cultural and environmental factors. The study of families and marriage is an important part of anthropology because family and household groups play a central role in defining relationships between people and making society function. While there is nothing in biology that dictates that a family group be organized in a particular way, our cultural expectations leads to ideas about families that seem "natural" to us. As cultures change over time, ideas about family also adapt to new circumstances.

NOTES

20. Olsen, M. K. G., "Authority and Conflict in Slavonian Households: The Effects of Social Environment on Intra-Household Processes" in The Household Economy: Reconsidering the Domestic Mode of Production, Richard Wilk, ed., 149-170

(Colorado: Westview Press, 1989). ↵

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9.7: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. Why is it important for anthropologists to understand the kinship, descent, and family relationships that exist in the cultures they study? In what ways can family relationships structure the lives of individuals?
2. Status and role define the position of people within the family as well as the behaviors they are expected to perform. What are some of the statuses and roles found in families in your community? How have these changed over time?
3. In this chapter, Gilliland describes several different patterns of family organization including nuclear families, extended families, and joint families. While small nuclear families are common in the United States, larger families are common in many other societies. What do you think are some of the practical effects of both small and large families on everyday life?

GLOSSARY

Affinal: Relationships created through marriage or other social ties (in-laws, adopted children, domestic partners).

Avunculocal: married individuals live with or near an uncle.

Bilateral: descent is recognized through both the father and the mother's sides of the family.

Bridewealth: payments made to the bride's family by the groom's family before marriage.

Clan: a group of people who have a general notion of common descent that is not attached to a specific biological ancestor.

Consanguineal: Relationships formed through blood connections (parents and children).

Descent groups: relationships that provide members with a sense of identity and social support based on ties of shared ancestry.

Dowry: payments made to the groom's family by the bride's family before marriage.

Ego: A person who is the starting point of a kinship chart.

Endogamy: a term describing expectations that individuals must marry within a particular group.

Exogamy: a term describing expectations that individuals must marry outside a particular group.

Extended family: a family of at least three-generations sharing a household.

Family: the smallest group of individuals who see themselves as connected to one another.

Family of orientation: the family in which an individual is raised.

Family of procreation: a new household formed for the purpose of conceiving and raising children.

Household: family members who reside together.

Joint family: a very large extended family that includes multiple generations.

Kinship: term used to describe culturally recognized ties between members of a family, the social statuses used to define family members, and the expected behaviors associated with these statuses; blood ties, common ancestry, and social relationships that form families within human groups.

Kinship system: the pattern of culturally recognized relationships between family members.

Kinship terminology: the terms used in a language to describe relatives.

Lineage: term used to describe any form of descent from a common ancestor.

Marriage: A cultural, social, and legal process that brings two or more individuals together to create a new family unit.

Matriarchal: a society in which women have authority to make decisions.

Matrilineal: a kinship group created through the maternal line (mothers and their children).

Matrilocal residence: married individuals live with or near the wife's mother's family.

Neolocal residence: newly married individuals establish a household separate from other family members.

Nuclear family: a parent or parents who are in a culturally-recognized relationship, such as marriage, along with minor or dependent children.

Patrilateral cousin marriage: the practice of marrying a male or female cousin on the father's side of the family.

Patrilineal: a kinship group created through the paternal line (fathers and their children).

Patrilocal residence: married individuals live with or near the husband's father's family.

Polygamy: Marriage with multiple spouses.

Polyandry: marriages with one wife and multiple husbands.

Polygyny: marriages in which there is one husband and multiple wives.

Role: the set of behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a particular status.

Serial monogamy: marriage to a succession of spouses one after the other.

Status: any culturally-designated position a person occupies in a particular setting.

Unilineal: descent is recognized through only one line or side of the family.

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9.8: About the Author

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Mary K. Gilliland, Ph.D. (also published as Mary K. Gilliland Olsen) earned a B.A. from Bryn Mawr College, with Honors in Anthropology; and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in anthropology from the University of California, San Diego. Her primary research took place in the former Yugoslavia (1982–4, 1990–1), Croatia (1993, 1995, 1996–7) and with displaced Bosnians, Croats and Serbs in the United States (2001–3). In Croatia, Mary Kay was affiliated with the Filozofski Fakultet in Zagreb, the Ethnographic Museum in Slavonski Brod (Croatia/Yugoslavia), and with the Institute for Anthropological Research (Zagreb, Croatia both pre- and post-independence). Continuing affiliation as member of Editorial Board for the Collegium Antropologicum: The Journal of the Institute for Anthropological Research, and named a Lifetime Member of the Croatian Anthropological Society. Mary Kay has also collaborated in projects in Asia, including People's Republic of China (primarily Xinjiang, Western China), Mongolia and Vietnam. Her areas of research interest and publication include culture and social change, gender and ethnic identity, family, marriage and intergenerational relationships. Primarily a "teaching anthropologist," Mary Kay was full-time faculty and Department Chair at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona from 1989–2006. She maintains an ongoing relationship as Associate Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arizona. She has taught at San Diego Mesa College, University of California, San Diego and the University of Zagreb. Since 2006 she has held a variety of administrative positions including Academic Dean, Vice President of Instruction and is currently Vice President of Academic Affairs at Central Arizona College.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Religion

Learning Objectives

- Define religion and explain its significance in human cultures.
- Summarize theories developed by anthropologists to explain the importance of supernatural beliefs in human communities.
- Identify the four elements of religion (cosmology, belief in the supernatural, rules of behavior, and rituals) and explain how each element contributes to religious practices.
- Define rites of passage, rites of intensification, and rites of revitalization and explain the purpose of each type of ritual.

10.1: Religion
10.2: Theories of Religion
10.3: Elements of Religion - Cosmologies and the Supernatural
10.4: Elements of Religion - Rules and Rituals
10.5: Religious Specialists
10.6: End of Chapter Discussion
10.7: About the Author

Image - Head shaman of Olkhon at Lake Baikal. Buryatia, Russia. By Аркадий Зарубин (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons.

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10.1: Religion

RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Humans have always wondered about the meaning of life, the nature of the universe, and the forces that shape our lives. While it is impossible to know for sure how the people who lived thousands of years ago answered these kinds of questions, there are some clues. Fifty thousand years ago, human communities buried the dead with stone tools, shells, animal bones, and other objects, a practice that suggests they were preparing the deceased for an afterlife, or a world beyond this one. Thirty thousand years ago, artists entered the Chauvet cave in France and painted dramatic scenes of animals on the cave walls along with abstract symbols that suggest the images were part of a supernatural belief system, possibly one focused on ensuring safety or success in hunting (Figure 1.1.1).[1] A few thousand years later, collections of small clay sculptures, known as Venus figurines, began appearing across Eurasia. They seem to express ideas about fertility or motherhood and may have been viewed as magical (Figure 1.1.2).[2]



Figure 10.1.1: An image from the Chauvet cave painted about 32,000 years ago. The paintings may have been part of religious ceremonies intended to ensure success in hunting.



Figure 10.1.2: The Venus of Willendorf figurine was made between 28,000 and 25,000 BC and may have been associated with spiritual beliefs about motherhood or fertility.

DEFINING RELIGION

Because ideas about the supernatural are part of every human culture, understanding these beliefs is important to anthropologists. However, studying supernatural beliefs is challenging for several reasons. The first difficulty arises from the challenge of defining the topic itself. The word “religion,” which is commonly used in the United States to refer to participation in a distinct form of faith such as Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, is not a universally recognized idea. Many cultures have no word for “religion” at all and many societies do not make a clear distinction between beliefs or practices that are “religious,” or “spiritual” and other habits that are an ordinary part of daily life. For instance, leaving an incense offering in a household shrine dedicated to the spirits of the ancestors may be viewed as a simple part of the daily routine rather than a “religious” practice. There are societies that believe in supernatural beings, but do not call them “gods.” Some societies do not see a distinction between the natural and the supernatural observing, instead, that the spirits share the same physical world as humans. Concepts like “heaven,” “hell,” or even “prayer” do not exist in many societies. The divide between “religion” and related ideas like “spirituality” or even “magic” is also murky in some cultural contexts.

To study supernatural beliefs, anthropologists must cultivate a perspective of cultural relativism and strive to understand beliefs from an emic or insider's perspective. Imposing the definitions or assumptions from one culture on another is likely to lead to misunderstandings. One example of this problem can be found in the early anthropological research of Sir James Frazer who attempted to compose the first comprehensive study of the world's major magical and religious belief systems. Frazer was part of early generation of anthropologists whose work was based on reading and questionnaires mailed to missionaries and colonial officials rather than travel and participant-observation. As a result, he had only minimal information about the beliefs he wrote about and he was quick to apply his own opinions. In *The Golden Bough* (1890) he dismissed many of the spiritual beliefs he documented: "I look upon [them] not merely as false but as preposterous and absurd."[3] His contemporary, Sir E.B. Tylor, was less dismissive of unfamiliar belief systems, but he defined religion minimally and, for some, in overly narrow terms as "the belief in supernatural beings." This definition excludes much of what people around the world actually believe.[4] As researchers gained more information about other cultures, their ideas about religion became more complex. The sociologist Emile Durkheim recognized that religion was not simply a belief in "supernatural beings," but a set of practices and social institutions that brought members of a community together. Religion, he said, was "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."[5]

Durkheim's analysis of religion emphasized the significance of spiritual beliefs for relationships between people. Subsequent anthropological research in communities around the world has confirmed that rituals associated with beliefs in the supernatural play a significant role in structuring community life, providing rules or guidelines for behavior, and bonding members of a community to one another. Interestingly, religious "beings," such as gods or spirits, also demonstrate social qualities. Most of the time, these beings are imagined in familiar terms as entities with personalities, desires, and "agency," an ability to make decisions and take action. Supernatural beings, in other words, are not so different from people.[6] In keeping with this idea, **religion** can be defined as "the means by which human society and culture is extended to include the nonhuman."[7] This definition is deliberately broad and can be used to encompass many different kinds of belief systems.

Definition: religion

The extension of human society and culture to include the supernatural.

Many religions involve ideas or rituals that could be described as "magical" and the relationship between religion and magic is complex. In his book *A General Theory of Magic* (1902), Marcel Mauss suggested that religion and magic were two opposite poles on a spectrum of spiritual beliefs. Magic was at one end of the spectrum; it was private, secret, and individual. Religion was at the opposite end of the spectrum; it was public and oriented toward bringing the community together.[8] Although Mauss' formulation presented religion and magic as part of the same general way of thinking, many contemporary anthropologists are convinced that making a distinction between religion and magic is artificial and usually not particularly useful. With this caution in mind, **magic** can be defined as practices intended to bring supernatural forces under one's personal control. **Sorcerers** are individuals who seek to use magic for their own purposes. It is important to remember that both magic and sorcery are labels that have historically been used by outsiders, including anthropologists, to describe spiritual beliefs with which they are unfamiliar. Words from the local language are almost always preferable for representing how people think about themselves.

Definition: magic

Practices intended to bring supernatural forces under one's personal control.

Definition: sorcerer

An individual who seeks to use magic for his or her own purposes.

NOTES

1. See Jean Clottes, *Cave Art* (London: Phaidon, 2010)
2. O. Soffer, J. M. Adovasio, and D. C. Hyland "The 'Venus' Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic" *Current Anthropology* 41 n. 4 (2000):511-537.
3. James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1958[1890]),vii.
4. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871).

5. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, tr. Joseph R. Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965[1915]), 62.
6. Jack David Eller, Introducing Anthropology of Religion (New York: Routledge, 2007), 9.
7. Ibid.
8. Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (London, Routledge, 1972[1902]), 24.

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10.2: Theories of Religion

Sir James Frazer's effort to interpret religious mythology was the first of many attempts to understand the reasons why cultures develop various kinds of spiritual beliefs. In the early twentieth century, many anthropologists applied a functional approach to this problem by focusing on the ways religion addressed human needs. Bronislaw Malinowski (1931), who conducted research in the Trobriand Islands located near Papua New Guinea, believed that religious beliefs met psychological needs. He observed that religion "is not born out of speculation or reflection, still less out of illusion or apprehension, but rather, out of the real tragedies of human life, out of the conflict between human plans and realities."[9]

At the time of Malinowski's research, the Trobriand Islanders participated in an event called the kula ring, a tradition that required men to build canoes and sail on long and dangerous journeys between neighboring islands to exchange ritual items. Malinowski noticed that before these dangerous trips several complex rituals had to be performed, but ordinary sailing for fishing trips required no special preparations. What was the difference? Malinowski concluded that the longer trips were not only more dangerous, but also provoked more anxiety because the men felt they had less control over what might happen. On long voyages, there were many things that could go wrong, few of which could be planned for or avoided. He argued that religious rituals provided a way to reduce or control anxiety when anticipating these conditions.[10] The use of rituals to reduce anxiety has been documented in many other settings. George Gmelch (1971) documented forms of "baseball magic" among professional athletes. Baseball players, for instance, have rituals related to how they eat, dress, and even drive to the ballpark, rituals they believe contribute to good luck.[11]

As a functionalist, Malinowski believed that religion provided shared values and behavioral norms that created solidarity between people. The sociologist Emile Durkheim also believed that religion played an important role in building connections between people by creating shared definitions of the sacred and profane. **Sacred** objects or ideas are set apart from the ordinary and treated with great respect or care while **profane** objects or ideas are ordinary and can be treated with disregard or contempt. Sacred things could include a God or gods, a natural phenomenon, an animal or many other things. Religion, Durkheim concluded, was "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices that unite, into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."[12] Once a person or a thing was designated as sacred, Durkheim believed that celebrating it through ritual was a powerful way to unite communities around shared values.[13] In addition, celebrating the sacred can create an intense emotional experience Durkheim referred to as **collective effervescence**, a passion or energy that arises when groups of people share the same thoughts and emotions. The experience of collective effervescence magnifies the emotional impact of an event and can create a sense of awe or wonder.[14]

Definition: sacred

Objects or ideas are set apart from the ordinary and treated with great respect or care.

Definition: profane

Objects or ideas are ordinary and can be treated with disregard or contempt.

Definition: collective effervescence

The passion or energy that arises when groups of people share the same thoughts and emotions.

Following Durkheim, many anthropologists, including Dame Mary Douglas, have found it useful to explore the ways in which definitions of sacred and profane structure religious beliefs. In her book *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas analyzed the way in which cultural ideas about things that were "dirty" or "impure" influenced religious beliefs. The kosher dietary rules observed by Jews were one prominent example of the application of this kind of thinking.[15]

The philosopher and historian Karl Marx famously called religion "the opium of the people."[16] He viewed religion as an ideology, a way of thinking that attempts to justify inequalities in power and status. In his view, religion created an illusion of happiness that helped people cope with the economic difficulties of life under capitalism. As an institution, Marx believed that the Christian church helped to legitimize and support the political and economic inequality of the working class by encouraging ordinary people to orient themselves toward the afterlife, where they could expect to receive comfort and happiness. He argued that the obedience and conformity advocated by religious leaders as a means of reaching heaven also persuaded people not to fight for better economic or social conditions in their current lives. Numerous examples of the use of religion to legitimize or justify power differences have been documented cross-culturally including the existence of divine rulers, who were believed to be empowered by

the Gods themselves, in ancient Egyptian and Incan societies. A glimpse of the legitimizing role of religion is also seen in the U.S. practice of having elected officials take an oath of office using the Bible or another holy book.

The psychologist Sigmund Freud believed that religion is the institution that prevents us from acting upon our deepest and most awful desires. One of his most famous examples is the Oedipal complex, the story of Oedipus who (unknowingly) had a sexual relationship with his mother and, once he discovered this, ripped out his own eyes in a violent and gory death. One possible interpretation of this story is that there is an unconscious sexual desire among males for their mothers and among females their fathers. These desires can never be acknowledged, let alone acted on, because of the damage they would cause to society.[17] In one of his most well-known works, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud proposes that religious beliefs provide rules or restrictions that keep the worst anti-social instincts, like the Oedipal complex, suppressed. He developed the idea of "totemic religions," belief systems based on the worship of a particular animal or object, and suggested that the purpose of these religions was to regulate interactions with socially significant and potentially disruptive objects and relationships.[18]

One interesting interpretation of religious beliefs that builds on the work of Durkheim, Marx, and Freud is Marvin Harris' analysis of the Hindu prohibition against killing cows. In Hinduism, the cow is honored and treated with respect because of its fertility, gentle nature, and association with some Hindu deities. In his book *Cow, Pigs, Wars, and Witches* (1974), Harris suggested that these religious ideas about the cow were actually based in an economic reality. In India, cows are more valuable alive as a source of milk or for doing work in the fields than they are dead as meat. For this reason, he argued, cows were defined as sacred and set apart from other kinds of animals that could be killed and eaten. The subsequent development of religious explanations for cows' specialness reinforced and legitimated the special treatment.[19]

A symbolic approach to the study of religion developed in the mid-twentieth century and presented new ways of analyzing supernatural beliefs. Clifford Geertz, one of the anthropologists responsible for creating the symbolic approach, defined religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations…. by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[20] Geertz suggested that religious practices were a way to enact or make visible important cultural ideas. The symbols used in any religion, such as a cross or even a cow, can be interpreted or "read" by anthropologists to discern important cultural values. At the same time, religious symbols reinforce values or aspirations in members of the religious community. The Christian cross, which is associated with both death and resurrection, demonstrates ideas about sacrifice and putting the needs of others in the community first. The cross also symbolizes deeper ideas about the nature of life itself: that suffering can have positive outcomes and that there is something beyond the current reality.

A symbolic approach to religion treats religious beliefs as a kind of "text" or "performance" that can be interpreted by outsiders. Like the other theories described in this section, symbolic approaches present some risk of misinterpretation. Religious beliefs involve complex combinations of personal and social values as well as embodied or visceral feelings that cannot always be appreciated or even recognized by outsiders. The persistently large gap between emic (insider) and etic (outsider) explanations for religious beliefs and practices makes the study of religion one of the most challenging topics in cultural anthropology.

NOTES

9. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Culture* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1931). ↵
10. Bronislaw Malinowski, "Rational Mastery by Man of his Surroundings," in *Magic, Science, & Religion* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955). ↵
11. George Gmelch, "Baseball Magic" *Transaction* 8(1971): 39-41. ↵
12. Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1912). ↵
13. Ibid. ↵
14. Kenneth D. Allan, *Explorations in Classic Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2005). ↵
15. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966). ↵
16. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970[1844]). ↵
17. Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Puffin Press, 1995). ↵
18. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950). ↵
19. Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1974). ↵
20. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz, 87-125 (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 90-91. ↵

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10.3: Elements of Religion - Cosmologies and the Supernatural

ELEMENTS OF RELIGION

Despite the wide variety of supernatural beliefs found in cultures around the world, most belief systems do share some common elements. The first of these characteristic is *cosmology*, an explanation for the origin or history of the world. Religious cosmologies provide "big picture" explanations for how human life was created and provide a perspective on the forces or powers at work in the world. A second characteristic of religion is a belief in the *supernatural*, a realm beyond direct human experience. This belief could include a God or gods, but this is not a requirement. Quite a few religious beliefs, as discussed below, involve more abstract ideas about supernatural forces. Most religions also share a third characteristic: *rules governing behavior*. These rules define proper conduct for individuals and for society as a whole and are oriented toward bringing individual actions into harmony with spiritual beliefs. A fourth element is *rituals*. **Rituals** are behaviors or practices that are formal, stylized, and repetitive performed as a social act (Kottak 2012). Often rituals serve a religious purpose and are usually supervised by religious specialists. Rituals may be oriented toward the supernatural, such as rituals designed to please the gods, but at the same time they address the needs of individuals or the community as a whole. Funeral rituals, for instance, may be designed to ensure the passage of a deceased person to the afterlife, but also simultaneously provide emotional comfort to those who are grieving and provide an outlet for the community to express care and support.

Definition: ritual

Behaviors or practices that are formal, stylized, and repetitive performed as a social act.

Religious Cosmologies

Religious cosmologies are ways of explaining the origin of the universe and the principles or "order" that governs reality. In its simplest form, a **cosmology** can be an origin story, an explanation for the history, present state, and possible futures of the world and the origins of the people, spirits, divinities, and forces that populate it. The ancient Greeks had an origin story that began with an act of creation from Chaos, the first thing to exist. The deities Erebus, representing darkness, and Nyx, representing night, were born from Chaos. Nyx gave birth to Aether (light) and Hemera (day). Hemera and Nyx took turns exiting the underworld, creating the phenomenon of day and night. Aether and Hemera next created Gaia (Earth), the mother of all life, who gave birth to the sky, the mountains, the sea, and eventually to a pantheon of gods. One of these gods, Prometheus, shaped humans out of mud and gave them the gift of fire. This origin story reflects many significant cultural ideas. One of these is the depiction of a world organized into a hierarchy with gods at the top and humans obligated to honor them.

Definition: cosmology

An explanation for the origin or history of the world.

Traditional Navajo origin stories provide a different view of the organization of the universe. These stories suggested that the world is a set of fourteen stacked "plates" or "platters." Creation began at the lowest levels and gradually spread to the top. The lower levels contained animals like insects as well as animal-people and bird-people who lived in their own fully-formed worlds with distinct cultures and societies. At the top level, First Man and First Woman eventually emerged and began making preparations for other humans, creating a sweat lodge, hoghan (traditional house), and preparing sacred medicine bundles. During a special ceremony, the first human men and women were formed and they created those who followed.[21] Like the Greek origin story, the Navajo cosmology explains human identity and emphasizes the debt humans owe to their supernatural ancestors.

The first two chapters of the Biblical Book of Genesis, which is the foundation for both Judaism and Christianity, describe the creation of the world and all living creatures. The exact words vary in different translations, but describe a God responsible for creating the world and everything in it: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The six-day process began with the division of light from darkness, land from water, and heaven from earth. On the fifth day, "God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good."[22] On the sixth day, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."[23] This cosmology differs from the others in describing an act of creation by a single deity, God, but shares with the Greek and Navajo versions a description of creation that emphasizes the relationship between people and their creator.

Reading these cosmologies also raises the question of how they should be interpreted. Are these origin stories regarded as literal truth in the cultures in which they originated? Or, are the stories metaphorical and symbolic? There is no simple answer to this question. Within any culture, individuals may disagree about the nature of their own religious traditions. Christians, for instance, differ in the extent to which they view the contents of the Bible as fact. Cultural relativism requires that anthropologists avoid making judgments about whether any cultural idea, including religious beliefs, is "correct" or "true." Instead, a more useful approach is to try to understand the multiple ways people interpret or make sense of their religious beliefs. In addition it is important to consider the function a religious cosmology has in the wider society. As Bronislaw Malinowski observed, a myth or origin story is not an "idle tale, but a hard-worked active force."[24]

Belief in the Supernatural

Another characteristic shared by most religions is a concept of the **supernatural**, spirits, divinities, or forces not governed by natural laws. The supernatural can take many forms. Some supernatural entities are **anthropomorphic**, having human characteristics. Other supernatural forces are more generalized, seen in phenomena like the power of the wind. The amount of involvement that supernatural forces or entities have in the lives of humans varies cross-culturally.

Definition: supernatural

Describes entities or forces not governed by natural laws.

Definition: anthropomorphic

An object or being that has human characteristics.

Abstract Forces

Many cultures are organized around belief in an impersonal supernatural force, a type of religion known as **animatism**. The idea of *mana* is one example. The word itself comes from Oceania and may originally have meant "powerful wind," "lightning" or "storm." Today, it still refers to power, but in a more general sense. Aram Oroi, a pastor from the Solomon Islands, has compared mana to turning on a flashlight: "You sense something powerful but unseen, and then—*click*—its power is made manifest in the world."[25] Traditionally, the ability to accumulate mana in certain locations, or in one's own body, was to become potent or successful.[26] Certain locations such as mountains or ancient sites (*marae*) have particularly strong mana. Likewise, individual behaviors, including sexual or violent acts, were traditionally viewed as ways to accumulate mana for oneself.

Definition: animatism

A religious system organized around a belief in an impersonal supernatural force.

Interestingly, the idea of *mana* has spread far beyond its original cultural context. In 1993, Richard Garfield incorporated the idea in the card game Magic: The Gathering. Players of the game, which has sold millions of copies since its introduction, use mana as a source of power to battle wizards and magical creatures. Mana is also a source of power in the immensely popular computer game World of Warcraft.[27] These examples do show **cultural appropriation**, the act of copying an idea from another culture and in the process distorting its meaning. However, they also demonstrate how compelling animist ideas about abstract supernatural power are across cultures. Another well-known example of animatism in popular culture is "the Force" depicted in the George Lucas *Star Wars* films. The Force is depicted as flowing through everything and is used by Luke Skywalker as a source of potency and insight when he destroys the Death Star.

Definition: cultural appropriation

The act of copying an idea from another culture and in the process distorting its meaning.

Spirits

The line between the natural and the supernatural can be blurry. Many people believe that humans have a supernatural or spiritual element that coexists within their natural bodies. In Christianity, this element is called the soul. In Hinduism, it is the *atman*.[28] The Tausūg, a group who live in the Philippines, believe that the soul has four parts: a transcendent soul that stays in the spiritual realm even when a person is alive; a life-soul that is attached to the body, but can move through dreams; the breath, which is always attached to the body, and the spirit-soul, which is like a person's shadow.[29]

Many people believe that the spirit survives after an individual dies, sometimes remaining on Earth and sometimes departing for a supernatural realm. Spirits, or “ghosts,” who remain on Earth may continue to play an active role in the lives of their families and communities. Some will be well-intentioned and others will be malevolent. Almost universally, spirits of the deceased are assumed to be needy and to make demands on the living. For this reason, many cultures have traditions for the veneration of the dead, rituals intended to honor the deceased, or to win their favor or cooperation. When treated properly, ancestor spirits can be messengers to gods, and can act on behalf of the living after receiving prayers or requests. If they are displeased, ancestor spirits can become aggravated and wreak havoc on the living through illness and suffering. To avoid these problems, offerings in the form of favorite foods, drinks, and gifts are made to appease the spirits. In China, as well as in many other countries, **filial piety** requires that the living continue to care for the ancestors. [30] In Madagascar, where bad luck and misfortune can be attributed to spirits of the dead who believe they have been neglected, a body may be repeatedly exhumed and shown respect by cleaning the bones.[31]



Figure 10.3.1: A spirit house in Thailand provides shelter for local spirits.

Definition: filial piety

A tradition requiring that the young provide care for the elderly and in some cases ancestral spirits.

If humans contain a supernatural spirit, essence, or soul, it is logical to think that non-human entities may have their own sparks of the divine. Religions based on the idea that plants, animals, inanimate objects, and even natural phenomena like weather have a spiritual or supernatural element are called **animism**. The first anthropological description of animism came from Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, who believed it was the earliest type of religious practice to develop in human societies. [32] Tylor suggested that ordinary parts of the human experience, such as dreaming, formed the basis for spiritual beliefs. When people dream, they may perceive that they have traveled to another place, or may be able to communicate with deceased members of their families. This sense of altered consciousness gives rise to ideas that the world is more than it seems. Tylor suggested that these experiences, combined with a pressing need to answer questions about the meaning of life, were the basis for all religious systems.[33] He also assumed that animist religions evolved into what he viewed as more sophisticated religious systems involving a God or gods.

Definition: animism

A religious system organized around a belief that plants, animals, inanimate objects, or natural phenomena have a spiritual or supernatural element.

Today, Tylor’s views about the evolution of religion are considered misguided. No belief system is inherently more sophisticated than another. Several animist religions exist today and have millions of adherents. One of the most well-known is Shintoism, the traditional religion of Japan. Shintoism recognizes spirits known as *kami* that exist in plants, animals, rocks, places and sometimes people. Certain locations have particularly strong connections to the kami, including mountains, forests, waterfalls, and shrines. Shinto shrines in Japan are marked by *torii* gates that mark the separation between ordinary reality and sacred space (Figure10.3.2).



Figure 10.3.2: The first torii at the entrance to Nikkō Tōshō-gū, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

Gods

The most powerful non-human spirits are gods, though in practice there is no universal definition of a “god” that would be recognized by all people. In general, gods are extremely powerful and not part of nature—not human, or animal. Despite their

unnaturalness, many gods have personalities or qualities that are recognizable and relatable to humans. They are often anthropomorphic, imagined in human form, or **zoomorphic**, imagined in animal form. In some religions, gods interact directly with humans while in others they are more remote.

Definition: zoomorphic

An object or being that has animal characteristics.

Anthropologists categorize belief systems organized around a God or gods using the terms monotheism and polytheism. **Monotheistic** religions recognize a single supreme God. The largest monotheistic religions in the world today are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Together these religions have more than 3.8 billion adherents worldwide.[34]**Polytheistic** religions include several gods. Hinduism, one of the world's largest polytheistic religions with more than 1 billion practitioners, has a pantheon of deities each with different capabilities and concerns.[35]

Definition: monotheistic

A religious systems that recognize a single supreme God.

Definition: polytheistic

A religious systems that recognize several gods.

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10.4: Elements of Religion - Rules and Rituals

RULES OF BEHAVIOR

Religious beliefs are an important element of social control because these beliefs help to define acceptable behaviors as well as punishments, including supernatural consequences, for misbehavior. One well-known example are the ideas expressed in the Ten Commandments, which are incorporated in the teachings of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism and prohibit behaviors such as theft, murder, adultery, dishonesty, and jealousy while also emphasizing the need for honor and respect between people. Behavior that violates the commandments brings both social disapproval from other members of the religious community and potential punishment from God.

Buddhism, the world's fourth largest religion, demonstrates the strong connection between spiritual beliefs and rules for everyday behavior. Buddhists follow the teachings of Buddha, who was an ordinary human who achieved wisdom through study and discipline. There is no God or gods in some forms of Buddhism. Instead, individuals who practice Buddhism use techniques like meditation to achieve the insight necessary to lead a meaningful life and ultimately, after many lifetimes, to achieve the goal of *nirvana*, release from suffering.

Although Buddhism defies easy categorization into any anthropological category, there is an element of animatism represented by *karma*, a moral force in the universe. Individual actions have effects on one's karma. Kindness toward others, for instance, yields positive karma while acts that are disapproved in Buddhist teachings, such as killing an animal, create negative karma. The amount of positive karma a person builds-up in a lifetime is important because it will determine how the individual will be reborn. *Reincarnation*, the idea that a living being can begin another life in a new body after death, is a feature of several religions. In Buddhism, the form of a human's reincarnation depends on the quality of the karma developed during life. Rebirth in a human form is considered good fortune because humans have the ability to control their own thoughts and behaviors. They can follow the Noble Eightfold Path, rules based on the teachings of Buddha that emphasize the need for discipline, restraint, humility, and kindness in every aspect of life. [36]

RITUALS

The most easily observed elements of any religious belief system are rituals. Victor Turner (1972) defined ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities … performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests."[37] Rituals have a concrete purpose or goal, such as a wedding ritual that results in a religiously sanctioned union between people, but rituals are also symbolic. The objects and activities involved in rituals "stand in for" or mean more than what they actually are. In a wedding ceremony in the United States, the white color of the wedding dress is a traditional symbol of purity.

A large amount of anthropological research has focused on identifying and interpreting religious rituals in a wide variety of communities. Although the details of these practices differ in various cultural settings, it is possible to categorize them into types based on their goals. One type of ritual is a *rite of passage*, a ceremony designed to transition individuals between life stages.[38] A second type of ritual is a *rite of intensification*, actions designed to bring a community together, often following a period of crisis. [39] *Revitalization rituals*, which also often follow periods of crisis in a community, are ambitious attempts to resolve serious problems, such as war, famine, or poverty through a spiritual or supernatural intervention.[40]

Rites of Passage

In his original description of **rites of passage**, Arnold Van Gennep (1909) noted that these rituals were carried out in three distinct stages: **separation**, **liminality**, and **incorporation**. During the first stage, individuals are removed from their current social identity and begin preparations to enter the next stage of life. The liminal period that follows is a time in which individuals often undergo tests, trials, or activities designed to prepare them for their new social roles. In the final stage of incorporation, individuals return to the community with a new socially recognized status. [41]

Definition: rite of passage

A ceremony designed to transition individuals between life stages.

Rites of passage that transition children into a new status as adults are common around the world. In Xhosa communities in South Africa, teenage boys were traditionally transitioned to manhood using a series of acts that moved them through each of the three

ritual stages. In the separation stage, the boys leave their homes and are circumcised; they cannot express distress or signs of pain during the procedure. Following the circumcision, they live in isolation while their wounds heal, a liminal phase during which they do not talk to anyone other than boys who are also undergoing the rite of passage. This stressful time helps to build bonds between the boys that will follow them through their lives as adult men. Before their journey home, the isolated living quarters are burned to the ground, symbolizing the loss of childhood. When the participants return to their community, the incorporation phase, they are recognized as men and allowed to learn the secret stories of the community.[42]

Definition: separation

The first stage of a rite of passage in which the individual withdraws, or is removed from, ordinary society.

Definition: liminality

The second stage of a rite of passage in which the individual is in a marginal or in-between phase, which often includes a time of testing and trials.

Definition: incorporation

The third stage of a rite of passage in which the individual returns to society in their new status and role.

Examples

Life Event	Example
Birth	Naming ceremony, Baptism, Dedication ceremony
Transition to Adulthood	Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Quinceñera, Communion, Graduation
Marriage	Wedding Ceremonies
Death	Funeral Rites, Memorial Services

Rites of Intensification

Rites of intensification are also extremely common in communities worldwide. These rituals are used to bind members of the community together, to create a sense of **communitas** or unity that encourages people to see themselves as members of a community. One particularly dramatic example of this ritual is the Nagol land diving ceremony held each spring on the island of Pentecost in Vanuatu in the South Pacific. Like many rituals, land diving has several goals. One of these is to help ensure a good harvest by impressing the spirits with a dramatic display of bravery. To accomplish this, men from the community construct wooden towers sixty to eighty feet high, tie ropes made from tree vines around their ankles, and jump head-first toward the ground (Figure 5). Preparations for the land diving involve almost every member of the community. Men spend a month or more working together to build the tower and collect the vines. The women of the community prepare special costumes and dances for the occasion and everyone takes care of land divers who may be injured during the dive. Both the preparations for the land diving and the festivities that follow are a powerful rite of intensification. Interestingly, the ritual is simultaneously a rite of passage; boys can be recognized as men by jumping from high portions of the tower witnessed by elders of the community.[43]



Figure 10.4.1: Land Diving on Pentecost Island, Vanuatu.

Definition: rites of intensification

Actions designed to bring a community together, often following a period of crisis.

Definition: communitas

An intense spirit of unity, solidarity, and togetherness that encourages people to see themselves as members of a community.

Rites of Revitalization

All **rites of revitalization** originate in difficult or even catastrophic circumstances. One notable example is a ritual that developed on the island of Tanna in the South Pacific. During World War II, many islands in the South Pacific were used by the U.S. military as temporary bases. Tanna was one of these locations and this formerly isolated community experienced an extremely rapid transformation as the U.S. military introduced modern conveniences such as electricity and automobiles. In an attempt to make sense of these developments, the island's residents developed a variety of theories about the reason for these changes. One possible explanation was that the foreign materials had been given to the islanders by a powerful deity or ancestral spirit, an entity who eventually acquired the name John Frum. The name may be based on a common name the islanders would have encountered while the military base was in operation: "John from America."

When the war ended and the U.S. military departed, the residents of Tanna experienced a kind of trauma as the material goods they had enjoyed disappeared and the John Frum ritual began. Each year on February fifteenth, many of the island's residents construct copies of U.S. airplanes, runways, or towers and march in military formation with replicas of military rifles and American blue jeans. The ritual is intended to attract John Frum, and the material wealth he controls, back to the island. Although the ritual has not yet had its intended transformative effect, the participants continue the ritual. When asked to explain his continued faith, one village elder explained: "You Christians have been waiting 2,000 years for Jesus to return to Earth, and you haven't given up hope."[44] This John Frum custom is sometimes called a **cargo cult**, a term used to describe rituals that seek to attract material prosperity. Although the John Frum ritual is focused on commodities, or "cargo," the term cargo cult is generally not preferred by anthropologists because it oversimplifies the complex motivations involved in the ritual. The word "cult" also has connotations with fringe or dangerous beliefs and this association also distorts understanding of the practice.

Definition: rites of revitalization

Attempts to resolve serious problems, such as war, famine or poverty through spiritual or supernatural intervention.

Definition: cargo cult

A term sometimes used to describe rituals that seek to attract material prosperity. The term is generally not preferred by anthropologists.

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10.5: Religious Specialists

Since rituals can be extremely complicated and the outcome is of vital importance to the community, specialist practitioners are often charged with responsibility for supervising the details. In many settings, religious specialists have a high social status and are treated with great respect. Some may become relatively wealthy by charging for their services while others may be impoverished, sometimes deliberately as a rejection of the material world. There is no universal terminology for religious practitioners, but there are three important categories: priests, prophets, and shamans.

Priests, who may be of any gender, are full-time religious practitioners. The position of priest emerges only in societies with substantial occupational specialization. Priests are the intermediaries between God (or the gods) and humans. Religious traditions vary in terms of the qualifications required for individuals entering the priesthood. In Christian traditions, it is common for priests to complete a program of formal higher education. Hindu priests, known as *pujari*, must learn the sacred language Sanskrit and spend many years becoming proficient in Hindu ceremonies. They must also follow strict lifestyle restrictions such as a vegetarian diet. Traditionally, only men from the Brahmin caste were eligible to become pujari, but this is changing. Today, people from other castes, as well as women, are joining the priesthood. One notable feature of societies that utilize full-time spiritual practitioners is a separation between ordinary believers and the God or gods. As intermediaries, priests have substantial authority to set the rules associated with worship practice and to control access to religious rites.[45]

Definition: priests

Full-time religious practitioners

The term **shaman** has been used for hundreds of years to refer to a part-time religious practitioner. Shamans carry out religious rituals when needed, but also participate in the normal work of the community. A shaman's religious practice depends on an ability to engage in direct communication with the spirits, gods, or supernatural realm. An important quality of a shaman is the ability to transcend normal reality in order to communicate with and perhaps even manipulate supernatural forces in an alternate world. This ability can be inherited or learned.[46] Transcending from the ordinary to the spiritual realm gives shamans the ability to do many things such as locate lost people or animals or heal the sick by identifying the spiritual cause of illness.

Definition: shaman

A part-time religious practitioner who carries out religious rituals when needed, but also participates in the normal work of the community.

Among the Chukchi, who live in northern Russia, the role of the shaman is thought to be a special calling, one that may be especially appropriate for people whose personality traits seem abnormal in the context of the community. Young people who suffer from nervousness, anxiety, or moodiness, for example may feel a call to take up shamanistic practice.[47] There has been some research suggesting that shamanism may be a culturally accepted way to deal with conditions like schizophrenia.[48] If true, this might be because achieving an altered state of consciousness is essential for shamanic work. Entering an altered state, which can be achieved through dreams, hallucinogenic drugs, rhythmic music, exhaustion through dance, or other means, makes it possible for shamans to directly engage with the supernatural realm.

Shamans of the upper Amazon in South America have been using *ayahuasca*, a drink made from plants that have hallucinogenic effects, for centuries. The effects of ayahuasca start with the nervous system:

One under the control of the narcotic sees unroll before him quite a spectacle: most lovely landscapes, monstrous animals, vipers which approach and wind down his body or are entwined like rolls of thick cable, at a few centimeters distance; as well, one sees who are true friends and those who betray him or who have done him ill; he observes the cause of the illness which he sustains, at the same time being presented with the most advantageous remedy; he takes part in fantastic hunts; the things which he most dearly loves or abhors acquire in these moments extraordinary vividness and color, and the scenes in which his life normally develop adopt the most beautiful and emotional expression.[49]

Among the Shipibo people of Peru, ayahuasca is thought to be the substance that allows the soul of a shaman to leave his body in order to retrieve a soul that has been lost or stolen. In many cultures, soul loss is the predominant explanation for illness. The Shipibo believe that the soul is a separate entity from the body, one that is capable of leaving and returning at will. Shamans can

also steal souls. The community shaman, under the influence of ayahuasca, is able to find and retrieve a soul, perhaps even killing the enemy as revenge.[50]

Anthropologist Scott Hutson (2000) has described similarities between the altered state of consciousness achieved by shamans and the mental states induced during a rave, a large dance party characterized by loud music with repetitive patterns. In a rave, bright lights, exhausting dance, and sometimes the use of hallucinogenic drugs, induce similar psychological effects to shamanic trancing. Hutson argues that through the rave individuals are able to enter altered states of consciousness characterized by a "self-forgetfulness" and an ability to transcend the ordinary self. The DJ at these events is often called a "techno-shaman," an interesting allusion to the guiding role traditional shamans play in their cultures.[51]

A **prophet** is a person who claims to have direct communication with the supernatural realm and who can communicate divine messages to others. Many religious communities originated with prophecies, including Islam which is based on teachings revealed to the prophet Muhammad by God. In Christianity and Judaism, Moses is an example of a prophet who received direct revelations from God. Another example of a historically significant prophet is Joseph Smith who founded the Church of Latter Day Saints, after receiving a prophecy from an angel named Moroni who guided him to the location of a buried set of golden plates. The information from the golden plates became the basis for the Book of Mormon.

Definition: prophet

A person who claims to have direct communication with the supernatural realm and who can communicate divine messages to others.

The major distinction between a priest and the prophet is the source of their authority. A priest gets his or her authority from the scripture and occupational position in a formally organized religious institution. A prophet derives authority from his or her direct connection to the divine and ability to convince others of his or her legitimacy through charisma**.** The kind of insight and guidance prophets offer can be extremely compelling, particularly in times of social upheaval or suffering.

One prophet who had enormous influence was David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians, a schism of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Branch Davidians were *millenarians*, people who believe that major transformations of the world are imminent. David Koresh was extremely charismatic; he was handsome and an eloquent speaker. He offered refuge and solace to people in need and in the process he preached about the coming of an apocalypse, which he believed would be caused by the intrusion of the United States government on the Branch Davidian's lifestyle. Koresh was so influential that when the United States government did eventually try to enter the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas in 1993 to search for illegal weapons, members of the group resisted and exchanged gunfire with federal agents. Eventually, under circumstances that are still disputed, a fire erupted in the compound and eighty-six people, including Koresh, were killed.[52] Ultimately, the U.S. government helped to fulfill the apocalyptic vision of the group and David Koresh became a martyr. The Branch Davidians evolved into a new group, "Branch, Lord our Righteousness," and today many await Koresh's return.[53]

CONCLUSION

Religion is of central importance to the lives of people in the majority of the world's cultures; more than eight-in-ten people worldwide identify with a religious group.[54] However, it is also true that the number of people who say that they have no religious affiliation is growing. There are now about as many people in the world who consider themselves religiously "unaffiliated" as there are Roman Catholics.[55] This is an important reminder that religions, like culture itself, are highly dynamic and subject to constant changes in interpretation and allegiance. Anthropology offers a unique perspective for the study of religious beliefs, the way people think about the supernatural, and how the values and behaviors these beliefs inspire contribute to the lives of individuals and communities. No single set of theories or vocabulary can completely capture the richness of the religious diversity that exists in the world today, but cultural anthropology provides a toolkit for understanding the emotional, social, and spiritual contributions that religion makes to the human experience.

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10.6: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. This chapter describes theories about religion developed by Durkheim, Marx, and Freud. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each theory? Which theory would be the most useful if you were attempting to learn about the religious beliefs of another culture?
2. Rites of passage and rites of intensification are an important part of many religious traditions, but these same rituals also exist in secular (non-religious) contexts. What are some examples of these rituals in your own community? What role do these rituals play in bringing people together?
3. Durkheim argued that a distinction between the sacred and the profane was a key characteristic of religion. Thinking about your own culture, what are some examples of ideas or objects that are considered "sacred"? What are the rules concerning how these objects or ideas should be treated? What are the penalties for people who do not follow these rules?

GLOSSARY

Animatism: a religious system organized around a belief in an impersonal supernatural force.

Animism: a religious system organized around a belief that plants, animals, inanimate objects, or natural phenomena have a spiritual or supernatural element.

Anthropomorphic: an object or being that has human characteristics.

Cargo cult: a term sometimes used to describe rituals that seek to attract material prosperity. The term is generally not preferred by anthropologists.

Collective effervescence: the passion or energy that arises when groups of people share the same thoughts and emotions.

Communitas: An intense spirit of unity, solidarity, and togetherness that encourages people to see themselves as members of a community.

Cosmology: an explanation for the origin or history of the world.

Cultural appropriation: the act of copying an idea from another culture and in the process distorting its meaning.

Filial piety: a tradition requiring that the young provide care for the elderly and in some cases ancestral spirits.

Incorporation: the third stage of a rite of passage in which the individual returns to society in their new status and role.

Liminality: the second stage of a rite of passage in which the individual is in a marginal or in-between phase, which often includes a time of testing and trials.

Magic: practices intended to bring supernatural forces under one's personal control.

Monotheistic: religious systems that recognize a single supreme God.

Polytheistic: religious systems that recognize several gods.

Priests: full-time religious practitioners.

Profane: objects or ideas are ordinary and can be treated with disregard or contempt.

Prophet: a person who claims to have direct communication with the supernatural realm and who can communicate divine messages to others.

Religion: the extension of human society and culture to include the supernatural.

Rite of intensification: actions designed to bring a community together, often following a period of crisis.

Rite of passage: a ceremony designed to transition individuals between life stages.

Rites of revitalization: attempts to resolve serious problems, such as war, famine or poverty through spiritual or supernatural intervention.

Ritual: a behaviors or practices that are formal, stylized, and repetitive performed as a social act.

Sacred: objects or ideas are set apart from the ordinary and treated with great respect or care.

Separation: The first stage of a rite of passage in which the individual withdraws, or is removed from, ordinary society.

Shaman: a part time religious practitioner who carries out religious rituals when needed, but also participates in the normal work of the community.

Sorcerer: an individual who seeks to use magic for his or her own purposes.

Supernatural: describes entities or forces not governed by natural laws.

Zoomorphic: an object or being that has animal characteristics.

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10.7: About the Author

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Sashur Henninger-Rener is an anthropologist with research in the fields of comparative religion and psychological anthropology. She received a Master of Arts from Columbia University in the City of New York in Anthropology and has since been researching and teaching. Currently, Sashur is teaching with The University of LaVerne and the Los Angeles Community College District in the fields of Cultural and Biological Anthropology. In her free time, Sashur enjoys traveling the world, visiting archaeological and cultural sites along the way. She and her husband are actively involved in animal rescuing, hoping to eventually found their own animal rescue for animals that are waiting to find homes.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: Race and Ethnicity

Learning Objectives

- Define the term reification and explain how the concept of race has been reified throughout history.
- Explain why a biological basis for human race categories does not exist.
- Discuss what anthropologists mean when they say that race is a socially constructed concept.
- Identify what is meant by racial formation, hypodescent, and the one-drop rule.
- Describe how ethnicity is different from race, how ethnic groups are different from racial groups, and what is meant by symbolic ethnicity.
- Analyze ways in which the racial and ethnic compositions of professional sports have shifted over time and how those shifts resulted from changing social and cultural circumstances that drew new groups into sports.

11.1: Is Anthropology the "Science of Race"?
11.2: Race, A Discredited Concept
11.3: Race As A Social Concept
11.4: Race In Three Nations
11.5: Ethnicity
11.6: A Melting Pot or A Salad Bowl?
11.7: Sports, Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity
11.8: End of Chapter Discussion
11.9: About the Author

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11.1: Is Anthropology the "Science of Race"?

Suppose someone asked you the following open-ended questions: How would you define the word **race** as it applies to groups of human beings? How many human races are there and what are they? For each of the races you identify, what are the important or key criteria that distinguish each group (what characteristics or features are unique to each group that differentiate it from the others)? Discussions about race and racism are often highly emotional and encompass a wide range of emotions, including discomfort, fear, defensiveness, anger, and insecurity—why is this such an emotional topic in society and why do you think it is so difficult for individuals to discuss race dispassionately?

Definition: race

An attempt to categorize humans based on observed physical differences.

How would you respond to these questions? I pose these thought-provoking questions to students enrolled in my Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course just before we begin the unit on race and ethnicity in a worksheet and ask them to answer each question fully to the best of their ability without doing any outside research. At the next class, I assign the students to small groups of five to eight depending on the size of the class and give them a few minutes to share their responses to the questions with one another. We then collectively discuss their responses as a class. Their responses are often very interesting and quite revealing and generate memorable classroom dialogues.

“Dude, what are you?!”

Ordinarily, students select a college major or minor by carefully considering their personal interests, particular subjects that pique their curiosity, and fields they feel would be a good basis for future professional careers. Technically, my decision to major in anthropology and later earn a master’s degree and doctorate in anthropology was mine alone, but I tell my friends and students, only partly as a joke, that my choice of major was made for me to some degree by people I encountered as a child, teenager, and young adult. Since middle school, I had noticed that many people—complete strangers, classmates, coworkers, and friends—seemed to find my physical appearance confusing or abnormal, often leading them to ask me questions like “What are you?” and “What’s your race?” Others simply assumed my heritage as if it was self-evident and easily defined and then interacted with me according to their conclusions.



Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\): The Common Threads mural at Broad and Spring Garden Streets in Philadelphia, PA highlights the cultural diversity of the city.

These subjective determinations varied wildly from person to person and from situation to situation. I distinctly recall, for example, an incident in a souvenir shop at the beach in Ocean City, Maryland, shortly after I graduated from high school. A middle-aged merchant attempted to persuade me to purchase a T-shirt that boldly declared “100% Italian . . . and Proud of It!” with bubbled letters that spelled “Italian” shaded green, white, and red. Despite my repeated efforts to convince the merchant that I was not of

Italian ethnic heritage, he refused to believe me. On another occasion during my mid-twenties while I was studying for my doctoral degree at Temple University, I was walking down Diamond Street in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, passing through a predominantly African American neighborhood. As I passed a group of six male teenagers socializing on the steps of a row house, one of them shouted "Hey, honky! What are you doing in this neighborhood?" Somewhat startled at being labeled a "honky," (something I had never been called before), I looked at the group and erupted in laughter, which produced looks of surprise and disbelief in return. As I proceeded to walk a few more blocks and reached the predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood of Lower Kensington, three young women flirtatiously addressed me as *papí* (an affectionate Spanish slang term for man). My transformation from "honky" to "*papí*" in a span of ten minutes spoke volumes about my life history and social experiences—and sparked my interest in cultural and physical anthropology.

Throughout my life, my physical appearance has provided me with countless unique and memorable experiences that have emphasized the significance of race and ethnicity as **socially constructed** concepts in America and other societies. My fascination with this subject is therefore both personal and professional; a lifetime of questions and assumptions from others regarding my racial and ethnic background have cultivated my interest in these topics. I noticed that my perceived race or ethnicity, much like beauty, rested in the eye of the beholder as individuals in different regions of the country (and outside of the United States) often perceived me as having different specific heritages. For example, as a teenager living in York County, Pennsylvania, senior citizens and middle-aged individuals usually assumed I was "white", while younger residents often saw me as "Puerto Rican" or generically "Hispanic" or "Latino." When I lived in Philadelphia, locals mostly assumed I was "Italian American," but many Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans, in the City of Brotherly Love often took me for either "Puerto Rican" or "Cuban."

Definition: socially constructed

A concept developed by society that is maintained over time through social interactions that make the idea seem "real."

My experiences in the southwest were a different matter altogether. During my time in Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado, local residents—regardless of their respective heritages—commonly assumed I was of Mexican descent. At times, local Mexican Americans addressed me as *carnal* (pronounced CAR-nowl), a term often used to imply a strong sense of community among Mexican American men that is somewhat akin to frequent use of the label "brother" among African American men. On more occasions than I can count, people assumed that I spoke Spanish. Once, in Los Angeles, someone from the Spanish-language television network Univisión attempted to interview me about my thoughts on an immigration bill pending in the California legislature. My West Coast friends and professional colleagues were surprised to hear that I was usually assumed to be Puerto Rican, Italian, or simply "white" on the East Coast, and one of my closest friends from graduate school—a Mexican American woman from northern California—once memorably stated that she would not "even assume" that I was "half white."

I have a rather ambiguous physical appearance—a shaved head, brown eyes, and a black mustache and goatee. Depending on who one asks, I have either a "pasty white" or "somewhat olive" complexion, and my last name is often the single biggest factor that leads people on the East Coast to conclude that I am Puerto Rican. My experiences are examples of what sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) referred to as "racial commonsense"—a deeply entrenched social belief that another person's racial or ethnic background is obvious and easily determined from brief glances and can be used to predict a person's culture, behavior, and personality. Reality, of course, is far more complex. One's racial or ethnic background cannot necessarily be accurately determined based on physical appearance alone, and an individual's "race" does not necessarily determine his or her "culture," which in turn does not determine "personality." Yet, these perceptions remain.

"Science of Race"?

Anthropology was sometimes referred to as the "science of race" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when physical anthropologists sought a biological basis for categorizing humans into racial types.[1] Since World War II, important research by anthropologists has revealed that racial categories are socially and culturally defined concepts and that racial labels and their definitions vary widely around the world. In other words, different countries have different racial categories, and different ways of classifying their citizens into these categories.[2] At the same time, significant genetic studies conducted by physical anthropologists since the 1970s have revealed that biologically distinct human races do not exist. Certainly, humans vary in terms of physical and genetic characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape, but those variations cannot be used as criteria to biologically classify racial groups with scientific accuracy. Let us turn our attention to understanding why humans cannot be scientifically divided into biologically distinct races.

NOTES

1. For more information about efforts to establish a “scientific” basis for race in the 18th and 19th centuries, see the “History” section of the *Race: Are We So Different* website: http://www.understandingrace.org. Stephen Jay Gould’s book, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), has a detailed discussion of the “scientific” methods used by Morton and others. ↵
2. More information about the social construction of racial categories in the United States can be found in Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007) and Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010). ↵

Adapted From

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11.2: Race, A Discredited Concept

At some point in your life, you have probably been asked to identify your race on a college form, job application, government or military form, or some other official document. And most likely, you were required to select from a list of choices rather than given the ability to respond freely. The frequency with which we are exposed to four or five common racial labels—"white," "black," "Caucasian," and "Asian," for example—tends to promote the illusion that racial categories are natural, objective, and evident divisions. After all, if Justin Timberlake, Jay-Z, and Jackie Chan stood side by side, those common racial labels might seem to make sense. What could be more objective, more conclusive, than this evidence before our very eyes? By this point, you might be thinking that anthropologists have gone completely insane in denying biological human races!

Physical anthropologists have identified several important concepts regarding the true nature of humans' physical, genetic, and biological variation that have discredited race as a biological concept. Many of the issues presented in this section are discussed in further detail in Race: Are We So Different, a website created by the American Anthropological Association. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) launched the website to educate the public about the true nature of human biological and cultural variation and challenge common misperceptions about race. This is an important endeavor because race is a complicated, often emotionally charged topic, leading many people to rely on their personal opinions and hearsay when drawing conclusions about people who are different from them. The website is highly interactive, featuring multimedia illustrations and online quizzes designed to increase visitors' knowledge of human variation. I encourage you to explore the website as you will likely find answers to several of the questions you may still be asking after reading this chapter.[3]

Before explaining why distinct biological races do not exist among humans, I must point out that one of the biggest reasons so many people continue to believe in the existence of biological human races is that the idea has been intensively **reified** in literature, the media, and culture for more than three hundred years. Reification refers to the process in which an inaccurate concept or idea is so heavily promoted and circulated among people that it begins to take on a life of its own. Over centuries, the notion of biological human races became ingrained—unquestioned, accepted, and regarded as a concrete "truth." Studies of human physical and cultural variation from a scientific and anthropological perspective have allowed us to move beyond reified thinking and toward an improved understanding of the true complexity of human diversity.

Definition: reified

The process by which an inaccurate concept or idea is accepted as "truth."

The reification of race has a long history. Especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philosophers and scholars attempted to identify various human races. They perceived "races" as specific divisions of humans who shared certain physical and biological features that distinguished them from other groups of humans. This historic notion of race may seem clear-cut and innocent enough, but it quickly led to problems as social theorists attempted to classify people by race. One of the most basic difficulties was the actual number of human races: how many were there, who were they, and what grounds distinguished them? Despite more than three centuries of such effort, no clear-cut scientific consensus was established for a precise number of human races.

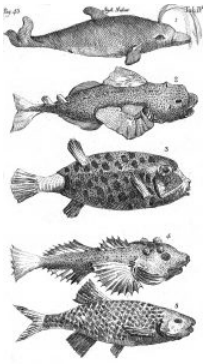


Figure 11.2.1: In Systema Naturae, Carolus Linnaeus attempted to create a taxonomy for all living things, including people.

One of the earliest and most influential attempts at producing a racial classification system came from Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus, who argued in *Systema Naturae* (1735) for the existence of four human races: *Americanus* (Native American / American Indian), *Europaeus* (European), *Asiaticus* (East Asian), and *Africanus* (African). These categories correspond with common racial

labels used in the United States for census and demographic purposes today. However, in 1795, German physician and anthropologist Johann Blumenbach suggested that there were five races, which he labeled as *Caucasian* (white), *Mongolian* (yellow or East Asian), *Ethiopian* (black or African), *American* (red or American Indian), *Malayan* (brown or Pacific Islander). Importantly, Blumenbach listed the races in this exact order, which he believed reflected their natural historical descent from the "primeval" Caucasian original to "extreme varieties."[4] Although he was a committed abolitionist, Blumenbach nevertheless felt that his "Caucasian" race (named after the Caucasus Mountains of Central Asia, where he believed humans had originated) represented the original variety of humankind from which the other races had degenerated.

By the early twentieth century, many social philosophers and scholars had accepted the idea of three human races: the so-called *Caucasoid*, *Negroid*, and *Mongoloid* groups that corresponded with regions of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia, respectively. However, the three-race theory faced serious criticism given that numerous peoples from several geographic regions were omitted from the classification, including Australian Aborigines, Asian Indians, American Indians, and inhabitants of the South Pacific Islands. Those groups could not be easily pigeonholed into racial categories regardless of how loosely the categories were defined. Australian Aborigines, for example, often have dark complexions (a trait they appeared to share with Africans) but reddish or blondish hair (a trait shared with northern Europeans). Likewise, many Indians living on the Asian subcontinent have complexions that are as dark or darker than those of many Africans and African Americans. Because of these seeming contradictions, some academics began to argue in favor of larger numbers of human races—five, nine, twenty, sixty, and more.[5]

During the 1920s and 1930s, some scholars asserted that Europeans were comprised of more than one "white" or "Caucasian" race: *Nordic*, *Alpine*, and *Mediterranean* (named for the geographic regions of Europe from which they descended). These European races, they alleged, exhibited obvious physical traits that distinguished them from one another and thus served as racial boundaries. For example, "Nordics" were said to consist of peoples of Northern Europe—Scandinavia, the British Isles, and Northern Germany — while "Alpines" came from the Alps Mountains of Central Europe and included French, Swiss, Northern Italians, and Southern Germans. People from southern Europe—including Portuguese, Spanish, Southern Italians, Sicilians, Greeks, and Albanians—comprised the "Mediterranean" race. Most Americans today would find this racial classification system bizarre, but its proponents argued for it on the basis that one would observe striking physical differences between a Swede or Norwegian and a Sicilian. Similar efforts were made to "carve up" the populations of Africa and Asia into geographically local, specific races.[6]

The fundamental point here is that any effort to classify human populations into racial categories is inherently arbitrary and subjective rather than scientific and objective. These racial classification schemes simply reflected their proponents' desires to "slice the pie" of human physical variation according to the particular trait(s) they preferred to establish as the major, defining criteria of their classification system. Two major types of "race classifiers" have emerged over the past 300 years: *lumpers* and *splitters*. Lumpers have classified races by large geographic tracts (often continents) and produced a small number of broad, general racial categories, as reflected in Linnaeus's original classification scheme and later three-race theories. Splitters have subdivided continent-wide racial categories into specific, more localized regional races and attempted to devise more "precise" racial labels for these specific groups, such as the three European races described earlier. Consequently, splitters have tried to identify many more human races than lumpers.

Racial labels, whether from a lumper or a splitter model, clearly attempt to identify and describe *something*. So why do these racial labels not accurately describe human physical and biological variation? To understand why, we must keep in mind that racial labels are distinct, discrete categories while human physical and biological variations (such as skin color, hair color and texture, eye color, height, nose shape, and distribution of blood types) are *continuous* rather than discrete.

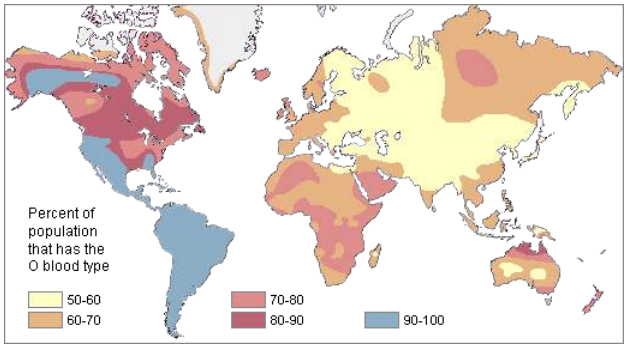


Figure 11.2.2: The global distribution of Type O blood reflects a clinal pattern.

Physical anthropologists use the term **cline** to refer to differences in the traits that occur in populations across a geographical area. In a cline, a trait may be more common in one geographical area than another, but the variation is gradual and continuous with no sharp breaks. A prominent example of clinal variation among humans is skin color. Think of it this way: Do all "white" persons who you know actually share the same skin complexion? Likewise, do all "black" persons who you know share an identical skin complexion? The answer, obviously, is no, since human skin color does not occur in just 3, 5, or even 50 shades. The reality is that human skin color, as a continuous trait, exists as a spectrum from very light to very dark with every possible hue, shade, and tone in between.

Definition: cline

Differences in the traits that occur in populations across a geographical area. In a cline, a trait may be more common in one geographical area than another, but the variation is gradual and continuous, with no sharp breaks.

Imagine two people—one from Sweden and one from Nigeria—standing side by side. If we looked only at those two individuals and ignored people who inhabit the regions between Sweden and Nigeria, it would be easy to reach the faulty conclusion that they represented two distinct human racial groups, one light ("white") and one dark ("black"). [7] However, if we walked from Nigeria to Sweden, we would gain a fuller understanding of human skin color because we would see that skin color generally became gradually lighter the further north we traveled from the equator. At no point during this imaginary walk would we reach a point at which the people abruptly changed skin color. As physical anthropologists such as John Relethford (2004) and C. Loring Brace (2005) have noted, the average range of skin color gradually changes over geographic space. North Africans are generally lighter-skinned than Central Africans, and southern Europeans are generally lighter-skinned than North Africans. In turn, northern Italians are generally lighter-skinned than Sicilians, and the Irish, Danes, and Swedes are generally lighter-skinned than northern Italians and Hungarians. Thus, human skin color cannot be used as a definitive marker of racial boundaries.

There are a few notable exceptions to this general rule of lighter-complexioned people inhabiting northern latitudes. The Chukchi of Eastern Siberia and Inuits of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland have darker skin than other Eurasian people living at similar latitudes, such as Scandinavians. Physical anthropologists have explained this exception in terms of the distinct dietary customs of indigenous Arctic groups, which have traditionally been based on certain native meats and fish that are rich in Vitamin D (polar bears, whales, seals, and trout).

What does Vitamin D have to do with skin color? The answer is intriguing! Dark skin blocks most of the sun's dangerous ultraviolet rays, which is advantageous in tropical environments where sunlight is most intense. Exposure to high levels of ultraviolet radiation can damage skin cells, causing cancer, and also destroy the body's supply of folate, a nutrient essential for reproduction. Folate deficiency in women can cause severe birth defects in their babies. Melanin, the pigment produced in skin cells, acts as a natural sunblock, protecting skin cells from damage, and preventing the breakdown of folate. However, exposure to sunlight has an important positive health effect: stimulating the production of vitamin D. Vitamin D is essential for the health of bones and the immune system. In areas where ultraviolet radiation is strong, there is no problem producing enough Vitamin D, even as darker skin filters ultraviolet radiation.[8]

In environments where the sun's rays are much less intense, a different problem occurs: not enough sunlight penetrates the skin to enable the production of Vitamin D. Over the course of human evolution, natural selection favored the evolution of lighter skin as humans migrated and settled farther from the equator to ensure that weaker rays of sunlight could adequately penetrate our skin. The diet of indigenous populations of the Arctic region provided sufficient amounts of Vitamin D to ensure their health. This reduced the selective pressure toward the evolution of lighter skin among the Inuit and the Chukchi. Physical anthropologist Nina Jablonski (2012) has also noted that natural selection could have favored darker skin in Arctic regions because high levels of ultraviolet radiation from the sun are reflected from snow and ice during the summer months.

Still, many people in the United States remain convinced that biologically distinct human races exist and are easy to identify, declaring that they can walk down any street in the United States and easily determine who is "white" and who is "black." The United States was populated historically by immigrants from a small number of world regions who did not reflect the full spectrum of human physical variation. The earliest settlers in the North American colonies overwhelmingly came from Northern Europe (particularly, Britain, France, Germany, and Ireland), regions where skin colors tend to be among the lightest in the world. Slaves brought to the United States during the colonial period came largely from the western coast of Central Africa, a region where skin color tends to be among the darkest in the world. Consequently, when we look at today's descendants of these groups, we are not looking at accurate, proportional representations of the total range of human skin color; instead, we are looking, in effect, at opposite ends of a spectrum, where striking differences are inevitable. More recent waves of immigrants who have come to the

United States from other world regions have brought a wider range of skin colors, shaping a continuum of skin color that defies classification into a few simple categories.

Physical anthropologists have also found that there are no specific genetic traits that are exclusive to a "racial" group. For the concept of human races to have biological significance, an analysis of multiple genetic traits would have to consistently produce the same racial classifications. In other words, a racial classification scheme for skin color would also have to reflect classifications by blood type, hair texture, eye shape, lactose intolerance, and other traits often mistakenly assumed to be "racial" characteristics. An analysis based on any one of those characteristics individually would produce a unique set of racial categories because variations in human physical and genetic are **nonconcordant**. Each trait is inherited independently, not "bundled together" with other traits and inherited as a package. There is no correlation between skin color and other characteristics such as blood type and lactose intolerance.

Definition: nonconcordant

Genetic traits that are inherited independently rather than as a package.

A prominent example of nonconcordance is sickle-cell anemia, which people often mistakenly think of as a disease that only affects Africans, African Americans, and "black" persons. In fact, the sickle-cell allele (the version of the gene that causes sickle-cell anemia when a person inherits two copies) is relatively common among people whose ancestors are from regions where a certain strain of malaria, *plasmodium falciparum*, is prevalent, namely Central and Western Africa and parts of Mediterranean Europe, the Arabian peninsula, and India. The sickle-cell trait thus is not exclusively African or "black." The erroneous perceptions are relatedly primarily to the fact that the ancestors of U.S. African Americans came predominantly from Western Africa, where the sickle-cell gene is prevalent, and are therefore more recognizable than populations of other ancestries and regions where the sickle-cell gene is common, such as southern Europe and Arabia.[9]

Another trait commonly mistaken as defining race is the epicanthic eye fold typically associated with people of East Asian ancestry. The epicanthic eye fold at the outer corner of the eyelid produces the eye shape that people in the United States typically associate with people from China and Japan, but is also common in people from Central Asia, parts of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, some American Indian groups, and the Khoi San of southern Africa.

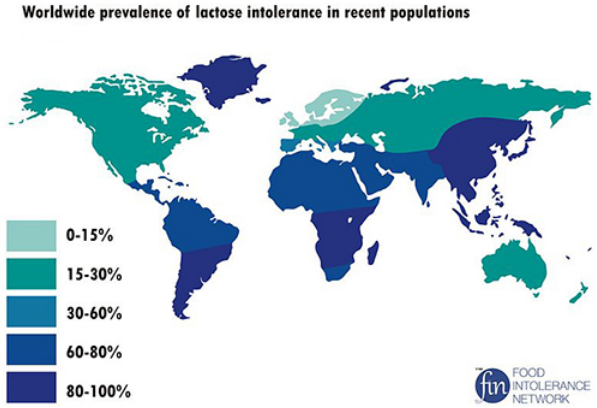


Figure 11.2.3: The ability to digest the lactose found in dairy products is more common in some populations than others.

In college, I took a course titled "Nutrition" because I thought it would be an easy way to boost my grade point average. The professor of the class, an authoritarian man in his late 60s or early 70s, routinely declared that "Asians can't drink milk!" When this assertion was challenged by various students, including a woman who claimed that her best friend was Korean and drank milk and ate ice cream all the time, the professor only became more strident, doubling down on his dairy diatribe and defiantly vowing that he would not "ignore the facts" for "purposes of political correctness." However, it is scientific accuracy, not political correctness, we should be concerned about, and lactose tolerance is a complex topic. Lactose is a sugar that is naturally present in milk and dairy products, and an enzyme, lactase, breaks it down into two simpler sugars that can be digested by the body. Ordinarily, humans (and other mammals) stop producing lactase after infancy, and approximately 75 percent of humans are thus lactose intolerant and cannot naturally digest milk. Lactose intolerance is a natural, normal condition. However, some people continue to produce lactase into adulthood and can naturally digest milk and dairy products. This lactose persistence developed through natural selection, primarily among people in regions that had long histories of dairy farming (including the Middle East, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, East Africa, and Northern India). In other areas and for some groups of people, dairy products were introduced relatively

recently (such as East Asia, Southern Europe, and Western and Southern Africa and among Australian Aborigines and American Indians) and lactose persistence has not developed yet.[10]

The idea of biological human races emphasizes differences, both real and perceived, *between* groups and ignores or overlooks differences *within* groups. The biological differences between "whites" and "blacks" and between "blacks" and "Asians" are assumed to be greater than the biological differences among "whites" and among "blacks." The opposite is actually true; the overwhelming majority of genetic diversity in humans (88–92 percent) is found within people who live on the same continent.[11] Also, keep in mind that human beings are one of the most genetically similar of all species. There is nearly six times more genetic variation among white-tailed deer in the southern United States than in all humans! Consider our closest living relative, the chimpanzee. Chimpanzees' natural habitat is confined to central Africa and parts of western Africa, yet four genetically distinct groups occupy those regions and they are far more genetically distinct than humans who live on different continents. That humans exhibit such a low level of genetic variation compared to other species reflects the fact that we are a relatively recent species; modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) first appeared in East Africa just under 200,000 years ago.[12]

Physical anthropologists today analyze human biological variation by examining specific genetic traits to understand how those traits originated and evolved over time and why some genetic traits are more common in certain populations. Since much of our biological diversity occurs mostly within (rather than between) continental regions once believed to be the homelands of distinct races, the concept of race is meaningless in any study of human biology. Franz Boas, considered the father of modern U.S. anthropology, was the first prominent anthropologist to challenge racial thinking directly during the early twentieth century. A professor of anthropology at Columbia University in New York City and a Jewish immigrant from Germany, Boas established anthropology in the United States as a four-field academic discipline consisting of archaeology, physical/biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics. His approach challenged conventional thinking at the time that humans could be separated into biological races endowed with unique intellectual, moral, and physical abilities.

In one of his most famous studies, Boas challenged craniometrics, in which the size and shape of skulls of various groups were measured as a way of assigning relative intelligence and moral behavior. Boas noted that the size and shape of the skull were not fixed characteristics within groups and were instead influenced by the environment. Children born in the United States to parents of various immigrant groups, for example, had slightly different average skull shapes than children born and raised in the homelands of those immigrant groups. The differences reflected relative access to nutrition and other socio-economic dimensions. In his famous 1909 essay "Race Problems in America," Boas challenged the commonly held idea that immigrants to the United States from Italy, Poland, Russia, Greece, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and other southern and eastern European nations were a threat to America's "racial purity." He pointed out that the British, Germans, and Scandinavians (popularly believed at the time to be the "true white" heritages that gave the United States its superior qualities) were not themselves "racially pure." Instead, many different tribal and cultural groups had intermixed over the centuries. In fact, Boas asserted, the notion of "racial purity" was utter nonsense. As present-day anthropologist Jonathan Marks (1994) noted, "You may group humans into a small number of races if you want to, but you are denied biology as a support for it."[13]

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NOTES

3. More discussion of the material in this section can be found in Carol Mukhopadhyay, Rosemary Henze, and Yolanda Moses, *How Real Is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, and Biology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013). Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the cultural construction of racial categories as a form of classification. The *Race: Are We So Different* website and its companion resources for teachers and researchers also explore the ideas described here. ↵
4. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind: De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1775). ↵

5. For details about how these categories were established, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*. ↵
6. For a discussion of the efforts to subdivide racial groups in the nineteenth century and its connection to eugenics, see Carol Mukhopadhyay, Rosemary Henze, and Yolanda Moses, *How Real Is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, and Biology.*↵
7. For more information about the genetic variation between human groups that puts this example in context see Sheldon Krimsky and Kathleen Sloan, *Race and the Genetic Revolution: Science, Myth, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 174-180. ↵
8. Carol Mukhopadhyay et. al *How Real Is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, and Biology*, 43-48. ↵
9. Ibid., 50-52. ↵
10. Ibid., 50-51. ↵
11. Ibid., 62. ↵
12. Alan R. Templeton, "Human Races: A Genetic and Evolutionary Perspective" *American Anthropologist* 100 no. 3 (1998): 632-650. ↵
13. Jonathan Marks, "Black, White, Other," 35. ↵

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11.3: Race As A Social Concept

Just because the idea of distinct biological human races is not a valid scientific concept does not mean, and should not be interpreted as implying, that "there is no such thing as race" or that "race isn't real." Race is indeed real but it is a concept based on arbitrary social and cultural definitions rather than biology or science. Thus, racial categories such as "white" and "black" are as real as categories of "American" and "African." Many things in the world are real but are not biological. So, while race does not reflect biological characteristics, it reflects socially constructed concepts defined subjectively by societies to reflect notions of division that are perceived to be significant. Some sociologists and anthropologists now use the term *social races* instead, seeking to emphasize their cultural and arbitrary roots.

Race is most accurately thought of as a socio-historical concept. Michael Omi and Howard Winant noted that "Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded."[14] In other words, racial labels ultimately reflect a society's social attitudes and cultural beliefs regarding notions of group differences. And since racial categories are culturally defined, they can vary from one society to another as well as change over time within a society. Omi and Winant referred to this as **racial formation—**"the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories."[15]

Definition: racial formation

The process of defining and redefining racial categories in a society.

The process of racial formation is vividly illustrated by the idea of "whiteness" in the United States. Over the course of U.S. history, the concept of "whiteness" expanded to include various immigrant groups that once were targets of racist beliefs and discrimination. In the mid 1800s, for example, Irish Catholic immigrants faced intense hostility from America's Anglo-Protestant mainstream society, and anti-Irish politicians and journalists depicted the Irish as racially different and inferior. Newspaper cartoons frequently portrayed Irish Catholics in apelike fashion: overweight, knuckle dragging, and brutish. In the early twentieth century, Italian and Jewish immigrants were typically perceived as racially distinct from America's Anglo-Protestant "white" majority as well. They were said to belong to the inferior "Mediterranean" and "Jewish" races. Today, Irish, Italian, and Jewish Americans are fully considered "white," and many people find it hard to believe that they once were perceived otherwise. Racial categories as an aspect of culture are typically learned, internalized, and accepted without question or critical thought in a process not so different from children learning their native language as they grow up.

A primary contributor to expansion of the definition of "whiteness" in the United States was the rise of many members of those immigrant groups in social status after World War II.[16] Hundreds of suburban housing developments were constructed on the edge of the nation's major cities during the 1940s and 1950s to accommodate returning soldiers, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 offered a series of benefits for military veterans, including free college education or technical training and cost-of-living stipends funded by the federal government for veterans pursuing higher education. In addition, veterans could obtain guaranteed low-interest loans for homes and for starting their own farms or businesses. The act was in effect from 1944 through 1956 and was *theoretically* available to all military veterans who served at least four months in uniform and were honorably discharged, but the legislation did not contain anti-discrimination provisions and most African American veterans were denied benefits because private banks refused to provide the loans and restrictive language by homeowners' associations prohibited sales of homes to nonwhites. The male children and grandchildren of European immigrant groups benefited tremendously from the act. They were able to obtain college educations, formerly available only to the affluent, at no cost, leading to professional white-collar careers, and to purchase low-cost suburban homes that increased substantially in value over time. The act has been credited, more than anything else, with creating the modern middle class of U.S. society and transforming the majority of "white" Americans from renters into homeowners.[17] As the children of Irish, Jewish, Italian, Greek, Anglo-Saxon, and Eastern European parents grew up together in the suburbs, formed friendships, and dated and married one another, the old social boundaries that defined "whiteness" were redefined.[18]

Race is a socially constructed concept but it is not a trivial matter. On the contrary, one's race often has a dramatic impact on everyday life. In the United States, for example, people often use race—their personal understanding of race—to predict "who" a person is and "what" a person is like in terms of personality, behavior, and other qualities. Because of this tendency to characterize others and make assumptions about them, people can be uncomfortable or defensive when they mistake someone's background or cannot easily determine "what" someone is, as revealed in statements such as "You don't *look* black!" or "You *talk* like a white

person. Such statements reveal fixed notions about "blackness" and "whiteness" and what members of each race will be like, reflecting their socially constructed and seemingly "common sense" understanding of the world.

Since the 1990s, scholars and anti-racism activists have discussed "white privilege" as a basic feature of race as a lived experience in the United States. Peggy McIntosh coined the term in a famous 1988 essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in which she identified more than two dozen accumulated unearned benefits and advantages associated with being a "white" person in the United States. The benefits ranged from relatively minor things, such as knowing that "flesh color" Band-Aids would match her skin, to major determinants of life experiences and opportunities, such as being assured that she would never be asked to speak on behalf of her entire race, being able to curse and get angry in public without others assuming she was acting that way because of her race, and not having to teach her children that police officers and the general public would view them as suspicious or criminal because of their race. In 2015, MTV aired a documentary on white privilege, simply titled *White People*, to raise awareness of this issue among Millennials. In the documentary, young "white" Americans from various geographic, social, and class backgrounds discussed their experiences with race.

White privilege has gained significant attention and is an important tool for understanding how race is often connected to everyday experiences and opportunities, but we must remember that no group is homogenous or monolithic. "White" persons receive varying degrees of privilege and social advantage, and other important characteristics, such as social class, gender, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability, shape individuals' overall lives and how they experience society. John Hartigan, an urban anthropologist, has written extensively about these characteristics. His *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (1999) discusses the lives of "white" residents in three neighborhoods in Detroit, Michigan, that vary significantly socio-economically—one impoverished, one working class, and one upper middle class. Hartigan reveals that social class has played a major role in shaping strikingly different identities among these "white" residents and how, accordingly, social relations between "whites" and "blacks" in the neighborhoods vary from camaraderie and companionship to conflict.

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NOTES

14. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 64. ↵
15. Ibid., 61 ↵
16. For more information about the social construction of whiteness in U.S. History see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For more information about the economic aspects of the construction of whiteness both before and after World War II, see David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2007) and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). ↵
17. For a detailed discussion of this process see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Ira Katznelson, W*hen Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005). ↵
18. For more information on these historical developments and their social ramifications, see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998) or David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White—The Strange Journey From Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). ↵

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11.4: Race In Three Nations

To better understand how race is constructed around the world, consider how the United States, Brazil, and Japan define racial categories. In the United States, race has traditionally been rigidly constructed, and Americans have long perceived racial categories as discrete and mutually exclusive: a person who had one "black" parent and one "white" parent was seen simply as "black." The institution of slavery played a major role in defining how the United States has classified people by race through the **one-drop rule**, which required that any trace of known or recorded non-European ("non-white") ancestry was used to automatically exclude a person from being classified as "white." Someone with one "black" grandparent and three "white" grandparents or one "black" great-grandparent and seven "white" great-grandparents was classified under the one-drop rule simply as "black." The original purpose of the one-drop rule was to ensure that children born from sexual unions (some consensual but many forced) between slave-owner fathers and enslaved women would be born into slave status.[19]

Definition: one-drop rule

The practice of excluding a person with any non-white ancestry from the white racial category.

UNITED STATES

Consider President Barack Obama. Obama is of biracial heritage; his mother was "white" of Euro-American descent and his father was a "black" man from Kenya. The media often refer to Obama simply as "black" or "African American," such as when he is referred to as the nation's "first black President," and never refer to him as "white."[20] Whiteness in the United States has long been understood and legally defined as implying "racial purity" despite the biological absurdity of the notion, and to be considered "white," one could have no known ancestors of black, American Indian, Asian, or other "non-white" backgrounds. Cultural anthropologists also refer to the one-drop rule as **hypodescent**, a term coined by anthropologist Marvin Harris in the 1960s to refer to a socially constructed racial classification system in which a person of mixed racial heritage is automatically categorized as a member of the less (or least) privileged group.[21]

Definition: hypodescent

A racial classification system that assigns a person with mixed racial heritage to the racial category that is considered least privileged.

Another example is birth certificates issued by U.S. hospitals, which, until relatively recently, used a precise formula to determine the appropriate racial classification for a newborn. If one parent was "white" and the other was "non-white," the child was classified as the race of the "non-white" parent; if neither parent was "white," the child was classified as the race of the father.

Not until very recently have the United States government, the media, and pop culture begun to officially acknowledge and embrace biracial and multiracial individuals. The 2000 census was the first to allow respondents to identify as more than one race. Currently, a grassroots movement that is expanding across the United States, led by organizations such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and Swirl, seeks to raise public awareness of biracial and multiracial people who sometimes still experience social prejudice for being of mixed race and/or resentment from peers who disapprove of their decision to identify with all of their backgrounds instead of just one. Prominent biracial and multiracial celebrities such as Tiger Woods, Alicia Keys, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé Knowles, Bruno Mars, and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and the election of Barack Obama have also prompted people in the United States to reconsider the problematic nature of rigid, discrete racial categories.

In 1977, the U.S. government established five official racial categories under Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Directive 15 that provided a basis for recordkeeping and compiling of statistical information to facilitate collection of demographic information by the Census Bureau and to ensure compliance with federal civil rights legislation and work-place anti-discrimination policies. Those categories and their definitions, which are still used today, are (a) "*White*: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East;" (b) "*Black or African American*: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa;" (c) "*American Indian or Alaskan Native*: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment;" (d) "*Asian*: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent;" and (e) "*Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:* a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or the Pacific Islands." In addition, OMB Directive 15 established *Hispanic or Latino* as a separate *ethnic* (not racial) category; on official documents, individuals are asked to identify their racial background and whether they are of Hispanic/Latino ethnic

heritage. The official definition of Hispanic or Latino is "a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race."

OMB Directive 15's terminology and definitions have generated considerable criticism and controversy. The complex fundamental question is whether such categories are practical and actually reflect how individuals choose to self-identify. Terms such as "non-Hispanic white" and "Black Hispanic," both a result of the directive, are baffling to many people in the United States who perceive Hispanics/Latinos as a separate group from whites and blacks. Others oppose any governmental attempt to classify people by race, on both liberal and conservative political grounds. In 1997, the American Anthropological Association unsuccessfully advocated for a cessation of federal efforts to coercively classify Americans by race, arguing instead that individuals should be given the opportunity to identify their ethnic and/or national heritages (such as their country or countries of ancestry).

BRAZIL

Brazil's concept of race is much more fluid, flexible, and multifaceted. The differences between Brazil and the United States are particularly striking because the countries have similar histories. Both nations were born of European colonialism in the New World, established major plantation economies that relied on large numbers of African slaves, and subsequently experienced large waves of immigration from around the world (particularly Europe) following the abolition of slavery. Despite those similarities, significant contrasts in how race is perceived in these two societies persist, which is sometimes summarized in the expression "The United States has a color line, while Brazil has a color continuum."[22] In Brazil, races are typically viewed as points on a continuum in which one gradually blends into another; "white" and "black" are opposite ends of a continuum that incorporates many intermediate color-based racial labels that have no equivalent in the United States.

The Brazilian term for these categories, which correspond to the concept of race in the United States, is *tipos*, which directly translates into Portuguese as "types."[23] Rather than describing what is believed to be a person's biological or genetic ancestry, *tipos* describe slight but noticeable differences in physical appearance. Examples include *loura*, a person with a very fair complexion, straight blonde hair, and blue or green eyes; *sarará*, a light-complexioned person with tightly curled blondish or reddish hair, blue or green eyes, a wide nose, and thick lips; and *cabo verde*, an individual with dark skin, brown eyes, straight black hair, a narrow nose, and thin lips. Sociologists and anthropologists have identified more than 125 *tipos* in Brazil, and small villages of only 500 people may feature 40 or more depending on how residents describe one another. Some of the labels vary from region to region, reflecting local cultural differences.

Since Brazilians perceive race based on phenotypes or outward physical appearance rather than as an extension of geographically based biological and genetic descent, individual members of a family can be seen as different *tipos*. This may seem bewildering to those who think of race as a fixed identity inherited from one's parents even though it is generally acknowledged that family members often have different physical features, such as sisters who have strikingly different eye colors, hair colors, and/or complexions. In Brazil, those differences are frequently viewed as significant enough to assign different *tipos*. Cultural anthropologist Conrad Phillip Kottak, who conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, noted that something as minor as a suntan or sunburn could lead to a person temporarily being described as a different *tipo* until the effects of the tanning or burning wore off.[24]

Another major difference in the construction of race in the United States and Brazil is the more fluid and flexible nature of race in Brazil, which is reflected in a popular Brazilian saying: "Money whitens." As darker-complexioned individuals increase their social class status (by, for example, graduating from college and obtaining high-salaried, professional positions), they generally come to be seen as a somewhat lighter *tipo* and light-complexioned individuals who become poorer may be viewed as a slightly darker *tipo*. In the United States, social class has no bearing on one's racial designation; a non-white person who achieves upward social mobility and accrues greater education and wealth may be seen by some as more "socially desirable" because of social class but does not change racial classification.

Brazil's Institute of Geography and Statistics established five official racial categories in 1940 to facilitate collection of demographic information that are still in use today: *branco* (white), *prêto* (black), *pardo* (brown), *amarelo* (yellow), and indígena (indigenous). These racial categories are similar to the ones established in the United States under OMB Directive 15 and to Linnaeus' proposed taxonomy in the 18th century. *Pardo* is unique to Brazil and denotes a person of both *branco* and *prêto* heritage. Many Brazilians object to these government categories and prefer *tipos*.

The more fluid construction of race in Brazil is accompanied by generally less hostile, more benign social interactions between people of different colors and complexions, which has contributed to Brazil being seen as a "racial paradise" and a "racial democracy" rainbow nation free of the harsh prejudices and societal discrimination that has characterized other multiracial nations

such as the United States and South Africa.[25] The "racial democracy" image has long been embraced by the government and elites in Brazil as a way to provide the country with a distinct identity in the international community. However, scholars in Brazil and the United States have questioned the extent to which racial equality exists in Brazil despite the appearance of interracial congeniality on the surface. Many light-complexioned Brazilians reject the idea that racial discrimination and inequalities persist and regard such claims as divisive while Afro-Brazilians have drawn attention to these inequalities in recent years.



Figure 11.4.1: A scene from the Black Women's March against Racism and Violence in Brasilia, Brazil, 2015.

Though Afro-Brazilians comprise approximately half of the country's population, they have historically accounted for less than 2 percent of all university students, and severe economic disparities between *tipos* remain prominent in Brazil to this day.[26] The majority of the country's Afro-Brazilians lives in the less-affluent northern region, site of the original sugar cane plantations while the majority of Brazilians of European descent live in the industrial and considerably wealthier southern region.[27] The *favelas* (slums) located on the edge of major cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paolo, which often lack electricity or running water, are inhabited largely by Afro-Brazilians, who are half as likely to have a working toilet in their homes as the overall Brazilian population.

There are significant economic differences between Brazilians according to their official racial designation. According to government statistics, *prêtos* have higher unemployment and poverty rates than other groups in Brazil and *brancos* earn 57 percent more than *prêtos* for the same occupation. Furthermore, the vast majority of Brazilians in leadership positions in politics, the military, the media, and education are *branco* or *pardo*. Inter-racial marriage occurs more frequently in Brazil than in the United States, but most of the marriages are between *prêtos* and *pardos* and not between *brancos* and either *prêtos* or *pardos*. Another significant area of concern centers on brutality and mistreatment of darker-complexioned Brazilians. As a result, some scholars of race and racism describe Brazil as a prominent example of a **pigmentocracy**: a society characterized by a strong correlation between a person's skin color and their social class.

Definition: pigmentocracy

A society characterized by strong correlation between a person's skin color and his or her social class.

Afro-Brazilian activism has grown substantially since the 1980s, inspired in part by the successes of the Civil Rights movement in the United States and by actions taken by the Brazilian government since the early 2000s. One of the Brazilian government's strategies has been to implement U.S.-style affirmative action policies in education and employment to increase the number of Afro-Brazilians in the nation's professional ranks and decrease the degree of economic disparity. Those efforts sparked an intense backlash among lighter-complexioned Brazilians and created a complex social and political dilemma: who, exactly, should be considered "dark/black enough" for inclusion in affirmative action, who makes that decision, and on what grounds will the decision be based? Many Brazilian families include relatives whose complexions are quite different and the country has clear racial categories only in terms of its demographic statistics. Nevertheless, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Brazil's president from 2003 through 2011, made promotion of greater racial equality a prominent objective of his administration. In addition to supporting affirmative action policies, Lula appointed four Afro-Brazilians to his cabinet, appointed the first Afro-Brazilian justice to the nation's supreme court, and established a government office for promotion of racial equality. These recent developments have led many in Brazil and elsewhere to reconsider the accuracy of Brazil's designation as a racial democracy, which has been as a central component of its national identity for decades.

Scholars mostly agree that race relations are more relaxed and genteel in Brazil than in the United States. They tend to disagree about why that is the case. Some have suggested that the differences in racial constructions stem from important colonial-era distinctions that set the tone for years to come. A common expression describing the situation is: "the United States had two British parents while Brazil had a Portuguese father and an African mother." British settlers who colonized North America thoroughly subjugated their slaves, intermarriage was rare, and African cultural influences on mainstream U.S. society were marginalized compared to British cultural traditions and customs. In Brazil, on the other hand, sexual and marital unions between the Portuguese settlers, who were overwhelmingly male, and female Africans were common, creating individuals who exhibit a wide range of

physical appearances. Sexual unions certainly occurred in the United States between male European slave masters and female African slaves, but the one-drop rule ensured that any children born of such unions would be classified as "black" and as slaves. In Brazil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the government and the Roman Catholic Church strongly encouraged European descended men to marry the African and indigenous women they impregnated in order to "whiten" the nation.[28] The United States government did not advocate for interracial families and most states had anti-miscegenation laws. The United States also implemented an official, government-sanctioned system of **Jim C**row racial segregation laws in that had no equivalent in Brazil.

Definition: Jim Crow laws

A term used to describe laws passed by state and local governments in the United States during the early twentieth century to enforce racial segregation of public and private places.

JAPAN

Japan represents an example of a third way of constructing race that is not associated with Western society or African slavery. Japanese society is more diverse than many people realize; the number of Korean, Chinese, Indian, and Brazilian immigrants began to increase in the 1980s, and the number of children who had one Japanese and one non-Japanese parent has increased substantially since the 1950s, driven in part by children fathered by American military men stationed in Japan. Yet, one segment of Japan's population known as the burakumin (formerly called the eta, a word meaning "pure filth") vividly illustrates the arbitrary nature of racial categories. Though physically and genetically indistinguishable from other Japanese people, the burakumin are a socially stigmatized and outcast group. They are descendants of people who worked dirty, low-prestige jobs that involved handling dead and slaughtered animals during the feudal era of Japan in the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s. In feudal times, they were forced to live in communities separated from the rest of society, had to wear a patch of leather on their clothing to symbolize their burakumin status, and were not permitted to marry non-burakumins.[29]

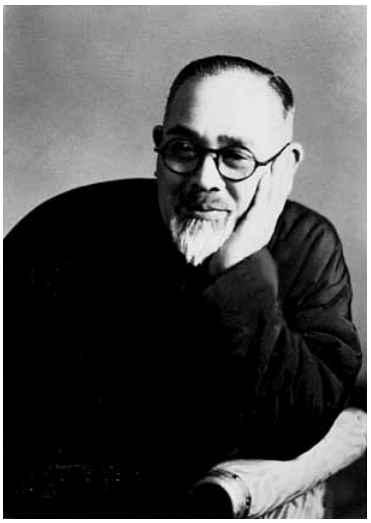


Figure 11.4.2: Jiichirō Matsumoto, a leader of the Buraku Liberation League.

Japan no longer legally prohibits marriage between burakumin and non-burakumin (today, approximately 75 percent of burakumins are married to non-burakumins), but prejudices and discrimination persist, particularly among older generations, and the marriages remain socially stigmatized. Employment for the burakumin remains concentrated in low-paying occupations involving physical labor despite the relative affluence and advanced education in Japanese society overall. Burakumin earn only about 60 percent of the national average household income.[30] Stereotypes of the burakumin as unintelligent, lazy, and violent still exist, but burakumin men account for a significant portion of Japan's professional athletes in popular sports such as baseball and sumo wrestling, an interesting pattern that reflects events in the United States, where racially stigmatized groups have long found relatively abundant opportunities for upward mobility in professional sports.

NOTES

19. While the one-drop rule was intended to protect the institution of slavery, a more nuanced view of racial identity has existed throughout U.S. History. For a history of the racial categories used historically in the United States census, including several mixed-race categories, see the Pew Research Center's "What Census Calls Us: Historical Timeline." http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/interactives/multiracial-timeline/↵
20. It is important to note that President Obama has also stated that he self-identifies as black. See for instance, Sam Roberts and Peter Baker. 2010. "Asked to Declare His Race, Obama Checks 'Black.'" *The New York Times*, April 2. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/us/politics/03census.html↵
21. This concept is discussed in more detail in chapter 9 of Carol Mukhopadhyay et. al *How Real Is Race: A Sourebook on Race, Culture, and Biology*. ↵

22. Edward Telles originated this expression in his book *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). ↵
23. More information about the Brazilian concepts of race described in this section is available in Jefferson M. Fish, “Mixed Blood: An Analytical Method of Classifying Race.” *Psychology Today*, November 1, 1995. https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199511/mixed-blood↵
24. Conrad Kottak, *Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013). ↵
25. See for instance the PBS documentary *Brazil: A Racial Paradise*, written and presented by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. For a detailed critique of the idea of Brazil as a “racial democracy,” see Michael Hanchard (ed), *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). ↵
26. Robert J. Cottrol, *The Long Lingering Shadow: Slavery, Race, and Law in the American Hemisphere* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 246. ↵
27. Ibid., 145 ↵
28. For more information about Brazil’s official policy toward mixed-race children during this era see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992). ↵
29. For a detailed discussion of stratification without race, see chapter 8 of Carol Mukhopadyay et. al *How Real is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, and Biology*. ↵
30. For more information about the status of Burakumin in Japan see Emily A. Su-lan Reber, “Buraku Mondai in Japan: Historical and Modern Perspectives and Directions for the Future.” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 12 (1999): 298 ↵

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11.5: Ethnicity

ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC GROUPS

The terms race and ethnicity are similar and there is a degree of overlap between them. The average person frequently uses the terms “race” and “ethnicity” interchangeably as synonyms and anthropologists also recognize that race and ethnicity are overlapping concepts. Both race and ethnic identity draw on an identification with others based on common ancestry and shared cultural traits.[31] As discussed earlier, a *race* is a social construction that defines groups of humans based on arbitrary physical and/or biological traits that are believed to distinguish them from other humans. An **ethnic group**, on the other hand, claims a distinct identity based on cultural characteristics and a shared ancestry that are believed to give its members a unique sense of peoplehood or heritage.

Definition: ethnic group

People in a society who claim a distinct identity for themselves based on shared cultural characteristics and ancestry.

The cultural characteristics used to define ethnic groups vary; they include specific languages spoken, religions practiced, and distinct patterns of dress, diet, customs, holidays, and other markers of distinction. In some societies, ethnic groups are geographically concentrated in particular regions, as with the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq and the Basques in northern Spain.

Ethnicity refers to the degree to which a person identifies with and feels an attachment to a particular ethnic group. As a component of a person’s identity, ethnicity is a fluid, complex phenomenon that is highly variable. Many individuals view their ethnicity as an important element of their personal and social identity. Numerous psychological, social, and familial factors play a role in ethnicity, and ethnic identity is most accurately understood as a range or continuum populated by people at every point. One’s sense of ethnicity can also fluctuate across time. Children of Korean immigrants living in an overwhelmingly white town, for example, may choose to self-identify simply as “American” during their middle school and high school years to fit in with their classmates and then choose to self-identify as “Korean,” “Korean American,” or “Asian American” in college or later in life as their social settings change or from a desire to connect more strongly with their family history and heritage. Do you consider your ethnicity an important part of your identity? Why do you feel the way you do?

Definition: ethnicity

The degree to which a person identifies with and feels an attachment to a particular ethnic group.

In the United States, ethnic identity can sometimes be primarily or purely symbolic in nature. Sociologists and anthropologists use the term **symbolic ethnicity** to describe limited or occasional displays of ethnic pride and identity that are primarily *expressive*—for public display—rather than *instrumental* as a major component of their daily social lives. Symbolic ethnicity is pervasive in U.S. society; consider customs such as “Kiss Me, I’m Irish!” buttons and bumper stickers, Puerto Rican flag necklaces, decals of the Virgin of Guadalupe, replicas of the Aztec stone calendar, and tattoos of Celtic crosses or of the map of Italy in green, white, and red stripes. When I was a teenager in the early to mid-1990s, medallions shaped like the African continent became popular among young African Americans after the release of Spike Lee’s film *Malcolm X* in 1992 and in response to clothing worn by socially conscious rappers and rap groups of the era, such as Public Enemy. During that same time, I surprised workers in a pizzeria in suburban Philadelphia when I asked them, in Spanish, what part of Mexico they came from. They wanted to know how I knew they were Mexican as they said they usually were presumed to be Italian or Puerto Rican. I replied, “The Virgin of Guadalupe gave it away!” while pointing to the miniature figurine of the iconic national symbol of Mexico on the counter near the register.

Definition: symbolic ethnicity

Limited or occasional displays of ethnic pride and identity that are primarily for public display.

In the United States, ethnic identity can sometimes be largely symbolic particularly for descendants of the various European immigrant groups who settled in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Regardless of whether their grandparents and great-grandparents migrated from Italy, Ireland, Germany, Poland, Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Greece, Scandinavia, or elsewhere, these third and fourth generation Americans likely do not speak their ancestors’ languages and have lost most or all of the cultural customs and traditions their ancestors brought to the United States. A few traditions, such as favorite family recipes or distinct customs associated with the celebration of a holiday, that originated in their homelands may be retained



Figure 11.5.1: Many people in the United States cherish their ethnic identities and cultural traditions. This Hindu altar is from a home in San Diego, California.

by family members across generations, reinforcing a sense of ethnic heritage and identity today. More recent immigrants are likely to retain more of the language and cultural traditions of their countries of origin. Non-European immigrants groups from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean also experience significant linguistic and cultural losses over generations, but may also continue to self-identify with their ethnic backgrounds if they do not feel fully incorporated into U.S, society because they "stick out" physically from Euro-American society and experience prejudice and discrimination. Psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies have indicated that retaining a strong sense of ethnic pride and identification is common among ethnic minorities in the United States and other nations as a means of coping with and overcoming societal bigotry.

While there have been periods of inter-ethnic tension between various European immigrant and ethnic groups in the United States, such as English-German and Irish-Italian conflicts, the descendants of these groups today have been assimilated, to a very large degree, into the general racial category of "white."

Ethnic groups and ethnicity, like race, are socially constructed identities created at particular moments in history under particular social conditions. The earliest views of ethnicity assumed that people had innate, unchanging ethnic identities and loyalties. In actuality, ethnic identities shift and are recreated over time and across societies. Anthropologists call this process **ethnogenesis**—gradual emergence of a new, distinct ethnic identity in response to changing social circumstances. For example, people whose ancestors came from what we know as Ireland may identify themselves as Irish Americans and generations of their ancestors as Irish, but at one time, people living in that part of the world identified themselves as Celtic.

Definition: ethnogenesis

Gradual emergence of new ethnicities in response to changing social circumstances.

In the United States, ethnogenesis has led to a number of new ethnic identities, including African American, Native American, American Indian, and Italian American. Slaves brought to America in the colonial period came primarily from Central and Western Africa and represented dozens of ethnic heritages, including Yoruba, Igbo, Akan, and Chamba, that had unique languages, religions, and cultures that were quickly lost because slaves were not permitted to speak their own languages or practice their customs and religions. Over time, a new unified identity emerged among their descendants. But that identity continues to evolve, as reflected by the transitions in the label used to identify it: from "colored" (early 1900s) to "Negro" (1930s–1960s) to "Black" (late 1960s to the present) and "African American" (1980s to the present).

NOTES

31. The distinction between race and ethnicity is a complex and controversial one within anthropology. Some anthropologists combine these concepts in acknowledgement of the overlap between them. See for instance Karen Brodkin. *How Jews Became White and What This Says About Race in America.*↵

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11.6: A Melting Pot or A Salad Bowl?

There is tremendous ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity throughout the United States, largely resulting from a long history and ongoing identification as a "nation of immigrants" that attracted millions of newcomers from every continent. Still, elected officials and residents ardently disagree about how the United States should approach this diversity and incorporate immigrant, ethnic, and cultural minority groups into the larger framework of American society. The fundamental question is whether cultural minority groups should be encouraged to forego their ethnic and cultural identities and adopt the values, traditions, and customs of mainstream culture or should be allowed and encouraged to retain key elements of their identities and heritages. This is a highly emotional question. Matters of cultural identity are often deeply personal and associated with strongly held beliefs about the defining features of their countries' national identities. Over the past 400 years, three distinct social philosophies have developed from efforts to promote national unity and tranquility in societies that have experienced large-scale immigration: assimilation, multiculturalism, and amalgamation.

Assimilation encourages and may even demand that members of ethnic and immigrant minority groups abandon their native customs, traditions, languages, and identities as quickly as possible and adopt those of mainstream society—"When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Advocates of assimilation generally view a strong sense of national unity based on a shared linguistic and cultural heritage as the best way to promote a strong national identity and avoid ethnic conflict. They point, for example, to ethnic warfare and genocide in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s and to recent independence movements by French Canadians in Quebec and in Scotland as evidence of negative consequences of groups retaining a strong sense of loyalty and identification with their ethnic or linguistic communities. The "English as the Official Language" movement in the United States is another example. People are concerned that U.S. unity is weakened by immigrants who do not learn to speak English. In recent years, the U.S. Census Bureau has identified more than 300 languages spoken in the United States. In 2010, more than 60 million people representing 21 percent of the total U.S. population spoke a language other than English at home and 38 million of those people spoke Spanish.

Definition: assimilation

Pressure placed on minority groups to adopt the customs and traditions of the dominant culture.

Multiculturalism takes a different view of assimilation, arguing that ethnic and cultural diversity is a positive quality that enriches a society and encouraging respect for cultural differences. The basic belief behind multiculturalism is that group differences, in and of themselves, do not spark tension, and society should promote tolerance for differences rather than urging members of immigrant, ethnic, and cultural minority groups to shed their customs and identities. Vivid examples of multiculturalism can be seen in major cities across the United States, such as New York, where ethnic neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Little Italy border one another, and Los Angeles, which features many diverse neighborhoods, including Little Tokyo, Koreatown, Filipinotown, Little Armenia, and Little Ethiopia. The ultimate objective of multiculturalism is to promote peaceful coexistence while allowing each ethnic community to preserve its unique heritage and identity. Multiculturalism is the official governmental policy of Canada; it was codified in 1988 under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which declares that "multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage."[32]

Definition: multiculturalism

Maintenance of multiple cultural traditions in a single society.

Amalgamation promotes hybridization of diverse cultural groups in a multiethnic society. Members of distinct ethnic and cultural groups freely intermingle, interact, and live among one another with cultural exchanges and, ultimately, inter-ethnic dating and intermarriage occurring as the social and cultural barriers between groups fade over time. Amalgamation is similar to assimilation in that a strong, unified national culture is viewed as the desired end result but differs because it represents a more thorough "melting pot" that blends the various groups in a society (the dominant/mainstream group and minority groups) into a new hybridized cultural identity rather than expecting minority groups to conform to the majority's standards.

Definition: amalgamation

Interactions between members of distinct ethnic and cultural groups that reduce barriers between the groups over time.

Debate is ongoing among sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and political pundits regarding the relative merits of each approach and which, if any, most accurately describes the United States. It is a complex and often contentious question because people may confuse their personal ideologies (what they think the United States should strive for) with social reality (what actually occurs). Furthermore, the United States is a large, complex country geographically that is comprised of large urban centers with millions of residents, moderately populated areas characterized by small towns, and mostly rural communities with only several hundred or a few thousand inhabitants. The nature of social and cultural life varies significantly with the setting in which it occurs.

NOTES

32. Canadian Multicultural Act, 1985. http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/FullText.html↵

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11.7: Sports, Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity

ANTHROPOLOGY MEETS POPULAR CULTURE

Throughout this chapter, I have stated that the concept of race is a socially constructed idea and explained why biologically distinct human races do not exist. Still, many in the United States cling to a belief in the existence of biological racial groups (regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds). Historically, the nature of popular sports in the United States has been offered as "proof" of biological differences between races in terms of natural athletic skills and abilities. In this regard, the world of sports has served as an important social institution in which notions of biological racial differences become reified—mistakenly assumed as objective, real, and factual. Specifically, many Americans have noted the large numbers of African Americans in Olympic sprinting, the National Football League (NFL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA) and interpreted their disproportionate number as perceived "evidence" or "proof" that "blacks" have unique genes, muscles, bone structures, and/or other biological qualities that make them superior athletes relative to people from other racial backgrounds—that they are "naturally gifted" runners and jumpers and thus predominate in sports.

This topic sparked intense media attention in 2012 during the lead-up to that year's Olympics in London. Michael Johnson, a retired African American track star who won gold medals at the 1992, 1996, and 2000 Summer Olympic Games, declared that "black" Americans and West Indians (of Jamaican, Trinidadian, Barbadian, and other Caribbean descent) dominated international sprinting competitions because they possessed a "superior athletic gene" that resulted from slavery: "All my life, I believed I became an athlete through my own determination, but it's impossible to think that being descended from slaves hasn't left an imprint through the generations . . . slavery has benefited descendants like me. I believe there is a superior athletic gene in us."[33] Others have previously expressed similar ideas, such as writer John Entine, who suggested in his book, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're Afraid to Talk About It* (2000), that the brutal nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and harsh conditions of slavery in the Americas produced slaves who could move faster and who had stronger, more durable bodies than the general population and that those supposedly hardier bodies persisted in today's African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, giving them important athletic advantages over others. In a similar vein, former CBS sportscaster Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder claimed, on the eve of Super Bowl XXII in 1988, that African Americans comprised the majority of NFL players because they were "bred that way" during slavery as a form of selective breeding between bigger and stronger slaves much like had been done with racehorses. Snyder was fired from CBS shortly after amid a tidal wave of controversy and furor. Racial stereotypes regarding perceptions of innate differences in athletic ability were a major theme in the 1992 comedy film *White Men Can't Jump*, which starred Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson as an inter-racial pair of basketball street hustlers.

Despite such beliefs, even among people who otherwise do not harbor racist sentiments, the notion of innate "black" athletic supremacy is obviously misguided, fallacious, and self-contradictory when we examine the demographic composition of the full range of sports in the United States rather than focusing solely on a few extremely popular sports that pay high salaries and have long served as inspiration for upward mobility and fame in a society in which educational and employment opportunities for lower-income and impoverished minority groups (often concentrated in inner-city communities) have rarely been equivalent to those of middle-class and affluent "whites" living in small towns and suburban communities. Take the myth that "blacks" have an innately superior jumping ability. The idea that "white men can't jump" stems from the relatively small number of white American players in the NBA and has been reified by the fact that only one "white" player (Brent Barry of the Los Angeles Clippers in 1996) has ever won the NBA's annual slam-dunk contest. However, the stereotype would be completely inverted if we look at the demographic composition and results of high jump competitions. The high jump is arguably a better gauge of leaping ability than a slam-dunk contest since it requires raising the entire body over a horizontal bar and prohibits extension of the arms overhead, thus diminishing any potential advantage from height. For decades, both the men's and the women's international high jump competitions have been dominated by white athletes from the United States and Europe. Yet no one attributes their success to "white racial genes." American society does not have a generational history of viewing people who are socially identified as "white" in terms of body type and physical prowess as it does with African Americans.

The same dynamic is at play if we compare basketball with volleyball. Both sports require similar sets of skills, namely, jumping, speed, agility, endurance, and outstanding hand-eye coordination. Nevertheless, beach volleyball has tended to be dominated by "white" athletes from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe while indoor volleyball is more "racially balanced" (if we assume that biological human races actually exist) since the powerhouse indoor volleyball nations are the United States, China, Japan, Brazil, Cuba, and Russia.

Thus, a variety of factors, including cultural affinities and preferences, social access and opportunities, existence of a societal infrastructure that supports youth participation and development in particular sports, and the degree of prestige assigned to various sports by nations, cultures, and ethnic communities, all play significant roles in influencing the concentration of social and/or ethnic groups in particular sports. It is not a matter of individual or group skills or talents; important socio-economic dimensions shape who participates in a sport and who excels. Think about a sport in which you have participated or have followed closely. What social dynamics do you associate with that sport in terms of the gender, race/ethnicity, and social class of the athletes who predominate in it?

For additional insight into the important role that social dynamics play in shaping the racial/ethnic, social class, and cultural dimensions of athletes, let us briefly consider three sports: basketball, boxing, and football. While basketball is a national sport played throughout the United States, it also has long been associated with urban/inner-city environments, and many professional American basketball players have come from working class and lower-income backgrounds. This trend dates to the 1930s, when Jewish players and teams dominated professional basketball in the United States. That dominance was commonly explained by the media in terms of the alleged "scheming," "flashiness," and "artful dodging" nature of the "Jewish culture." In other words, Jews were believed to have a fundamental talent for hoops that explained their over-representation in the sport. In reality, most Jewish immigrants in the early twentieth century lived in working class, urban neighborhoods such as New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago where basketball was a popular sport in the local social fabric of working-class communities.[34]

By 1992, approximately 90 percent of NBA players were African American, and the league's demographics once again fueled rumors that a racial/ethnic group was "naturally gifted" in basketball. However, within ten short years, foreign-born players largely from Eastern European nations such as Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Serbia, Croatia, Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey accounted for nearly 20 percent of the starting line-ups of NBA teams. The first player selected in the 2002 NBA draft was seven-foot six-inch center Yao Ming, a native of Shanghai, China, and by the early 2000s, the United States had lost some of its traditional dominance of international basketball as several nations began to catch up because of the tremendous globalization of basketball's popularity.

Like basketball, boxing has been an urban sport popular among working-class ethnic groups. During the early twentieth century, both amateur and professional boxing in the United States were dominated by European immigrant groups, particularly the Irish, Italians, and Jewish Americans. As with basketball, which inspired the "hoop dreams" of inner-city youths to escape poverty by reaching the professional ranks, boxing provided sons of lower-income European immigrants with dreams of upward mobility, fame, and fortune. In fact, it was one of the few American sports that thrived during the Great Depression, attracting a wave of impoverished young people who saw pugilism as a ticket to financial security. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, intra-European ethnic rivalries (Irish vs. Italian, Italian vs. Jewish) were common in U.S. boxing; fighters were seen as quasi-ambassadors of their respective neighborhoods and ethnic communities.

The demographic composition of boxers began to change in the latter half of the twentieth century when formerly stigmatized and racialized Eastern European immigrant groups began to be perceived simply as "white" and mainstream. They attained middle-class status and relocated to the newly established suburbs, and boxing underwent a profound racial and ethnic transition. New urban minority groups—African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans who moved into inner-city neighborhoods vacated by Europeans began to dominate boxing.

Finally, consider football, which has surpassed baseball as the most popular spectator sport in the United States and is popular with all social classes, races/ethnicities, and regions. Collegiate and professional football rosters are also undergoing a demographic change; a growing number of current National College Athletic Association and NFL players were born outside the mainland United States. Since the 1980s, many athletes from American Samoa, a U.S. territory in the South Pacific, have joined U.S. football teams. A boy in American Samoa is an astounding 56 times more likely to make the NFL than a boy born and raised on the U.S. mainland![35] American Samoa's rapid transformation into a gridiron powerhouse is the result of several inter-related factors that dramatically increased the appeal of the sport across the tiny island, including the cultural influence of American missionaries who introduced football. Expanding migration of Samoans to Hawaii and California in recent decades has also fostered their interest in football, which has trickled back to the South Pacific, and the NFL is working to expand the popularity of football in American Samoa.[36] Similarly, Major League Baseball has been promoting baseball in the Dominican Republic, Korea, and Japan in recent years.

CONCLUSION

Issues of race, racism, and ethnic relations remain among the most contentious social and political topics in the United States and throughout the world. Anthropology offers valuable information to the public regarding these issues, as anthropological knowledge encourages individuals to "think outside the box" about race and ethnicity. This "thinking outside the box" includes understanding that racial and ethnic categories are socially constructed rather than natural, biological divisions of humankind and realizing that the current racial and ethnic categories that exist in the United States today do not necessarily reflect categories used in other countries. Physical anthropologists, who study human evolution, epidemiology, and genetics, are uniquely qualified to explain why distinct biological human races do not exist. Nevertheless, race and ethnicity – as social constructs – continue to be used as criteria for prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, and stereotypes well into the twenty-first century. Cultural anthropologists play a crucial role in informing the public how the concept of race originated, how racial categories have shifted over time, how race and ethnicity are constructed differently within various nations across the world, and how the current racial and ethnic categories utilized in the United States were arbitrarily labeled and defined by the federal government under OMB Directive 15 in 1977. Understanding the complex nature of clines and continuous biological human variation, along with an awareness of the distinct ways in which race and ethnicity have been constructed in different nations, enables us to recognize racial and ethnic labels not as self-evident biological divisions of humans, but instead as socially created categories that vary cross-culturally.

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NOTES

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34. The 2010 documentary *The First Basket* by David Vyorst describes the experiences of Jewish basketball players in the mid-twentieth century U.S. ↵
35. Scott Pelley, America Samoa: Football Island. *CBS News*, September 17, 2010 http://www.cbsnews.com/news/american-samoa-football-island-17-09-2010/↵
36. Ibid. ↵

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11.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. García describes the reasons that race is considered a “discredited concept in human biology.” Despite this scientific fact, most people continue to believe that race is “real.” Why do you think race has continued to be an important social reality even after it has been discredited scientifically?
2. The process of racial formation is different in every society. In the United States, the “one-drop rule” and hypodescent have historically affected the way people with multiracial backgrounds have been racialized. How have ideas about multiracial identity been changing in the past few decades? As the number of people who identify as “multiracial” increases, do you think there will be changes in the way we think about other racial categories?
3. Members of some ethnic groups are able to practice symbolic ethnicity, limited or occasional displays of ethnic pride and identity. Why can ethnicity be displayed in an optional way while race cannot?
4. There is no scientific evidence supporting the idea that racial or ethnic background provides a biological advantage in sports. Instead, a variety of social dynamics, including cultural affinities and preferences as well as access and opportunities influence who will become involved in particular sports. Think about a sport in which you have participated or have followed closely. What social dynamics do you think are most responsible for affecting the racial, ethnic, gender, or social class composition of the athletes who participate?

GLOSSARY

Amalgamation: interactions between members of distinct ethnic and cultural groups that reduce barriers between the groups over time.

Assimilation: pressure placed on minority groups to adopt the customs and traditions of the dominant culture.

Cline: differences in the traits that occur in populations across a geographical area. In a cline, a trait may be more common in one geographical area than another, but the variation is gradual and continuous, with no sharp breaks.

Ethnic group: people in a society who claim a distinct identity for themselves based on shared cultural characteristics and ancestry.

Ethnicity: the degree to which a person identifies with and feels an attachment to a particular ethnic group.

Ethnogenesis: gradual emergence of new ethnicities in response to changing social circumstances.

Hypodescent: a racial classification system that assigns a person with mixed racial heritage to the racial category that is considered least privileged.

Jim Crow laws: a term used to describe laws passed by state and local governments in the United States during the early twentieth century to enforce racial segregation of public and private places.

Multiculturalism: maintenance of multiple cultural traditions in a single society.

Nonconcordant: genetic traits that are inherited independently rather than as a package.

One-drop rule: the practice of excluding a person with any non-white ancestry from the white racial category.

Pigmentocracy: a society characterized by strong correlation between a person’s skin color and his or her social class.

Race: an attempt to categorize humans based on observed physical differences.

Racial formation: the process of defining and redefining racial categories in a society.

Reified: the process by which an inaccurate concept or idea is accepted as “truth”.

Socially constructed: a concept developed by society that is maintained over time through social interactions that make the idea seem â€œreal.â€

Symbolic ethnicity: limited or occasional displays of ethnic pride and identity that are primarily for public display.

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Justin D. García - I am an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, a public state-owned university located approximately 70 miles west of Philadelphia. I earned my Ph.D. in Anthropology from Temple University in 2011, with a specific focus in urban anthropology. I currently live in Chester County, Pennsylvania in suburban Philadelphia. My research interests include U.S. immigration, social constructs of race and ethnicity, urban social/cultural life, U.S. popular culture, human evolution/the hominid lineage, and anthropological theory. Aside from anthropology, my hobbies include lifting weights, watching sports (particularly boxing, football, and basketball) and movies, traveling, and playing video games (the Grand Theft Auto series is my personal favorite).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12: Gender and Sexuality

Learning Objectives

- Identify ways in which culture shapes sex/gender and sexuality.
- Describe ways in which gender and sexuality organize and structure the societies in which we live.
- Assess the range of possible ways of constructing gender and sexuality by sharing examples from different cultures, including small-scale societies.
- Analyze how anthropology as a discipline is affected by gender ideology and gender norms.

12.1: Sex and Gender According to Anthropologists
12.2: Foundations of the Anthropology of Gender
12.3: The Gender Binary and Beyond
12.4: Gender Variability and Third Gender
12.5: Gender Stratification
12.6: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender
12.7: Sexuality and Gender
12.8: End of Chapter Discussion
12.9: About the Authors

Image: The rainbow flag is a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) pride and LGBT social movements in use since the 1970s. (CC BY 2.0; Ludovic Bertron).

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12.1: Sex and Gender According to Anthropologists

INTRODUCTION: SEX AND GENDER ACCORDING TO ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Anthropologists[1] are fond of pointing out that much of what we take for granted as "natural" in our lives is actually cultural—it is not grounded in the natural world or in biology but invented by humans.[2] Because culture is invented, it takes different forms in different places and changes over time in those places. Living in the twenty-first century, we have witnessed how rapidly and dramatically culture can change, from ways of communicating to the emergence of same-sex marriage. Similarly, many of us live in culturally diverse settings and experience how varied human cultural inventions can be.

We readily accept that clothing, language, and music are cultural—invented, created, and alterable—but often find it difficult to accept that gender and sexuality are not natural but deeply embedded in and shaped by culture. We struggle with the idea that the division of humans into two and only two categories, "male" and "female," is not universal, that "male" and "female" are cultural concepts that take different forms and have different meanings cross-culturally. Similarly, human sexuality, rather than being simply natural is one of the most culturally significant, shaped, regulated, and symbolic of all human capacities. The concept of humans as either "heterosexual" or "homosexual" is a culturally and historically specific invention that is increasingly being challenged in the United States and elsewhere.

Part of the problem is that gender has a biological component, unlike other types of cultural inventions such as a sewing machine, cell phone, or poem. We do have bodies and there are some male-female differences, including in reproductive capacities and roles, albeit far fewer than we have been taught. Similarly, sexuality, sexual desires and responses, are partially rooted in human natural capacities. However, in many ways, sexuality and gender are like food. We have a biologically rooted need to eat to survive and we have the capacity to enjoy eating. What constitutes "food," what is "delicious" or "repulsive," the contexts and meanings that surround food and human eating—those are cultural. Many potentially edible items are not "food" (rats, bumblebees, and cats in the United States, for example), and the concept of "food" itself is embedded in elaborate conventions about eating: how, when, with whom, where, "utensils," for what purposes? A "romantic dinner" at a "gourmet restaurant" is a complex cultural invention.

In short, gender and sexuality, like eating, have biological components. But cultures, over time, have erected complex and elaborate edifices around them, creating systems of meaning that often barely resemble what is natural and innate. We experience gender and sexuality largely through the prism of the culture or cultures to which we have been exposed and in which we have been raised.

In this chapter, we are asking you to reflect deeply on the ways in which what we have been taught to think of as natural, that is, our sex, gender, and our sexuality, is, in fact, deeply embedded in and shaped by our culture. We challenge you to explore exactly which, if any, aspects of our gender and our sexuality are totally natural.

One powerful aspect of culture, and a reason cultural norms feel so natural, is that we learn culture the way we learn our native language: without formal instruction, in social contexts, picking it up from others around us, without thinking. Soon, it becomes deeply embedded in our brains. We no longer think consciously about what the sounds we hear when someone says "hello" mean unless we do not speak English. Nor is it difficult to "tell the time" on a "clock" even though "time" and "clocks" are complex cultural inventions.

The same principles apply to gender and sexuality. We learn very early (by at least age three) about the categories of gender in our culture—that individuals are either "male" or "female" and that elaborate beliefs, behaviors, and meanings are associated with each gender. We can think of this complex set of ideas as a **gender ideology** or a *cultural model of gender***.** All societies have gender ideologies, just as they have belief systems about other significant areas of life, such as health and disease, the natural world, and social relationships, including family.

Definition: gender ideology

A complex set of beliefs about gender and gendered capacities, propensities, preferences, identities and socially expected behaviors and interactions that apply to males, females, and other gender categories. Gender ideology can differ among cultures and is acquired through enculturation. Also known as a *cultural model of gender*.

NOTES

1. The Introduction and much of the material in the Foundations segment draws upon and synthesizes Mukhopadhyay's decades of research, writing, and teaching courses on culture, gender, and human sexuality. Some of it has been published. Other material

comes from lecture notes. See http://www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay. ↵

2. We use quotation marks here and elsewhere in the chapter to alert readers to a culturally specific, culturally invented concept in the United States. We need to approach U.S. cultural inventions the same way we would a concept we encountered in a foreign, so-called “exotic” culture. ↵

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12.2: Foundations of the Anthropology of Gender

GENDER VS SEX

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are sometimes used interchangeably and do in fact complement each other, they nonetheless refer to different aspects of what it means to be a woman or man in any society.

Sex refers to the anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that are determined at the moment of conception and develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence. Females, of course, have two X chromosomes, while males have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. From this basic genetic difference spring other biological differences. The first to appear are the different genitals that boys and girls develop in the womb and that the doctor (or midwife) and parents look for when a baby is born (assuming the baby's sex is not already known from ultrasound or other techniques) so that the momentous announcement, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" can be made. The genitalia are called *primary sex characteristics*, while the other differences that develop during puberty are called *secondary sex characteristics* and stem from hormonal differences between the two sexes. In this difficult period of adolescents' lives, boys generally acquire deeper voices, more body hair, and more muscles from their flowing testosterone. Girls develop breasts and wider hips and begin menstruating as nature prepares them for possible pregnancy and childbirth. For better or worse, these basic biological differences between the sexes affect many people's perceptions of what it means to be female or male.

Definition: sex

The anatomical and other biological differences that determine male and female.

GENDER: A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

If sex is a biological concept, then gender is a culturally constructed concept. **Gender** is the meanings, values, and characteristics that are culturally assigned based on sex, such as masculinity and femininity (Blackstone 2003). *Femininity* refers to the cultural expectations we have of girls and women, while *masculinity* refers to the expectations we have of boys and men. A related concept, **gender roles**, refers to the set of expectations about tasks, attitudes, and behaviors that are culturally assigned based on sex and gender (Blackstone 2003). How we think and behave as females and males is not etched in stone by our biology but rather is a result of how society expects us to think and behave based on what sex we are. As we grow up, we learn these expectations as we develop our **gender identity**, or our beliefs about ourselves as females or males.

Definition: gender

The meanings, values, and characteristics that are culturally assigned based on sex such as masculinity and femininity.

Definition: gender roles

The set of expectations about tasks, attitudes, and behaviors that are culturally assigned based on sex and gender.

Definition: gender identity

Our beliefs about ourselves as females or males.

REJECTING BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

In the past, influenced by Judeo-Christian religion and nineteenth and twentieth-century scientific beliefs, biology (and reproductive capacity) was literally considered to be destiny. Males and females, at least "normal" males and females, were thought to be born with different intellectual, physical, and moral capacities, preferences, tastes, personalities, and predispositions for violence and suffering.[3]

Ironically, many cultures, including European Christianity in the Middle Ages, viewed women as having a strong, often "insatiable" sexual "drive" and capacity. But by the nineteenth century, women and their sexuality were largely defined in reproductive terms, as in their capacity to "carry a man's child." Even late-twentieth-century human sexuality texts often referred only to "reproductive systems," to genitals as "reproductive" organs, and excluded the "clitoris" and other female organs of sexual pleasure that had no reproductive function. For women, the primary, if not sole, legitimate purpose of sexuality was reproduction.[4]

Nineteenth and mid-twentieth century European and U.S. gender ideologies linked sexuality and gender in other ways.[5] Sexual preference—the sex to whom one was attracted—was "naturally" heterosexual, at least among "normal" humans, and "normal," according to mid-twentieth century Freudian-influenced psychology, was defined largely by whether one adhered to conventional gender roles for males and females. So, appropriately, "masculine" men were "naturally" attracted to "feminine" women and vice versa. Homosexuality, too, was depicted not just as a sexual preference but as gender-inappropriate role behavior, down to gestures and color of clothing.[6] This is apparent in old stereotypes of gay men as "effeminate" (acting like a female, wearing "female" fabrics such as silk or colors such as pink, and participating in "feminine" professions like ballet) and of lesbian women as "butch" (cropped hair, riding motorcycles, wearing leather—prototypical masculinity). Once again, separate phenomena—sexual preference and gender role performance—were conflated because of beliefs that rooted both in biology. "Abnormality" in one sphere (sexual preference) was linked to "abnormality" in the other sphere (gendered capacities and preferences).

In short, the gender and sexual ideologies were based on *biological determinism*, the belief that there are innate biological differences in intelligence, the capacity for language, and modes of behavior between human populations (as defined in Chapter 3). Expanding on that theory to include male and female populations, these ideologies assumed that biological differences between males and females leads to fundamentally different capacities, preferences, and gendered behaviors. This suggests that gender roles are rooted in biology, not culture, which is scientifically unsupported.

Decades of research on gender and sexuality, including by feminist anthropologists, has challenged these old theories, particularly biological determinism. We now understand that cultures, not nature, create the gender ideologies that go along with being born male or female and the ideologies vary widely, cross-culturally. What is considered "man's work" in some societies, such as carrying heavy loads, or farming, can be "woman's work" in others. What is "masculine" and "feminine" varies: pink and blue, for example, are culturally invented gender-color linkages, and skirts and "make-up" can be worn by men, indeed by "warriors." Hindu deities, male and female, are highly decorated and difficult to distinguish, at least by conventional masculine U.S. stereotypes (see examples and Figures 12.2.1 and 12.2.2).



Figure 12.2.1: Hindu deities: Vishnu and his many "avatars" or forms (all male).



Figure 12.2.2: Hindu Deities: Vishnu and Goddess Shiva plus avatars.

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3. See Carolyn B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Also, Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender. Biological Theories About Women and Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). For some web-based examples of these nineteenth century views, see article at http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century. For a list of descriptive terms, see www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/Women_in_the_Nineteenth_Century.htm. ↵
4. For an example of a textbook, see Herant A. Katchadurian, *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989). See also Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013). ↵
5. Material in the following paragraphs comes from Mukhopadhyay, unpublished Human Sexuality lecture notes. ↵
6. Herant A. Katchadurian, *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality*, 365. ↵

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12.3: The Gender Binary and Beyond

We anthropologists, as noted earlier, love to shake up notions of what is "natural" and "normal." One common assumption is that all cultures divide human beings into two and only two genders, a dualistic or **binary model of gender**. However, in some cultures gender is more fluid and flexible, allowing individuals born as one biologic sex to assume another gender or creating more than two genders from which individuals can select. Examples of non-binary cultures come from pre-contact Native America. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict long ago identified a fairly widespread phenomenon of "two-spirit" people, individuals who do not comfortably conform to the gender roles and gender ideology normally associated with their biologic sex. Among Zuni people of New Mexico, beginning in the pre-contact era which was a relatively gender-egalitarian horticultural society, individuals could choose an alternative role of "not-men" or "not-women." A two-spirited Zuni man would do the work and wear clothing normally associated with females, having shown a preference for female-identified activities and symbols at an early age. In some, but not all cases, they would eventually marry a man. Early European ethnocentric reports often described it as a form of homosexuality. Anthropologists suggested more-complex motivations, including dreams of selection by spirits, individual psychologies, biological characteristics, and negative aspects of male roles (e.g., warfare). Most significantly, these alternative gender roles were acceptable, publicly recognized, and sometimes venerated.[13]

Definition: binary model of gender

Cultural definitions of gender that include only two identities – male and female (also called the *dualistic model of gender*).

Less is known about additional gender roles available to biological women, although stories of "manly hearted women" suggest a parallel among some Native American groups. For example, a Kutenai woman known to have lived in 1811 was originally married to a French-Canadian man but then returned to the Kutenai and assumed a male gender role, changing her name to Kauxuma nupika (Gone-to-the-Spirits), becoming a spiritual prophet, and eventually marrying a woman.[14]

A well-known example of a non-binary gender system is found among the Hijra in India. Often called a **third gender**, these individuals are usually biologically male but adopt female clothing, gestures, and names; eschew sexual desire and sexual activity; and go through religious rituals that give them certain divine powers, including blessing or cursing couples' fertility and performing at weddings and births. Hijra may undergo voluntary surgical removal of genitals through a "nirvan" or rebirth operation. Some hijra are males born with ambiguous external genitals, such as a particularly small penis or testicles that did not fully descend.[15]

Definition: third gender

A gender identity that exists in non-binary gender systems offering one or more gender roles separate from male or female.

Research has shown that individuals with ambiguous genitals, sometimes called "intersex," are surprisingly common. Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein estimate that such intersex individuals constitute five percent of human births.[16] So what are cultures to do when faced with an infant or child who cannot easily be "sexed?" Some cultures, including the United States, used to force children into one of the two binary categories, even if it required surgery or hormone therapy. But in other places, such as India and among the Isthmus Zapotec in southern Oaxaca, Mexico, they have instead created a third gender category that has an institutional identity and role to perform in society.[17]

These cross-cultural examples demonstrate that the traditional rigid binary gender model in the United States is neither universal nor necessary. While all cultures recognize at least two biological sexes, usually based on genitals visible at birth, and have created at least two gender roles, many cultures go beyond the binary model, offering a third or fourth gender category. Other cultures allow individuals to adopt, without sanctions, a gender role that is not congruent with their biological sex. In short, biology need not be destiny when it comes to gender roles, as we are increasingly discovering in the United States.

VARIABILITY AMONG BINARY CULTURES

Even societies with a binary gender system exhibit enormous variability in the meanings and practices associated with being male or female. Sometimes male-female distinctions pervade virtually all aspects of life, structuring space, work, social life, communication, body decoration, and expressive forms such as music. For instance, both genders may farm, but may have separate fields for "male" and "female" crops and gender-specific crop rituals. Or, the village public space may be spatially segregated with a "men's house" (a special dwelling only for men, like a "men's club") and a "women's house." In some societies, such as the

Sambia of New Guinea, even when married couples occupy the same house, the space within the house is divided into male and female areas.[18]

Women and men can also have gender-specific religious rituals and deities and use gender-identified tools. There are cases of "male" and "female" foods, rains, and even "languages" (including words, verb forms, pronouns, inflections, and writing systems; one example is the Nu Shu writing system used by some women in parts of China in the twentieth century).[19]Gender ideologies can emphasize differences in character, capacities, and morality, sometimes portraying males and females as "opposites" on a continuum.

In societies that are highly segregated by gender, gender relationships sometimes are seen as hostile or oppositional with one of the genders (usually female) viewed as potentially threatening. Female bodily fluids, such as menstrual blood and vaginal secretions, can be dangerous, damaging to men, "impure," and "polluting," especially in ritual contexts. In other cases, however, menstrual blood is associated with positive power. A girl's first menstruation may be celebrated publicly with elaborate community rituals, as among the Bemba in southern Africa, and subsequent monthly flows bring special privileges.[20] Men in some small-scale societies go through ritualized nose-bleeding, sometimes called "male menstruation," though the meanings are quite complex.[21]

Of course, gender-differentiation is not unique to small-scale societies like the Sambia. Virtually all major world religions have traditionally segregated males and females spatially and "marked" them in other ways. Look at eighteenth- and nineteenth- century churches, which had gender-specific seating; at contemporary Saudi Arabia, Iranian, and conservative Malaysian mosques; and at Orthodox Jewish temples today in Israel and the United States.

NOTES

13. Information about alternative gender roles in pre-contact Native American communities can be found in Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women* (Boston: Pearson, 2013). Also, see the 2011 PBS Independent Lens film *Two Spirits* for an account of the role of two-spirit ideology in Navajo communities, including the story of a Navajo teenager who was the victim of a hate crime because of his two-spirit identity. ↵
14. Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women.*↵
15. Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: the Hijras of India* (Boston, MA: Cengage, 1999); Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Cross-cultural Variations* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland 2000); and Gayatri Reddy and Serena Nanda, "Hijras: An "Alternative" Sex/Gender in India," in *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. C. Brettell and C. Sargent, 278–285 (Upper Saddle River New Jersey: Pearson, 2005). ↵
16. Janet S. Hyde and John D. DeLamater, *Understanding Human Sexuality*, 99; Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women.*↵
17. Beverly Chinas, personal communication with Mukhopadhyay. See also her writings on Isthmus Zapotec women such as: Beverly Chinas, *The Isthmus Zapotecs: A Matrifocal Culture of Mexico* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1997). For a film on this culture, see Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne, *Blossoms of Fire, Film* (San Francisco: Film Arts Foundation, 2001).↵
18. Gilbert Herdt, *The Sambia* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 2006). For an excellent film see Gilbert Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes* (London UK: BBC, 1994). ↵
19. More information about the Nu shu writing system can be found in the film by Yue-Qing Yang, *Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1999). ↵
20. Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975). See Audrey Richards, *Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia* (London: Faber, 1956) and A. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia, An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: Oxford, 1939). ↵
21. See for example, Ian Hogbin, *The Island of Menstruating Men: Religion in Wogeo, New Guinea* (Scranton, PA: Chandler Publishing Company, 1970). ↵

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12.4: Gender Variability and Third Gender

Some of the most compelling evidence against a strong biological determination of gender roles comes from anthropologists, whose work on preindustrial societies demonstrates some striking gender variation from one culture to another. This variation underscores the impact of culture on how females and males think and behave.

Margaret Mead (1935) was one of the first anthropologists to study cultural differences in gender. In New Guinea she found three tribes—the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli—whose gender roles differed dramatically. In the Arapesh both sexes were gentle and nurturing. Both women and men spent much time with their children in a loving way and exhibited what we would normally call maternal behavior. In the Arapesh, then, different gender roles did not exist, and in fact, both sexes conformed to what Americans would normally call the female gender role.

The situation was the reverse among the Mundugumor. Here both men and women were fierce, competitive, and violent. Both sexes seemed to almost dislike children and often physically punished them. In the Mundugumor society, then, different gender roles also did not exist, as both sexes conformed to what we Americans would normally call the male gender role.

In the Tchambuli, Mead finally found a tribe where different gender roles did exist. One sex was the dominant, efficient, assertive one and showed leadership in tribal affairs, while the other sex liked to dress up in frilly clothes, wear makeup, and even giggle a lot. Here, then, Mead found a society with gender roles similar to those found in the United States, but with a surprising twist. In the Tchambuli, women were the dominant, assertive sex that showed leadership in tribal affairs, while men were the ones wearing frilly clothes and makeup.

Mead's research caused a firestorm in scholarly circles, as it challenged the biological view on gender that was still very popular when she went to New Guinea. In recent years, Mead's findings have been challenged by other anthropologists. Among other things, they argue that she probably painted an overly simplistic picture of gender roles in her three societies (Scheper-Hughes, 1987). Other anthropologists defend Mead's work and note that much subsequent research has found that gender-linked attitudes and behavior do differ widely from one culture to another (Morgan, 1989). If so, they say, the impact of culture on what it means to be a female or male cannot be ignored.

Extensive evidence of this impact comes from anthropologist George Murdock, who created the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample of almost 200 preindustrial societies studied by anthropologists. Murdock (1937) found that some tasks in these societies, such as hunting and trapping, are almost always done by men, while other tasks, such as cooking and fetching water, are almost always done by women. These patterns provide evidence for the evolutionary argument presented earlier, as they probably stem from the biological differences between the sexes. Even so, there were at least some societies in which women hunted and in which men cooked and fetched water.

More importantly, Murdock found much greater gender variation in several of the other tasks he studied, including planting crops, milking, and generating fires. Men primarily performed these tasks in some societies, women primarily performed them in other societies, and in still other societies both sexes performed them equally. Figure 12.4.2 (Gender Responsibility for Weaving) shows the gender responsibility for yet another task, weaving. Women are the primary weavers in about 61% of the societies that do weaving, men are the primary weavers in 32%, and both sexes do the weaving in 7% of the societies. Murdock's findings illustrate how gender roles differ from one culture to another and imply they are not biologically determined.

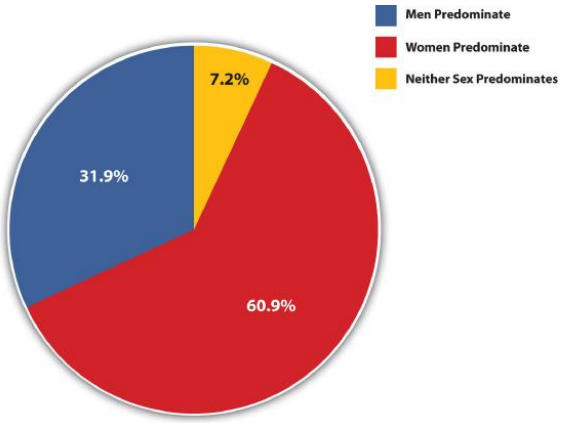


Figure 12.4.1: Gender Responsibility for Weaving
Source: Data from Standard Cross-Cultural Sample.

Anthropologists since Mead and Murdock have continued to investigate cultural differences in gender. Some of their most interesting findings concern gender and sexuality (Morgan, 1989; Brettell & Sargent, 2009). Although all societies distinguish "femaleness" and "maleness," additional gender categories exist in some societies. The Native Americans known as the Mohave, for example, recognize four genders: a woman, a woman who acts like a man, a man, and a man who acts like a woman. In some societies, a third, intermediary gender category is recognized. Prior to the late twentieth century, anthropologists called this category the *berdache*, who is usually a man who takes on a woman's role. However, this term is now considered outdated and can be offensive, because it is derived from a French word with a derogatory meaning. Berdache has been replaced with the term *two-spirit*, which is the term chosen by Native American and First Nations people. This intermediary category combines aspects of both femininity and masculinity of the society in which it is found and is thus considered a *third gender*. Although some people in this category are born as *intersex* individuals, meaning they have genitalia of both sexes, many are born biologically as one sex or the other but adopt a third gender.

Another example of this intermediary gender category may be found in India, where the *hirja* role involves males who wear women's clothing and identify as women (Reddy, 2006). The hirja role is an important part of Hindu mythology, in which third genders play key roles both as humans and as gods. Today people identified by themselves and others as hirjas continue to play an important role in Hindu practices and in Indian cultural life in general. Serena Nanda (1997, pp. 200–201) calls hirjas "human beings who are neither man nor woman" and says they are thought of as "special, sacred beings" even though they are sometimes ridiculed and abused.

One more example, but not the last, of a third gender is composed of women warriors in 33 Native American groups in North America. Walter L. Williams (1997) calls these women "amazons" and notes that they dress like men and sometimes even marry women. In some tribes, girls exhibit such "masculine" characteristics from childhood, while in others they may be recruited into "amazonhood." In the Kaska Indians, for example, a married couple with too many daughters would select one to "be like a man." When she is about 5 years of age, her parents would begin to dress her like a boy and have her do male tasks. Eventually, she would grow up to become a hunter. These examples of third genders identified by anthropologists remind us that gender is culturally constructed and not just a biological fact.

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12.5: Gender Stratification

EMERGENCE OF DOMESTIC (FEMALE) VS. PUBLIC (MALE) SPHERES

In large stratified and centralized societies, a “public” vs. “private” or “domestic” distinction appears. The public, extra-family sphere of life is a relatively recent development in human history even though most of us have grown up in or around cities and towns with their obvious public spaces, physical manifestations of the political, economic, and other extra-family institutions that characterize large-scale societies. In such settings, it is easy to identify the domestic or private spaces families occupy, but a similar public-domestic distinction exists in villages. The public sphere is associated with, and often dominated by, males. The domestic sphere, in contrast, is primarily associated with women—though it, too, can be divided into male and female spheres. This is referred to as the **domestic-public dichotomy**. In India, for example, where households frequently consist of multi-generational groups of male siblings and their families, there often are “lounging” spaces where men congregate, smoke pipes, chat, and meet visitors. Women’s spaces typically focus around the kitchen or cooking hearth (if outside) or at other sites of women’s activities.[25] In some cases, an inner court is the women’s area while the outer porch and roads that connect the houses are male spaces. In some Middle Eastern villages, women create over-the-roof paths for visiting each other without going “outside” into male spaces.[26]

Definition: domestic-public dichotomy

The contrast between women's role in the home and men's role in public life, with a corresponding social devaluation of women's work and worth (Kottak, 2012, p. 168).

The gender division between public and private/domestic, however, is as symbolic as it is spatial, often emphasizing a gender ideology of social separation between males and females (except young children), social regulation of sexuality and marriage, and male rights and control over females (wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers). It manifests as separate spaces in mosques, sex-segregated schools, and separate “ladies compartments” on trains, as in India (Figure 12.5.1).



Figure 12.5.1: A women only train car in India.

Of course, it is impossible to separate the genders completely. Rural women pass through the more-public spaces of a village to fetch water and firewood and to work in agricultural fields. Women shop in public markets, though that can be a “man’s job.” As girls more often attend school, as in India, they take public transportation and thus travel through public “male” spaces even if they travel to all-girl schools (Figure 12.5.2). At college, they can be immersed in and even live on campuses where men predominate, especially if they are studying engineering, computer science, or other technical subjects (Figure 12.5.3). This can severely limit Indian girls’ educational and occupational choices, particularly for girls who come from relatively conservative families or regions.[27]

One way in which women navigate “male” spaces is by adopting routes, behavior (avoiding eye contact), and/or clothing that create separation.[28] The term “purdah,” the separation or segregation of women from men, literally means “veiling,” although other devices can be used. In nineteenth-century Jaipur, Rajasthan, royal Rajput women inhabited the inner courtyard spaces of the palace. But an elaborate false building front, the hawa mahal, allowed them to view the comings and goings on the street without being exposed to the public male gaze.

As demand for educating girls has grown in traditionally sexually segregated societies, all-girl schools have been constructed, paralleling processes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States. At the university level, however, prestigious schools that offer high-demand subjects such as engineering often have historically been all-male, excluding women as Harvard once did.[29] In other cases, there are no female faculty members teaching traditionally male subjects like engineering at all-women colleges. In Saudi Arabia, women’s universities have taught courses using closed-circuit television to avoid violating norms of sexual segregation, particularly for young, unmarried women.[30] In countries such as India, gynecologists and obstetricians have been predominantly female, in part because families object to male doctors examining and treating women. Thus, in places that do not have female physicians, women’s health can suffer.



Figure 12.5.2: All-girls school in Bangalore, India.



Figure 12.5.3: Management studies graduate students at CUSAT-Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kerala, India.

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30. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, “Women in Science: Is the Glass Ceiling Disappearing?” Proceedings of conference organized by the National Institute of Science and Technology Development Studies, the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India; Indian Council of Social Science Research; and the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum. March 8–10, 2004. New Delhi, India. ↵
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32. For more details, see the film by Leslee Udwin, *India’s Daughter* (Firenze, Italy: Berta Film). The Wikipedia article about the film notes the reluctance of the Indian government to air the film in India, en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/India’s_Daughter. ↵
33. For a critique of the “myth” of the medieval chastity belt, see http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/chastity-belts-the-odd-truth-about-locking-up-womens-genitalia. ↵
34. See for example, the film by Sabiha Sumar, *Silent Waters* (Mumbai, India: Shringar Film). While this is not a documentary, the film reflects the tumultuous history of the partition into two countries. ↵
35. For the !Kung San, see Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: Life and Words of a Kung Woman* (New York: Vintage, 1983). For Trobrianders, see Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1987). ↵

IMAGE CREDITS

Figure 12.5.1. A women only train car in India. Photograph by Ajay Tallam, 2007.

Figure 12.5.2. All-girls school in Bangalore, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.

Figure 12.5.3. Management studies graduate students at CUSAT-Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kerala, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.

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12.6: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender

More-recent research has been focused on improving the ethnographic and archaeological record by re-examining old material. Some have turned from cause-effect relationships to better understanding how gender systems work and focusing on a single culture or cultural region. Others have explored a single topic, such as menstrual blood, cultural concepts of masculinity and infertility across cultures.[86]

Many American anthropologists "returned home," looking with fresh eyes at the diversity of women's lives in their own society: working-class women, immigrant women, women of various ethnic and racial groups, and women in different geographic regions and occupations.[87] Some ethnographers, for example, immersed themselves in the abortion debates, conducting fieldwork to understand the perspective and logic behind pro-choice and pro-life activists in North Dakota. Others headed to college campuses, studying the "culture of romance" or fraternity gang rape.[88] Peggy Sanday's work on sexual coercion, including her cross-cultural study of rape-prone societies, was followed by other studies of power-coercion-gender relationships, such as using new reproductive technologies for selecting the sex of children.[89]

Many previously unexplored areas such as the discourse around reproduction, representations of women in medical professions, images in popular culture, and international development policies (which had virtually ignored gender) came under critical scrutiny.[90] Others worked on identifying complex local factors and processes that produce particular configurations of gender and gender relations, such as the *patrifocal* (male-focused) cultural model of family in many parts of India.[91] Sexuality studies expanded, challenging existing binary paradigms, making visible the lives of lesbian mothers and other traditionally marginalized sexualities and identities.[92]

The past virtual invisibility of women in archaeology disappeared as a host of new studies was published, often by feminist anthropologists, including a pioneering volume by Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. That book gave rise to a multi-volume series specifically on gender and archaeology edited by Sarah Nelson. Everything from divisions of labor to power relations to sexuality could be scrutinized in the archaeological record.[93]

Some anthropologists argued that there are recurring patterns despite the complexity and variability of human gender systems. One is the impact of women's economic contributions on their power, prestige, and autonomy.[94] Women's work, alone, does not necessarily give them control or ownership of what they produce. It is not always valued and does not necessarily lead to political power. Women in many cultures engage in agricultural labor, but the fields are often owned and controlled by their husbands' families or by a landlord, as in many parts of India and Iran.[95] The women have little authority, prestige, or autonomy.[96] Many foraging and some horticultural societies, on the other hand, recognize women's economic and reproductive contributions, and that recognition may reflect relative equality in other spheres as well, including sexuality. Gender relations seem more egalitarian, overall, in small-scale societies such as the San, Trobrianders, and Na, in part because they are kinship-based, often with relatively few valuable resources that can be accumulated; those that exist are communally owned, usually by kinship groups in which both women and men have rights.

Another factor in gender equality is the social environment. Positive social relations—an absence of constant hostility or warfare with neighbors—seems to be correlated with relatively egalitarian gender relations. In contrast, militarized societies—whether small-scale horticultural groups like the Sambia who perceive their neighbors as potential enemies or large-scale stratified societies with formal military organizations and vast empires—seem to benefit men more than women overall.[97] Warrior societies culturally value men's roles, and warfare gives men access to economic and political resources.

As to old stereotypes about why men are warriors, there may be another explanation. From a reproductive standpoint, men are far more expendable than women, especially women of reproductive age.[98] While this theme has not yet been taken up by many anthropologists, male roles in warfare could be more about expendability than supposed greater male strength, aggressiveness, or courage. One can ask why it has taken so long for women in the United States to be allowed to fly combat missions? Certainly, it is not about women not being strong enough to carry the plane.[99]

Patriarchy . . . But What about Matriarchy?

The rise of stratified agriculture-intensive centralized "states" has tended to produce transformations in gender relations and gender ideologies that some have called **patriarchy**, a male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females overall and in every strata of society. Gender intersects with class and, often, with religion, caste, and ethnicity. So, while there could be powerful queens, males took precedence over females within royal families, and while upper-class Brahmin women in India could have male servants, they had far fewer formal assets, power, and rights than their brothers and

husbands. Also, as noted earlier, families strictly controlled their movements, interactions with males, "social reputations," and marriages. Similarly, while twentieth-century British colonial women in British-controlled India had power over some Indian men, they still could not vote, hold high political office, control their own fertility or sexuality, or exercise other rights available to their male counterparts.[100] Of course, poor lower-class lower-caste Indian women were (and still are) the most vulnerable and mistreated in India, more so overall than their brothers, husbands, fathers, or sons.

Definition: patriarchy

A male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females overall and in every strata of society.

On the other hand, while a form of *matriarchy* exists, we have yet to find female-dominated societies in which the extent and range of women's power, authority, status, and privilege parallel men's in patriarchal societies. In the twentieth century, some anthropologists at first confused "matriarchy" with *matrilineal*. In matrilineal societies, descent or membership in a kinship group is transmitted from mothers to their children (male and female) and then, through daughters, to their children, and so forth (as in many Na families). Matrilineal societies create woman-centered kinship groups in which having daughters is often more important to "continuing the line" than having sons, and living arrangements after marriage often center around related women in a *matrilocal* extended family household. Female sexuality may become less regulated since it is the mother who carries the "seed" of the lineage. In this sense, it is the reverse of the kinds of patrilineal, patrilocal, patrifocal male-oriented kinship groups and households one finds in many patriarchal societies. Peggy Sanday suggested, on these and other grounds, that the Minangkabau, a major ethnic group in Indonesia, is a matriarchy.[101]

Ethnographic data have shown that males, especially as members of matrilineages, can be powerful in matrilineal societies. Warfare, as previously mentioned, along with political and social stratification can alter gender dynamics. The Nayar (in Kerala, India), the Minangkabau, and the Na are matrilineal societies embedded in, or influenced by, dominant cultures and patriarchal religions such as Islam and Hinduism. The society of the Na in China is also *matrifocal* in some ways. Thus, the larger context, including contemporary global processes, can undermine women's power and status.[102] At the same time, though, many societies are clearly matrifocal, are relatively female-centered, and do not have the kinds of gender ideologies and systems found in most patriarchal societies.[103]

NOTES

86. See for example, Evelyn Blackwood. *Webs of Power. Women, Kin, and Community in a Sumatran Village* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. 2000); Marcia Inhorn, *Infertility and Patriarchy: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, ed. Blood Magic. *The Anthropology of Menstruation.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Marcia Inhorn, and Frank Van Balen, eds. *Infertility around the Globe: New Thinking on Childlessness, Gender and Reproductive Technologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). ↵
87. Johnnetta Cole, ed. *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind* (New York:Free Press, 1986).Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragone and Patricia Zavella, eds. *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*. (New York: Routledge, 1997). ↵
88. See for example, Faye Ginsburg. *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart. *Educated in Romance.* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990); Peggy Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*. (New York: New York University Press, 2007). ↵
89. Peggy Sanday, "The Socio-cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-cultural Study" *Journal of Social Issues* 37 no. 5 (1981): 5-27. See also Conrad Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology. Appreciating Cultural Diversity* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013); Veena Das, Violence, Gender and Subjectivity, *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 37 (2008):283-299; Tulsi Patel, ed. *Sex-Selective Abortion in India. Gender, Society and New Reproductive Technologies* (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2007). ↵
90. Eleanor Leacock and Helen I. Safa, eds., *Women's Work: Development and the Division of Labor by Gender* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1986); Nandini Gunewardena and Ann Kingsolver, eds. *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalities* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008); Kay B.Warren and Susan C. Bourque, "Women, Technology, and Development Ideologies. Frameworks and Findings," in Sandra Morgen, ed.

Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association Publication, 1989), 382-410. ↵

91. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay and Susan Seymour, ed. *Women, Education and Family Structure in India* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994). ↵
92. Ellen Lewin, *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender in American Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1993). ↵
93. See Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey, ed. *Engendering Archeology. Women and Prehistory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Sarah M. Nelson, *Worlds of Gender. The Archeology of Women's Lives Around the Globe*. (Lanham, MD: Altamira, 2007). See also earlier volumes. Rosemary A. Joyce, *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender and Archeology* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008); Barbara Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archeology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 317-336. ↵
94. The following analysis was developed by Mukhopadhyay in scholarly papers and in lecture notes. ↵
95. Mary E. Hegland, *Days of Revolution: Political Unrest in an Iranian Village* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015). ↵
96. This analysis was developed by Mukhopadhyay in scholarly papers and in lecture notes. An example of this pattern from Iran is Mary E. Hegland, *Days of Revolution*. ↵
97. Conrad Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology. Appreciating Cultural Diversity.15th ed*. (McGraw Hill, 2013). ↵
98. E. Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View;* C. Mukhopadhyay and Patricia Higgins, "Anthropological Studies of the Status of Women Revisited: 1977–1987." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17 (1988): 461–495. ↵
99. One 1970s male pilot, when asked about why there were no women pilots, said, without thinking, "Because women aren't strong enough to fly the plane!" He then realized what he'd said and laughed. From Mukhopadhyay, field notes, 1980. ↵
100. Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable. The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-century Colonial Cultures," in *Situated Lives. Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*, ed. Louise Lamphere, H. Ragone, and P. Zavella, 373–399 (New York: Routledge, 1997). ↵
101. Peggy Sanday, *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2002). ↵
102. Mukhopadhyay, lecture notes, Gender and Culture. ↵
103. See for instance Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea*; Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women;* Carolyn B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds. *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*.↵

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12.7: Sexuality and Gender

CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STUDYING SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Contemporary anthropology now recognizes the crucial role played by gender in human society. Anthropologists in the post-2000 era have focused on exploring fluidity within and beyond sexuality, incorporating a gendered lens in all anthropological research, and applying feminist science frameworks, discourse-narrative analyses, political theory, critical studies of race, and queer theory to better understand and theorize gendered dynamics and power. Pleasure, desire, trauma, mobility, boundaries, reproduction, violence, coercion, bio-politics, globalization, neoliberal "development" policies and discourses, immigration, and other areas of anthropological inquiry have also informed gender and sexuality studies. We next discuss some of those trends.[124]

Heteronormativity and Sexuality in the United States

In the long history of human sexual relationships, we see that most involve people from different biological sexes, but some societies recognize and even celebrate partnerships between members of the same biological sex.[125] In some places, religious institutions formalize unions while in others unions are recognized only once they result in a pregnancy or live birth. Thus, what many people in the United States consider "normal," such as the partnership of one man and one woman in a sexually exclusive relationship legitimized by the state and federal government and often sanctioned by a religious institution, is actually heteronormative. **Heteronormativity** is a term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault to refer to the often-unnoticed system of rights and privileges that accompany normative sexual choices and family formation. For example, a "biologically female" woman attracted to a "biologically male" man who pursued that attraction and formed a relationship with that man would be following a heteronormative pattern in the United States. If she married him, she would be continuing to follow societal expectations related to gender and sexuality and would be agreeing to state involvement in her love life as she formalizes her relationship.

Definition: heteronormativity

A term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault to refer to the often-unnoticed system of rights and privileges that accompany normative sexual choices and family formation.

Despite pervasive messages reinforcing heteronormative social relations, people find other ways to satisfy their sexual desires and organize their families. Many people continue to choose partners from the so-called "opposite" sex, a phrase that reflects the old U.S. bipolar view of males and females as being at opposite ends of a range of characteristics (strong-weak, active-passive, hard-soft, outside-inside, Mars-Venus).[126] Others select partners from the same biological sex. Increasingly, people are choosing partners who attract them—perhaps female, perhaps male, and perhaps someone with ambiguous physical sexual characteristics.

Labels have changed rapidly in the United States during the twenty-first century as a wider range of sexual orientations has been openly acknowledged, accompanied by a shift in our binary view of sexuality. Rather than thinking of individuals as either heterosexual OR homosexual, scholars and activists now recognize a *spectrum* of sexual orientations. Given the U.S. focus on identity, it is not surprising that a range of new personhood categories, such as bisexual, queer, questioning, lesbian, and gay have emerged to reflect a more-fluid, shifting, expansive, and ambiguous conception of sexuality and sexual identity.

Transgender, meanwhile, is a category for people who identify as a different gender than the one that was assigned to them at birth. This may entail a social transition or a physical one, using a number of methods. Anthropologist David Valentine explored how the concept of "transgender" became established in the United States and found that many people who were identified by others as transgender did not embrace the label themselves. This label, too, has undergone a profound shift in usage, and the high-profile transition by Caitlyn Jenner in the mid-2010s has further shifted how people think about those who identify as transgender.[127]

Definition: transgender

A category for people who or people who identify as a different gender than the one that was assigned to them at birth. This may entail a social transition or a physical one, using a number of methods.

By 2011, an estimated 8.7 million people in the United States identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.[128] These communities represent a vibrant, growing, and increasingly politically and economically powerful segment of the population. While people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender—or any of a number of other sexual and gender minorities—have existed throughout the United States' history, it is only since the Stonewall uprisings of 1969 that the modern LGBT movement has been a key force in U.S. society.[129] Some activists, community members, and scholars argue that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender) is a better choice of labels than GLBT since it puts lesbian identity in the foreground—a key issue because the term "gay" is often used as an umbrella term and can erase recognition of individuals who are not gay males. Recently, the acronym has been expanded to include LGBTQ (queer or questioning), LGBTQQ (both queer and questioning), LGBTQIA (queer/questioning, intersex, and/or asexual), and LGBTQAIA (adding allies as well).

Like the U.S. population overall, the LGBTQ community is extremely diverse. Some African-Americans prefer the term "same-gender loving" because the other terms are seen as developed by and for "white people." Emphasizing the importance and power of words, Jafari Sinclaire Allen explains that "same-gender loving" was "coined by the black queer activist Cleo Manago [around 1995] to mark a distinction between 'gay' and 'lesbian' culture and identification, and black men and women who have sex with members of the same sex."[130] While scholars continue to use gay, lesbian, and queer and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control uses MSM (men who have sex with men), "same-gender loving" resonates in some urban communities.

Not everyone who might fit one of the LGBTQQIA designations consciously identifies with a group defined by sexual orientation. Some people highlight their other identities, as Minnesotans, for example, or their ethnicity, religion, profession, or hobby—whatever they consider central and important in their lives. Some scholars argue that heteronormativity allows people who self-identify as heterosexual the luxury of not being defined by their sexual orientation. They suggest that those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth be referred to as **cisgender**.[131] Only when labels are universal rather than used only for non-normative groups, they argue, will people become aware of discrimination based on differences in sexual preference.

Definition: cisgender

A term used to describe those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Though people are urging adoption of sexual identity labels, not everyone is embracing the move to self-identify in a specific category. Thus, a man who is attracted to both men and women might self-identify as bisexual and join activist communities while another might prefer not to be incorporated into any sexual-preference-based politics. Some people prefer to eliminate acronyms altogether, instead embracing terms such as *genderfluid* and *genderqueer* that recognize a spectrum instead of a static identity. This freedom to self-identify or avoid categories altogether is important. Most of all, these shifts and debates demonstrate that, like the terms themselves, LGBTQ communities in the United States are diverse and dynamic with often-changing priorities and makeup.

Changing Attitudes toward LGBTQ People in the United States

In the last two decades, attitudes toward LGBTQ—particularly lesbian, gay and bisexual—people have changed dramatically. The most sweeping change is the extension of marriage rights to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. The first state to extend marriage rights was Massachusetts in 2003. By 2014, more than half of U.S. Americans said they believed same-sex couples should have the right to marry, and on June 26, 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. supreme court declared that same-sex couples had the legal right to marry.[132] Few civil rights movements have seen such progress in such a short period of time. While many factors have influenced the shift in attitudes, sociologists and anthropologists have identified increased awareness of and exposure to LGBTQ people through the media and personal interactions as playing key roles.[133]

Legalization of same-sex marriage also helped normalize same-sex parenting. Sarah, whose three young children—including a set of twins—are mothered by Sarah and her partner, was active in campaigns for marriage equality in Minnesota and ecstatic when the campaign succeeded in 2013 (see Text Box 4).

However, legalization of same-sex marriage has not been welcomed everywhere in the United States. Anthropologist Jessica Johnson's ethnographic work profiling a Seattle-based megachurch from 2006 through 2008 initially explored their efforts to oppose same-sex marriage. Later, she shifted her focus to the rhetoric of gender, masculinity, and cisgender sexuality used by the church and its pastor.[134] Official church communications dismissed homosexuality as aberrant and mobilized members to advocate against same-sex marriage. The church's efforts were not successful.

Interestingly, activists and gender studies scholars express concern over incorporating marriage—a heteronormative institution some consider oppressive—into queer spaces not previously governed by state authority. These concerns may be overshadowed by

a desire for normative lives and legal protections, but as sociologist Tamara Metz and others have argued, legally intertwining passion, romance, sexual intimacy, and economic rights and responsibilities is not necessarily a move in the right direction.[135] As Miriam Smith has written, "We must move beyond thinking of same-sex marriage and relationship recognition as struggles that pit allegedly normalized or assimilated same-sex couples against queer politics and sensibilities and, rather, recognize the increasingly complex gender politics of same-sex marriage and relationship recognition, a politics that implicates groups beyond the LGBT community."[136]

While U.S. culture on the whole has become more supportive and accepting of LGBTQ people, they still face challenges. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not federally protected statuses. Thus, in 32 states (as of 2016), employers can legally refuse to hire and can fire someone simply for being LGBTQ.[137] Even in states where queer people have legal protection, transgender and other gender-diverse people do not. LGBTQ people can be legally denied housing and other important resources heterosexual people take for granted. LGBTQ youth made up 40 percent of homeless young people in the United States in 2012 and are often thrust into homelessness by family rejection.[138] Transgender people are the most vulnerable and experience high levels of violence, including homicide.

Sexuality Outside the United States

Same-sex sexual and romantic relationships probably exist in every society, but concepts like "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" are cultural products that, in many ways, reflect a culturally specific gender ideology and a set of beliefs about how sexual preferences develop. In many cultures (such as the Sambia discussed above), same-sex sex is a behavior, not an identity. Some individuals in India identify as practicing "female-female sexuality" or "male-male sexuality." The film *Fire* by Mira Nair aroused tremendous controversy in India partly because it depicted a same-sex relationship between two married women somewhat graphically and because it suggested alternatives available to women stuck in unhappy and abusive patriarchal marriages.[139] Whether one is "homosexual" or "heterosexual" may not be linked simply to engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. Instead, as among some Brazilian males, your status in the sexual relationship, literally and symbolically, depends on (or determines!) whether you are the inserter or the penetrated.[140] Which would you expect involves higher status?

Even anthropologists who are sensitive to cross-cultural variations in the terms and understandings that accompany same-sex sexual and romantic relationships can still unconsciously project their own meanings onto other cultures. Evelyn Blackwood, an American, described how surprised she was to realize that her Sumatran lover, who called herself a "Tombois," had a different conception of what constituted a "lesbian" identity and lesbian relationship than she did.[141] We must be careful not to assume that other cultures share LGBTQ identities as they are understood in the United States and many European countries.

Furthermore, each country has its own approach to sexuality and marriage, and reproduction often plays a central role. In Israel, an embrace of pro-natalist policies for Jewish Israelis has meant that expensive reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilization are provided to women at no cost or are heavily subsidized. An Israeli gay activist described how surprised queer activists from other countries were when they found that nearly all Israeli female same-sex couples were raising children. (This embrace of same-sex parenting did not extend to male couples, for whom the state did not provide assisted reproductive support.) The pro-natalist policies can be traced in part to Israel's emergence as a state: founded in the aftermath of persecution and systematic genocide of Jewish residents of Europe from 1937 through 1945, Israel initially promoted policies that encouraged births at least in part as resistance to Nazi attempts to destroy the Jewish people. The contexts may be less dramatic elsewhere, but local and national histories often inform policies and practices.

In Thailand, Ara Wilson has explored how biological women embrace identities as *toms* and *dees*. Although these terms seem to be derived from English-language concepts (*dees* is etymologically related to "ladies"), suggesting international influences, the ubiquity and acceptance of *toms* and *dees* in Thailand does diverge from patterns in the United States.[142]

In China (as elsewhere), the experiences of those involved in male-male sexuality and those involved in female-female sexuality can differ. In her book *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*, Lucetta Yip Lo Kam discusses how lesbians in China note their lack of public social spaces compared with gay men.[143] Even the words *lala* and *tongzhi* index different categories from the English terms: *lala* encompasses lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people while *tongzhi* is a gloss term that usually refers to gay men but has been expanded in the last two decades to other uses. (*Tongzhi* is a cooptation of the Chinese-language socialist-era term for *comrade*.)

Language makes a difference in how individuals and communities articulate their identities. Anthropologists such as Kam have commented on how sharing their own backgrounds with those with whom they work can be instrumental in gaining trust and

building rapport. Her identity as a Chinese-speaking queer anthropologist and activist from Hong Kong helped women in Shanghai feel comfortable speaking with her and willing to include her in their networks.[144]

From these examples, we see that approaches to sexuality in different parts of the world are evolving, just as gender norms in the United States are undergoing tremendous shifts. Anthropologists often cross boundaries to research these changes, and their contributions will continue to shape understandings of the broad range of approaches to sexuality.

NOTES

124. There is a huge body of research on these (and other) topics that we simply have not been able to cover in one chapter of a book. We hope the material and references we have provided will give readers a starting point for further investigation! ↵
125. Many gender studies scholars have moved away from labeling people "biologically female" or "biologically male," shifting instead to terms like "assigned female at birth" and "assigned male at birth." Terms that foreground assignment help recognize the fluidity of gender identity and the existence of intersex people who do not fit neatly into those categories. ↵
126. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, "A Feminist Cognitive Anthropology: The Case of Women and Mathematics" *Ethos* 32 no. 4 (2004): 458-492. ↵
127. David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). See also Jessi Hempel, "My Brother's Pregnancy and the Making of a New American Family" *TIME* September 2016. http://time.com/4475634/trans-man-pregnancy-evan./↵
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131. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality" *Gender and Society* 23 no. 4 (2009): 440–464. ↵
132. Justin McCarthy, "Same-Sex Marriage Support Reaches New High at 55%." Gallup. http://www.gallup.com/poll/169640/sex-marriage-support-reaches-new-high.aspx. ↵
133. Ellen Lewin and William Leap, *Out in Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); William Leap and Ellen Lewin, *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). ↵
134. Jessica Johnson, "The Citizen-Soldier: Masculinity, War, and Sacrifice at an Emerging Church in Seattle, Washington." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 33 no. 2 (2010): 326–351. ↵
135. Tamara Metz, *Untying the Knot: Marriage, the State, and the Case for Their Divorce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). ↵
136. Miriam Smith, "Gender Politics and the Same-Sex Marriage Debate in the United States," Social Politics 17 no. 1 (2010): 1-28. Quote is on p.1 ↵
137. Luke Malone, "Here Are The 32 States Where You Can Be Fired For Being LGBT," Vocativ.com, February 12, 2015. http://www.vocativ.com/culture/lgbt/lgbt-rights-kansas/. ↵
138. The Williams Institute. 2012. "America's Shame: 40% of Homeless Youth are LGBT Kids." San Diego Gay and Lesbian News, 13 July. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/americas-shame-40-of-homeless-youth-are-lgbt-kids/. ↵
139. *Fire*, film by Mira Nair. 1996. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2yW8BtM8sw. ↵
140. Don Kulick, "The Gender of Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes" *American Anthropologist* 99 no. 3 (1997): 574–585. ↵
141. Evelyn Blackwood, "Tombois in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire," in *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Ellen Lewin, 411–434 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). ↵
142. Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies inthe Global City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). ↵
143. Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). ↵
144. Ibid. ↵

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12.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

1. From your experiences with US culture, what aspects of gender and sexuality do you see as being at least partially shaped by culture? Think about gender roles, vocabulary, appearance, what is considered erotic, etc.
2. How important is your gender to how you think about yourself, to your "identity" or self-definition, to your everyday life? Reflect on what it would be like to be a different gender.
3. How important is your "sexuality" and "sexual orientation" to how you think about yourself, to your identity or self-definition? Reflect on what it would be like if you altered your sexual identity or practices.

GLOSSARY

Binary model of gender: Cultural definitions of gender that include only two identities – male and female (also called the *dualistic model of gender*).

Cisgender: A term used to describe those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Domestic-public dichotomy: The contrast between women's role in the home and men's role in public life, with a corresponding social devaluation of women's work and worth.

Gender: The meanings, values, and characteristics that are culturally assigned based on sex such as masculinity and femininity.

Gender identity: Our beliefs about ourselves as females or males.

Gender ideology: A complex set of beliefs about gender and gendered capacities, propensities, preferences, identities and socially expected behaviors and interactions that apply to males, females, and other gender categories. Gender ideology can differ among cultures and is acquired through enculturation. Also known as a *cultural model of gender*.

Gender roles: The set of expectations about tasks, attitudes, and behaviors that are culturally assigned based on sex and gender.

Patriarchy: A male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females overall and in every strata of society.

Heteronormativity: A term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault to refer to the often-unnoticed system of rights and privileges that accompany normative sexual choices and family formation.

Sex: The anatomical and other biological differences that determine male and female.

Third gender: a gender identity that exists in non-binary gender systems offering one or more gender roles separate from male or female.

Transgender: A category for people who identify as a different gender than the one that was assigned to them at birth. This may entail a social transition or a physical one, using a number of methods.

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12.9: About the Authors

"Gender and Sexuality" in *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*, *2nd Edition*, Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges, 2020, under CC BY-NC 4.0.



Dr. Mukhopadhyay specializes in gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and culture-cognition, with research in the USA and India on gendered families, politics, and science-engineering. In graduate school she co-created one of the earliest gender-culture courses. She has developed numerous gender classes and taught, for 20 years, a popular anthropology and gender-oriented, multi-section Human Sexuality course. Gender-related publications include: *Cognitive Anthropology Through a Gendered Lens* (2011). *How Exportable are Western Theories of Gendered Science?* (2009), *A Feminist Cognitive Anthropology: The Case of Women and Mathematics* (2004), *Women, Education and Family Structure in India* (1994, with S. Seymour). She co-authored an early *Annual Review of Anthropology* article on gender (1988) and is in the Association for Feminist Anthropology. In other work, she served as a Key Advisor for the AAA RACE project; co-authored *How Real is Race: A Sourcebook on Race, Culture and Biology*, (2nd Edition, 2014) and promotes active learning approaches to teaching about culture (cf.2007).



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Abby Gondek is a PhD candidate in Global and Socio-cultural Studies (majoring in Anthropology/Sociology) at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. She defended her dissertation proposal in April 2016. Her project, "Jewish Women's Transracial, Transdisciplinary and Transnational Social Science Networks, 1920-1970" uses social network analysis and grounded theory methodology to understand the relationships between the anti-racist and pro-political/economic justice stance taken by Jewish female social scientists and their Jewish gendered-racialized subjectivities. Further information about her work is available from http://transform-art-gender.webs.com and http://abbygondek.blogspot.com.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Globalization

Learning Objectives

- Define globalization and the 5 “scapes” that can be used to characterize global flows or exchanges.
- Explain the relationship between globalization and the creation of new “glocal” lifestyles and forms of consumption.
- Describe some of the ways people use agency to respond to globalization including syncretism and participation in alternative markets.
- Assess the relationship between globalization, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism.
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the intensification of globalization.
- Discuss the implications of globalization for anthropology.

13.1: Overview and Early Globalization
13.2: The Five "Scapes" of Globalization
13.3: Selective Importation and Adaptation
13.4: Globalization in Everyday Life
13.5: Globalization and Neoliberalism
13.6: Responses to Globalization
13.7: Implications for Anthropology
13.8: End of Chapter Discussion
13.9: About the Authors

Thumbnail: Counter service in a McDonald's restaurant in Dukhan, Qatar. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Vincent van Zeijst).

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13.1: Overview and Early Globalization

It is Tuesday on campus as you enter the dining hall. The day's hot lunch entrées include Caribbean jerk pork with mango salsa and a side of collard greens. The next station is offering made-to-order Asian stir-fry. At the sandwich counter, tuna salad, an all-American classic, is being served in a pita. Now, are these dishes authentic? That, of course, depends on how you define authenticity.[1] A similar question was asked at Oberlin College in December 2015 when a group of students claimed that adapting foreign cuisines constituted a form of social injustice.[2] Their claim, which raised a great deal of controversy, was that the cafeteria's appropriation and poor execution of ethnic dishes was disrespectful to the cultures from which those recipes were taken. Many people dismissed the students' concerns as either an overreaction or as an attempt to rephrase a perennial complaint (bad cafeteria food) in a politically loaded language of social justice likely to garner a response from the administration. Regardless of what one thinks about this case, it *is* revealing of how college campuses—as well as the larger societies in which they are situated—have changed over time. The fact that dishes like sushi and banh mi sandwiches are even available in an Ohio college cafeteria suggests that globalization has intensified. The fact that the students would be reflexive enough to question the ethical implications of appropriating foreign cuisine suggests that we are truly in a new era. But what, in fact, is globalization?

EARLY GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a word commonly used in public discourse, but it is often loosely defined in today's society (much like the word "culture" itself). First appearing in the English language in the 1940s, the term "globalization" is now commonplace and is used to discuss the circulation of goods, the fast and furious exchange of ideas, and the movement of people.[3] Despite its common use, it seems that the many people using the term are often not defining it in the same way. Some treat globalization as simply an economic issue while others focus more on the social and political aspects. What is clear, however, is that globalization has influenced many different facets of contemporary social life. This actually makes globalization an ideal topic of study for anthropologists, who pride themselves on taking a holistic approach to culture. For our purposes, we adopt political scientist Manfred Steger's definition of **globalization**: "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."[4]

Definition: globalization

The intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

It is challenging to determine precisely when globalization began. Although some people discuss globalization as if it was an entirely new process without historical antecedents, in truth its precursors have been going on for a very long time. In this chapter, we argue that the distinguishing feature of globalization in the contemporary era is the speed, rather than the scope, of global interactions. Early modern technological innovations hastened globalization.[5] For instance, the invention of the wheel created a need for permanent roads that would facilitate transport of animal drawn carts. These wheeled vehicles increased people's mobility, which in turn facilitated the sharing of both goods and ideas. Even before the invention of the wheel, the creation of written communication systems allowed ideas to be shared between people in distant locations.

Certainly extensive empires have existed at various times throughout human history, including Chinese dynasties (the Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE, for instance, reached the same size the Roman Empire achieved much later); the Ottoman Empire, and the Roman Empire. Most recently in world history, European colonial expansion into Africa, Asia and the Americas marked another landmark of globalization. As discussed in the Development of Anthropological Ideas chapter, *colonialism* refers to the political, social, economic, and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended period of time. Technically, colonialism can be practiced by any group that is powerful enough to subdue other groups—and this certainly would be an accurate term for Ottoman and Roman imperial expansion—but as a term, colonialism is typically associated with the actions of European countries starting in the 1500s and lasting through the 1900s. During this period, European colonial powers divvied up "unclaimed" land with little regard for ethnic groups who already lived in those places, their political structures, belief systems, or lifeways. By 1914, European nations ruled more than 85 percent of the world, and it is not by accident that the image of the world most often seen on conventional maps continues to be very Eurocentric in its orientation.

Colonialism in the Americas was the result of European conquest of newly "discovered" territories during the Age of Exploration. Columbus was likely not the first explorer to reach the Americas, but his "discovery" intensified Europeans' desires to colonize this "new" territory. European leaders began expanding their spheres of influence in Europe before turning their attention to lands

further afield; the successes they had in colonizing nearby lands, amplified by a growing demand for trade items found in "the Orient," fueled their enthusiasm for exploration outside the region. The Catholic Church also supported this economically motivated mission, as it coincided with a weakening of their religious-stronghold in places like England, Germany, and France.

One of the most devastating features of the colonial period was the forced labor of both indigenous Americans and Africans who were enslaved and shipped off as chattel. Between 1525 and 1866, 12.5 million slaves were sent to the New World from Africa. Treated as chattel, only 10.7 million Africans survived until arriving in the Americas. The U.S. imported approximately 450,000 of these slaves. It is not by coincidence that the ethically irredeemable shipment of slaves to the Americas corresponded to massive shipments of goods to Europe and down the west coast of Africa. As far as the total scope of international flows, however, European colonialism pales in comparison to the scope of globalization that has transpired since the 1990s.

Contemporary globalization, at least in terms of economics, is perhaps best pinpointed as coinciding with the conclusion of World War II and the Bretton Woods Conference.[6] The agreements made at the Bretton Woods Conference led to the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which later became the World Bank (WB). It also laid the groundwork for the World Trade Organization (WTO). Taken together, these three organizations have had a tremendous role in accelerating globalization and in shaping the lives of people in the developing world. The very idea of governing bodies like the United Nations, or regulatory institutions like the IMF and WB, that exist outside the confines of a specific nation-state—now widely referenced as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)—contributes to undermining local sovereignty.[7] Although local, regional, and national identities and affiliations retain salience in the global era, their importance has shifted relative to the growing sense many people have of being citizens of the world.

NOTES

1. See Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (New York: Wiley, 2007). ↵
2. Robby Soave, "Oberlin College Students: Cafeteria Food is Racist," The Daily Beast, December 20, 2015 http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/12/20/oberlin-students-cafeteria-food-is-racist.html↵
3. Manfred Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). ↵
4. Steger, *Globalization*, 13. ↵
5. Steger, *Globalization*. ↵
6. Ibid. ↵
7. Ibid. ↵

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13.2: The Five "Scapes" of Globalization

As we have already established, globalization refers to the increasing pace and scope of interconnections crisscrossing the globe. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has discussed this in terms of five specific “scapes” or flows: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes. Thinking of globalization in terms of the people, things, and ideas that flow across national boundaries is a productive framework for understanding the shifting social landscapes in which contemporary people are often embedded in their daily lives. Questions about where people migrate, their reasons for migration, the pace at which they travel, the ways their lives change as a result of their travels, and how their original communities change can all be addressed within this framework. Questions about goods and ideas that travel without the accompaniment of human agents can also be answered using Appadurai’s notion of scapes.

ETHNOSCAPE

Ethnoscape refers to the flow of people across boundaries. While people such as labor migrants or refugees (see case study below) travel out of necessity or in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families, leisure travelers are also part of this scape. The World Tourism Organization, a specialized branch of the United Nations, argues that tourism is one of the fastest growing commercial sectors and that approximately one in eleven jobs is related to tourism in some way.[8] Tourism typically puts people from developed parts of the world in contact with people in the developing world, which creates both opportunities and challenges for all involved. While there is the potential for tourists to be positively affected by their experiences with “the Other” while travelling, the tourism industry has also received its share of criticisms. Individuals from wealthier countries like the U.S., even if they are not wealthy themselves by the standards of the United States, are able to indulge in luxuries while traveling abroad in poorer nations like those found in the Caribbean. There is a fine line between a) tourists expecting service while on vacation and b) tourists treating local people like *servants*. This latter scenario exemplifies the unequal power relationships that develop in these kinds of situations, and such power relationships concern responsible social scientists.[9]

Definition: ethnoscape

The flow of people across boundaries.

TECHNOSCAPE

Technoscape refers to flows of technology. Apple’s iPhone is just one example of how the movement of technologies across boundaries can radically affect day-to-day life for people all along the commodity chain. Sales records are surpassed with each release of a new iPhone, with lines of customers spilling out of Apple stores and snaking around the block. Demand for this new product drives a fast and furious pace of production. Workers who are struggling to keep up with demand are subjected to labor conditions most iPhone users would find abhorrent; some even commit suicide as a result. The revenue associated with the production and export of technological goods is drastically altering the international distribution of wealth. As the pace of technological innovation increases, so does the flow of technology. This is not, of course, an entirely new phenomenon; earlier technologies have also drastically and irrevocably changed the human experience. For example, the large-scale production and distribution of the printing press throughout Europe (and beyond) dramatically changed the ways in which people thought of themselves—as members not only of local communities, but of national communities as well.[10]

Definition: technoscape

The global flows of technology.

IDEOSCAPE

Ideoscape refers to the flow of ideas. This can be small-scale, such as an individual posting her or his personal views on Facebook for public consumption, or it can be larger and more systematic. Missionaries provide a key example. Christian missionaries to the Amazon region made it their explicit goal to spread their religious doctrines. As the experiences of missionary-turned-anthropologist Daniel Everett show, however, local people do not necessarily interpret the ideas they are brought in the way missionaries expect.[11] In addition to the fact that all people have agency to accept, reject, or adapt the ideologies that are introduced to or imposed on them (see syncretism below). The structure of the language spoken by the Pirahã makes it difficult to provide direct translations of the gospel.[12]

Definition: ideoscape

The global flow of ideas.

FINANCESCAPE

Financescape refers to the flow of money across political borders. Like the other flows discussed by Appadurai, this phenomenon has been occurring for centuries. The Spanish, for example, conscripted indigenous laborers to mine the silver veins of the Potosí mines of Bolivia. The vast riches extracted from this region were used to pay Spain's debts in northern Europe. The pace of the global transfer of money has only accelerated and today transactions in the New York Stock Exchange, the Nikkei index, and other such finance hubs have nearly immediate effects on economies around the world.

Definition: financescape

The flow of money across political borders.

MEDIASCAPE

Mediascape refers to the flow of media across borders. In earlier historic periods, it could take weeks or even months for entertainment and education content to travel from one location to another. From the telegraph to the telephone, and now the Internet (and myriad other digital communication technologies), media are far more easily and rapidly shared regardless of geographic borders. For example, Brazilian telenovelas may provide entertainment on long-distance African bus trips, Bollywood films are shown in Canadian cinemas, and people from around the world regularly watch mega-events such as the World Cup and the Olympics from wherever they may live.

Definition: mediascape

The flow of media across borders.

While the five scapes defined by Appadurai provide useful tools for thinking about these various forms of circulation, disentangling them in this way can also be misleading. Ultimately, the phenomena studied by most anthropologists will involve more than one of these scapes. Take clothing for instance. Kelsey Timmerman, an author whose undergraduate concentration was in anthropology, was inspired to find out more about the lives of the people who made his clothing.[13] In a single day, he found, the average American might be wearing clothes made in Honduras, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and China. Something as seemingly simple as a T-shirt can actually involve all five of Appadurai's scapes. The transnational corporations responsible for the production of these shirts themselves are part of capitalism, an idea which has become part of the international ideoscape. The financescape is altered by a company in the U.S. contracting a production facility in another country where labor costs are cheaper. The equipment needed to create these T-shirts is purchased and delivered to the production facility, thus altering the technoscape. The ethnoscape is affected by individuals migrating from their homes in rural villages to city centers, often disrupting traditional residence patterns in the process. Finally, the mediascape is involved in the marketing of these T-shirts.

NOTES

8. United Nations World Tourism Organization, "Why Tourism," www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism ↵
9. To be fair, responsible policy makers and businesses, local communities, and travelers themselves may also be concerned with these issues. ↵
10. See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). ↵
11. Daniel L. Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009). ↵
12. Daniel L. Everett, "What Does Pirahã Grammar Have to Teach Us About Human Language and the Mind?" *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 3 no. 6 (2012): 555-63. ↵
13. Kelsey Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing?* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012). ↵

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13.3: Selective Importation and Adaptation

GLOCALIZATION

Globalization most certainly changes the landscape of contemporary social life (see the discussion of the five "scapes" in the previous section). Yet it would be a mistake to think of globalization as a state that emerges without human agency. In most cases, people make decisions regarding whether or not they want to adopt a new product or idea that has been made available to them via globalization. They also have the ability to determine the ways in which that product or idea will be used, including many far different from what was originally intended. A cast-off Boy Scout uniform, for example, may be adopted by a Maasai village leader as a symbol of his authority when dealing with Tanzanian government officials.[14]

First emerging in the late 1980s, the term **glocalization** refers to the adaptation of global ideas into locally palatable forms.[15] In some instances, this may be done as a profit-generating scheme by transnational corporations. For example, McDonald's offers vastly different menu items in different countries. While a Big Mac may be the American favorite, when in India you might try a McAloo Tikki (a breadcrumb-coated potato and pea patty), in Hong Kong mixed veggies and egg mini twisty pasta in a chicken broth for breakfast, in Thailand corn pies or pineapple pies, or a Steak Mince 'N' Cheese pie in New Zealand. In other cases, people rather than corporations find innovative ways to adopt and adapt foreign ideas. The Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico, for example, have found a way to adapt globally available consumer goods to fit their longstanding cultural traditions. Traditionally, when a member of the community dies, that individual's relatives have an obligation to ease his or her passing to the afterlife. One part of this obligation is making an extraordinary number of tamales for the mourners who come to pay their respects at the home altar that has been erected for the deceased. These tamales are intended to be taken home and were once shared in traditional earthen containers. Rather than disrupting this tradition, the introduction of modern consumer goods like Tupperware has made the old tradition of sharing food easier.[16] In this case, Zapotec culture is not threatened by the introduction of foreign goods and ideas because the community incorporates new things into their pre-existing practices without completely trading old ideas for new ones. Practices like these provide evidence that fears about globalization leading to nothing but cultural homogenization may be exaggerations. Yet, other communities refuse these products precisely because they equate modernization and globalization with culture loss. For example, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Dr. Rigoberta Menchu recounts how adamantly the Maya elders where she was raised warned the youth away from consuming Coca-Cola or even using modern corn mills rather than the traditional mano and metate.[17]

Definition: glocalization

The adaptation of global ideas into locally palatable forms.

Case Study: Both Global and Local-Salsa Dancing Around the World

While there are a variety of texts regarding the histories of salsa music and dancing, as it exists today the salsa scene is inseparable from the five flows of globalization described above.[18] Take for instance the vast number of salsa "congresses" and festivals held worldwide throughout the year. People from near and far travel to these events as dance students, social participants, performers, and instructors (the *ethnoscape*). Travel to and from these events, often internationally, depends on modern transportation (the *technoscape*). What is being taught, shared, and communicated at these events is, primarily ideas about different dancing style and techniques (the *ideoscape*). In addition to the costs of gas/parking/airfare or the like, registration, hotel rooms, lessons, DJs/bands, and other services are all available because they are being paid for (the *financescape*). Finally, these events could not exist as they do today without online advertising (see Figure 1 for an example), workshop and performance schedules, and event registration, let alone video-clips of the featured teachers and performers (the *mediascape*). Indeed, the very fact that dancers can come from disparate locations and all successfully dance with each other—even in the absence of a common spoken language—testifies to the globalization involved in such dance forms today.[19]

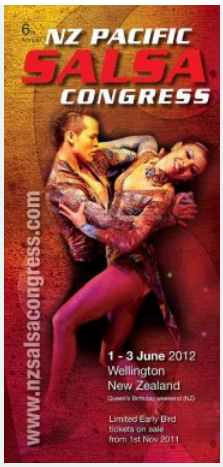


Figure 13.3.1:Advertisement for the New Zealand Salsa Congress, 2012.

The widely shared patterning of movement to music in this dance genre does not, however, negate the very real differences between local iterations. Featured in the very title of ethnomusicologist Sydney Hutchinson's recent edited volume, *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts*, real differences between local contexts, practices, and meanings are shown in chapters dedicated to the salsa scenes in New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, rural America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia (Cali), Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo), France, Spain (Barcelona), and Japan.[20] Learning to dance at family gatherings is different from learning in a studio. Learning to dance to music that plays in every building on the street is different from learning in a setting with entirely different local instruments. Learning to dance is different when everyone comes from the same general socioeconomic and ethnic background compared to learning in extremely heterogeneous urban settings. This set of comparisons could continue for quite some time. The point is that even global forms take on local shapes.[21]

Lifestyle, Taste, and Conspicuous Consumption

While some aspects of globalization are best studied at the societal level, others are best examined at smaller scales such as the trends visible within specific socio-economic strata or even at the level of individual decision-making. The concept of "lifestyle" refers to the creative, reflexive, and sometimes even ironic ways in which individuals perform various social identities. Sociologist David Chaney describes lifestyles as "characteristic modes of social engagement, or narratives of identity, in which the actions concerned can embed the metaphors at hand."[22] The lifestyles we live and portray, then, can be seen as reflexive projects (see the Fieldwork chapter for more information about reflexivity) in the sense that they display both to ourselves and to our audiences who we think we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be seen to be.

Chaney argues that people only feel the need to differentiate themselves when confronted with an array of available styles of living.[23] Societies organized via organic solidarity (versus mechanical) are predicated on different goods, skills, and tasks. Within this framework, the rise of a consumerist economy enables individuals to exhibit their identities through the purchase and conspicuous use of various goods.[24] Globalization has increased the variety of goods available for individuals to purchase—as well as people's awareness of these products—thus expanding the range of identities that can be performed through their consumption habits. In some situations, identity is an individual project, with conspicuous consumption used to display one's sense of self. For example, a student who feels alienated by the conservative, "preppy," students at her East Coast school can cultivate an alternative identity by growing dreadlocks, wearing Bob Marley T-shirts, and practicing djembe drumming, all of which are associated with the African diaspora outside the United States.

Critics have argued that a consequence of globalization is the homogenization of culture. Along similar lines, some have worried that the rapid expansion of the leisure market would decrease the diversity of cultural products (e.g. books, movies) consumed by the populace. The disappearance of small-scale shops and restaurants has certainly been an outcome of the rise of global conglomerates, but the homogenization of culture is not a foregone conclusion.[25] Globalization enables individuals in far-flung corners of the world to encounter new ideas, commodities, belief systems, and voluntary groups to which they might choose to belong. At times these are at the expense of existing options, but it is also important to acknowledge that people make choices and can select the options or opportunities that most resonate with them. The concept of lifestyle thus highlights the degree of decision-making available to individual actors who can pick and choose from global commodities, ideas, and activities. At the same time as individual choices are involved, the decisions made and the assemblages selected are far from random. Participating in a lifestyle

implies knowledge about consumption; knowing how to distinguish between goods is a form of symbolic capital that further enhances the standing of the individual.[26]

How much free will, freedom of choice, or autonomy an individual actually has is an age-old question far beyond the scope of this chapter, but in many cases a person's consumption patterns are actually a reflection of the social class in which she or he was raised—even when an individual thinks he or she is selectively adopting elements from global flows that fit with his or her unique identity. In other words, an individual's "taste" is actually an outgrowth of his or her **habitus**, the embodied dispositions that arise from one's enculturation in a specific social setting.[27] Habitus results in a feeling of ease within specific settings. For example, children who have been raised in upper-class homes are able to more seamlessly integrate into elite boarding schools than classmates on scholarships who might find norms of dining, dress, and overall comportment to be unfamiliar.[28] Habitus, the generative grammar for social action, generates tastes and, by extension, lifestyles.[29]

Definition: habitus

The dispositions, attitudes, or preferences that are the learned basis for personal "taste" and lifestyles.

Recall the vignette that opened this chapter. The fact that the students of this prestigious liberal arts college are in the position to critique the ethical implications of specific recipes suggests that their life experiences are far different from the roughly one in seven households (totaling 17.5 million households) in the United States with low or very low food security.[30] Inevitably then, what people choose to consume from global offerings—and the discourses they generate around those consumption choices—are often indicative of their social status. Once a commodity becomes part of these global flows, it is theoretically available to all people regardless of where they live. In actual practice, however, there are additional gatekeeping devices that ensure continued differentiation between social classes. Price will prevent many people from enjoying globally traded goods. While a Coca-Cola may seem commonplace to the average college student in the U.S., it is considered a luxury good in other parts of the world. Likewise, although Kobe steaks (which come from the Japanese *wagyu* cattle) are available in the U.S., it is a relatively small subgroup of Americans who would be able and willing to spend hundreds of dollars for a serving of meat. Having the knowledge necessary to discern between different goods and then utilize them according to socially prescribed norms is another mark of distinction between social classes, as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste made clear.[31]

NOTES

14. Robin Schmidt and Morten Vest, *Maasai on the Move*, Film, directed by Robin Schmidt and Morten Vest (2010, Danish Broadcasting Corporation). ↵
15. See Chanchal Kumar Sharma, "Emerging Dimensions of Decentralisation Debate in the Age of Globalisation" *Indian Journal of Federal Studies* 19 no. 1 (2009): 47–65. ↵
16. Anya Peterson Royce, *Becoming an Ancestor: The Isthmus Zapotec Way of Death* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). ↵
17. Rigoberta. I Menchu, *Rigoberta Menchu*: *An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1984). ↵
18. See, for instance, Peter Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Musica Tropicalin Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Or, Lise Waxer, *The City of Musical Memory: Salsa, Record Grooves, and Popular Culture in Cali, Columbia* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). ↵
19. For more on traveling to train at such congresses and festivals—whether salsa, or any other embodied practice—see Griffith and Marion, *Apprenticeship Pilgrimage: Developing Expertise through Travel and Training* (Lexington: forthcoming). ↵
20. Sydney Hutchinson, *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). ↵
21. Also see Lise Waxer, *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002). ↵
22. David Chaney, *Lifestyles* (London: Routledge, 1996), 92. ↵
23. Chaney, *Lifestyles*.↵
24. Ibid. ↵
25. Ibid., 24. ↵
26. Ibid., 57. ↵
27. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). ↵

28. Shamus Rahman Khan, *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). ↵
29. Chaney, *Lifestyles*, 60. ↵
30. Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, “Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2014” http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx↵
31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*. ↵

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13.4: Globalization in Everyday Life

Although some within the discipline argue that anthropologists should report objectively on the cultures and social phenomena they study, given the structure of the discourse surrounding globalization, it is increasingly difficult to avoid being pigeonholed as "pro" or "anti" globalization. In truth though, globalization has had both positive and negative impacts.

ADANTAGES OF THE INTENSIFICATION OF GLOBALIZATION

As optimists, we will start with the "glass-half-full" interpretation of globalization. Political Scientist Manfred Steger has argued that "humane forms of globalization" have the potential to help us deal with some of the most pressing issues of our time, like rectifying the staggering inequalities between rich and poor or promoting conservation.[32] The mediascape has made people in the **Global North** increasingly aware of the social injustices happening in other parts of the world. In his book on the global garment industry, Kelsey Timmerman highlights the efforts undertaken by activists in the U.S., ranging from public demonstrations decrying the fur industry to boycotts of products produced in socially unsustainable ways.[33] While many of these efforts fall short of their intended outcome—and typically overlook the complexities of labor situations in the **Global South** where families often rely upon the labor of their children to make ends meet—such examples nonetheless underscore the connections people in one location now feel with others (who they will likely never meet) through the commodity chains that link them.

Definition: Global North

Refers to the wealthier countries of the world. The definition includes countries that are sometimes called "First World" or "Highly Developed Economies."

Definition: Global South

Refers to the poorest countries of the world. The definition includes countries that are sometimes called "Third World" or "Least Developed Economies."

Globalization has also facilitated the rise of solidarity movements that would not have been likely in an earlier era. To take a recent example, within hours of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, individuals from different nations and walks of life had changed their Facebook profile pictures to include the image of the French flag. This movement was criticized because of its Eurocentrism; the victims of a bombing in Beirut just the day before received far less international support than did the French victims. Shortcomings aside, it still stands as a testament to how quickly solidarity movements can gain momentum thanks to technological innovations like social media.

Micro-loan programs and crowd-source fundraising are yet more ways in which individuals from disparate circumstances are becoming linked in the global era. Kiva, for example, is a microfinance organization that enables anyone with an Internet connection to make a small ($25) donation to an individual or cooperative in various parts of the developing world. The projects for which individuals/groups are seeking funding are described on the Kiva website and donors choose one or more specific projects to support. The recipient must then repay the loan to Kiva with interest.

Crowd-source fundraising follows a similar principle, though without the requirement that money be paid back to the donors. One small-scale example involves funds gathered in this way for a faculty led applied visual research class in Dangriga, Belize in 2014. By generating a small pool of additional funding, 100 percent of the students' project fees could be dedicated to producing materials for local community partners (compared to other groups, who used some of these fees for student lunches or other items). As a result, the team was able to over-deliver on what had been promised to the community. The Sabal Cassava Farm (Belize's sole commercial cassava farm) had requested a new road sign as well as full-color marketing flyers. The Austin Rodriguez Drum Shop —a cultural resource center, and producer of traditional Garifuna drums—had wanted help updating their educational poster (see Figure 13.4.1 and 13.4.2). For both groups the team was able to a) provide digital frames with all the research images (so that the local community partners had something "in hand" and could use as they wanted; b) use higher grade production materials, and c) start work on large-format, coffee-table style documents to be provided to each family *and* also copies to be donated to the local Gulisi Garifuna Museum.



Figure 13.4.1: Original educational “poster” composed of photos, many water-damaged, attached to cardboard with layers of clear tape. Photograph by Jonathan S. Marion. All rights reserved.



Figure 13.4.2: Updated 3’x4′ poster, documenting the entire drum-making process, with matte lamination to protect from water damage. Photograph by Jonathan S. Marion. All rights reserved.

Advances in transportation technologies, combined with an increased awareness of humanitarian crises abroad (an awareness that is largely facilitated by advances in communication technologies) also create new ethnoscapes. Programs like the Peace Corps have a relatively long history of sending Westerners into foreign nations to assist with humanitarian efforts on a regular basis. Other volunteers are mobilized in times of crisis. Medical professionals may volunteer their services during a disease epidemic, flocking to the regions others are trying to flee. Engineers may volunteer their time to help rebuild cities in the wake of natural disasters. And even lay people without a specialized skill set may lend their energy to helping others in the aftermath of a disaster, or by collecting and/or donating goods to be used in various relief efforts. In 2010, a devastating, 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, affecting an estimated three million people. Thanks to widespread coverage of the crisis, the international response was immediate and intense with more than twenty countries contributing resources and personnel to assist in the recovery efforts. Clearly, then, there are also benefits facilitated by globalization.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE INTENSIFICATION OF GLOBALIZATION

In the previous section, we concluded by noting how the intensification of globalization can bring benefits to people in times of crisis. Yet it bears remembering and reiterating that sometimes such crises are themselves brought about by globalization. The decimation of indigenous tribes in the Americas, who had little to no resistance to the diseases carried by European explorers and settlers, is but one early example of this. Such changes to the world’s ethnoscapes may also be accompanied by changes to local health. As epidemic after epidemic wreaked havoc on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, death rates in some tribes reached as high as 95 percent. Addressing a current instance, the research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

(CCAFS) coordinated by the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, has called attention to the role of human-caused climate change in creating the current Syrian refugee crisis (see case study by Laurie King below).[34]

Similarly, a current example of how globalization can spell disaster from a public health standpoint would be the concern in 2014 about infected airplane passengers bringing the Ebola virus from Africa to the U.S. In March 2014, the country of Guinea experienced an outbreak of the Ebola virus. From there, it spread into many countries in the western part of Africa. Medical professionals from the U.S. traveled to West Africa to assist with patient care. In October 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that a man who traveled from Liberia to the U.S. while asymptomatic became ill several days after reaching the U.S. and eventually succumbed to the disease. Several health workers in the U.S. also became ill with the virus, but were successfully treated. In response to this outbreak, the CDC increased screening efforts at the major ports of entry to the U.S. [35] However, these precautions did not quell the fears of many Americans who heatedly debated the possibility of instituting travel bans to and from countries with confirmed cases of Ebola.

The debates about travel bans to and from West Africa were a reminder of the xenophobic attitudes held by many Americans even in this age of globalization. There are many reasons for this. Racial prejudice is still very much a reality in today's world (see the Race and Ethnicity chapter) as is prejudice against other religions, non-normative gender identity, the differently abled, and others. In some ways, these fears have been heightened by globalization rather than diminished. Especially after the global recession of 2008, some nation-states have become fearful for their economic security and have found it easy to use marginalized populations as scapegoats. While advances in communication technology have enabled social justice focused solidarity movements (as discussed above), unfortunately the same media have been used as a platform for hate-mongering by others. Social media enables those who had previously only been schoolyard bullies to broadcast their taunts further than ever before. Terrorists post videos of unspeakable violence online and individuals whose hateful attitudes might have been curbed through the informal sanctions of gossip and marginalization in a smaller-scale society can now find communities of like-minded bigots in online chat rooms. By foregrounding the importance of the hypothetical "average" person, populist politics has engaged in scapegoating of minority ethnic and religious groups. This has been most apparent in the successful campaigns for the British Brexit vote on June 23, 2016 and the election of Donald Trump as President in the United States.

A portmanteau of "British" and "exit," Brexit refers to the vote to leave the European Union. (Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, the European Union is an economic and political union of 28 nation-states founded on November 1, 1993 in Maastricht, Netherlands.) Both this and the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the U.S. represent backlash against some of the inequities generated by globalization. At the world scale, the Global North continues to extract wealth from the Global South. More tellingly though is the widening wealth-gap even in "rich" countries. Without sufficient social protection, capitalism—a system wherein profit motivates political and economic decision making—has led to a situation in which the world's eight richest men (note the gendering) now control as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent of the entire world's population. In other words, eight men now have just as much money as 3.75 *billion* people combined and no nation in the world has a larger wealth-gap (the difference between those with the most and the least in a society) than the United States. So, while globalization has facilitated advantages for some, more and more people are being left behind. Social scientists often use the term "re-entrenchment" to describe efforts people make to reassert their traditional values and ways of life. While this impulse is understandable, many of these people are susceptible to the rhetoric of scapegoating: being told some other group is at fault for the problems they are facing. This is the double-edged sword of globalization. Additionally, in some cases globalization is forced on already marginal populations in peripheral nations through institutions like the IMF and World Bank. In these instances, globalization facilitates and amplifies the reach and impact of **neoliberalism**, a multi-faceted political and economic philosophy that emphasizes privatization and unregulated markets (see the next section).

Definition: neoliberalism

The ideology of free-market capitalism emphasizing privatization and unregulated markets.

NOTES

32. Manfred Steger, *Globalization*, xiii. ↵
33. Kelsey Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing?*. ↵
34. Bruce Campbell and Lisa Goddard, "Climate Change, Food Security and the Refugee Crisis: Connecting the Dots to Avoid Future Tragedy." https://ccafs.cgiar.org/blog/climate-change-food-security-and-refugee-crisis-connecting-dots-avoid-future-tragedy#.Vt1JXJMrLu4↵

35. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa.” http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/index.html. ↵

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13.5: Globalization and Neoliberalism

Latin America provides a good example of how the shift from colonialism to neoliberalism has been disseminated through and exacerbated by globalization. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Latin American colonies' independence from Spain and Portugal was secure, but the relations of power that prevailed during the colonial period had largely been replicated with local elites controlling the means of production. During this period, citizens individually and collectively endeavored to establish a new national identity. Despite nominal commitments to democracy throughout the region, patron/client relationships functioned as the primary political mechanism. Internal divisions ran deep in many Latin American countries, with the supporters (or clients) of rival elites periodically drawn into violent contests for rule on behalf of their patrons. In the last decade of the 1800s and the first decade of the 1900s, people in Latin America began to question the right of the elites to rule, as well as the hidden costs of modernization. Peasant uprisings, like the one that took place at Canudus in Brazil in 1896, were evidence of the shifting political framework. People also saw the imperialistic tendencies of the U.S. as a negative force of modernization which they hoped to avoid. Together, this led to a situation in which people in Latin America sought a national identity that resonated with their sense of self.

During this same period there was a slight but significant change in the economic structure of the region. The economy was still based on exports of agriculture and natural resources like minerals, and the profits remained in the hands of the elite. What was new, however, was the introduction and modest growth of manufacturing in the cities, which created new job opportunities. Economic diversification led to a more complex class structure and an emerging middle class. Unfortunately, this period of relative prosperity and stability soon ended. Because of the plentiful natural resources and the captive labor source "available" for exploitation in Latin America, wealthy landowners were able to undersell their European competitors on agricultural products and provide "exotic" minerals. The privileged position of Latin American landowner compared to European farmers led to widespread poverty among farmers in Europe, which led to out-migration and political instability in Europe. As locally born Latin American peasants migrated from the countryside to the cities *and* the cities filled with European immigrants, the landowning elite began to lose control, or at least the kind of power they used to hold over the farmers who worked their land and had no other work options.

While city living provided certain opportunities, it also introduced new challenges. In the city, for instance, people rarely had access to land for subsistence agriculture. This made them far more vulnerable to economic fluctuations, and the vulnerability of city living necessitated the adoption of new political philosophies. Urban poverty and desperation created a climate in which many people found socialist philosophies appealing, starting as early as the 1920s in some places like Brazil. Initially, union leaders and European immigrants who spread socialist ideas among the urban poor were punished by the state and often deported. Eventually such repressive tactics proved insufficient to curtail the swelling disruptions caused by strikes and related actions by the unions. Faced with a new political reality, the elite co-opted the public rhetoric of the urban masses. Realizing the need to cast themselves as allies to the urban workforce, the elites ushered in a period of modest reform with more protection for workers.

During this period, and as an extension of their work-related activism, the middle class also clamored for expansions of the social services provided by the state. Pressure from the middle class for more social services for citizens unfortunately played into growing xenophobia (fear of foreigners) resulting from the immigration of so many foreigners *and* faulty ideas about racial superiority communicated through a growing discourse of nationalism. In some places, the elites aligned with the middle classes if they saw it as politically advantageous. In other places, however, elites resisted incorporating the middle classes into the ruling structure and the elites' power ultimately was wrested away though military coups. While emerging leaders from the middle class continued relying on the export economic model, they directed a greater percentage of the profits back into social programs. Only after the stock market crash of the 1930s—and the resulting global recession—did those in power start to question the export model.

In the early part of the 1900s, Latin American countries largely supported free trade because they believed they had a competitive advantage. They believed that by producing the products their country/region was best suited to produce they would prosper on the world market. However, changing world circumstances meant that Latin American countries soon lost their advantage; average family size in industrialized countries began to decrease, lowering demand for Latin American commodities. When other countries with similar climates and topography began to grow the same crops, a global oversupply of agricultural products led to lower prices and worsened the decline of Latin America's financial status in the world market.

This economic downturn was amplified by the loss of British hegemony after World War II. Before the war, Great Britain and Latin America had enjoyed a stable exchange relationship with Latin America sending agricultural goods to Great Britain and the British sending manufactured goods to Latin America. As the U.S. rose in global power, Americans looked to Latin America as a new market for U.S. manufactured goods. In contrast to Great Britain though, the U.S. did not need to import Latin American

agricultural goods because the U.S. produced enough of its own, production that was further protected by high import tariffs. Even if a consumer wanted to buy Latin American commodities, the commodities would be more expensive than domestic ones—even if actual costs were lower. Overall, Latin America sold its agricultural goods to Europe, including Great Britain, but Latin American exporters had to accept lower prices than ever before.

The United States' economic strategy toward Latin America was different than Great Britain's had been. For those commodities that could not be produced in the U.S., like bananas, U.S. companies went to Latin America so they could directly control the means of production. Although these commodities were grown and/or produced *in* Latin America, the profits were taken by foreign companies rather than local ones. This same process also happened with mining interests like tin and copper; U.S. companies purchased the mines in order to extract as much profit as possible. American companies were in a position to exploit the natural resources of these countries because the U.S. had the financial capital local communities lacked *and* the technological expertise needed to sustain these industries. This pattern curtailed the rate of economic growth throughout Latin America as well as in other regions where similar patterns developed.

The late 1920s through the 1950s saw many Latin American countries turning to nationalism—often through force—as both a cultural movement and an economic strategy. The middle classes were in a favor of curtailing the export economy that had been preferred by the elites, but did not have the political clout to win elections. Indeed, their agenda was regularly blocked by the elites who used their influence (i.e. with their clients) to press their interests, especially in the rural areas. With time, however, middle class men increasingly came to occupy military officer positions and used their newfound authority to put nationalist leaders in the presidencies. Nationalists argued that an over-dependence on agriculture had led to Latin America's vulnerable position in the international economy and called for a build-up of industry. They hoped to start producing the goods that they had been importing from the U.S. and Europe. Their goal: industrial self-sufficiency.

The state was instrumental in this economic reorganization, both helping people buy local goods and discouraging them from buying foreign goods. Doing this was far from as easy as it may sound. The state imposed high duties on goods destined for the export market in order to entice producers to sell their goods at home. At the same time, the state imposed high tariffs on the imports they wanted to replace with local products. With time (and struggle) these measures had their intended effects, making the locally produced goods comparatively more affordable—and therefore appealing—to local consumers.

As already noted, developing factories required capital and technological expertise from abroad, which in turn made the goods produced much more expensive. To help people afford such expensive goods, the state printed more money, generating massive inflation. (In some places this inflation would eventually reach 2,000 percent!) The combination of chronic inflation with high foreign debt emerged as an enduring problem in Latin America and other parts of the Global South. Countries crippled by high inflation and debt have turned to international institutions like the IMF and WB for relief and while the intentions may be good, borrowing money from these global institutions always comes with strings attached. When a country accepts a loan from the IMF or the WB, for instance, they must agree to a number of conditions such as privatizing state enterprises (see the case study on Bolivia's water crisis, below) and cutting spending on social services like healthcare and education. Borrowing countries are also required to adopt a number of policies intended to encourage free trade, such as the reduction or elimination of tariffs on imported goods and subsidies for domestically produced goods. Policies are put into place to encourage foreign investment. Transnational corporations have now reached the point that many of them rival nations in terms of revenue. In fact, as of 2009, "forty-four of the world's hundred largest economies are corporations."[36] It is an understatement to note that the policies forced on countries by lenders are often disruptive—if not entirely destructive—of locally preferred lifeways and preferences. Although the IMF and WB measures are intended to spark economic growth, the populace often winds up suffering in the wake of these changes. Colonialism has given way to a neocolonialism in which economic force achieves what used to require military force with transnational corporations benefiting from the exploitation of poorer nations.

Case Study: Privatization and Bolivia's Water Crisis

In 2000, Bolivians in the city of Cochabamba took to the streets to protest the exploitative practices of a transnational company that had won the right to provide water services in the city.[37] Anti-globalization activists celebrated this victory of mostly poor mestizo and indigenous people over capitalist giants, but the situation on the ground today is more complicated.

Water is one of the most essential elements on this planet. So how is it that a foreign company was given the right to determine who would have access to Bolivian water supplies and what the water would cost? The answer serves to highlight the fact that many former colonies like Bolivia have existed in a perpetual state of subordination to global superpowers. When Bolivia was a colony, Spain claimed the silver and other precious commodities that could be extracted from Bolivia's landscape, but after Bolivia became independent structural adjustment policies mandated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank

paved the way for foreign companies to plunder the country's natural resources. In other words, colonial style relationships have been replicated in a global system that forces impoverished countries to sell resources to satisfy creditors; "resource extraction is facilitated by debt relations."[38]

Like many countries in the Global South, Bolivia is deep in debt. A failed program of social reforms, coupled with government corruption, was worsened by a severe drought affecting Bolivian agriculture. In order to pay its debts in the 1980s, Bolivia agreed to structural adjustments mandated by the conditions of the country's World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans. One of the mandates of these loans was privatization of state-run enterprises like the water system. Proponents of privatizing such resources argue that the efficiency associated with for-profit businesses will also serve to conserve precious natural resources. Some have gone so far as to suggest that increases in water prices would help customers better grasp the preciousness of water and thereby encourage conservation. Of course, if customers conserve water too much the company managing water delivery will fail to make a profit, thus initiating a dangerous cycle. When companies anticipate that they will not see a return on their investment in infrastructure, they simply refuse to extend services to certain areas of the community.

What made the privatization of water in Bolivia so disastrous for the people of urban areas like Cochabamba was the rapid population growth they experienced starting in the latter half of the twentieth century (growth that continues in the present). Population pressures layered on top of the scarcity of water in the Bolivian natural environment makes access to potable water a perennial concern. Migration to urban areas was hastened by many different factors including land reform, privatization of mines and resultant layoffs, and severe droughts. This influx of migrants put pressure on urban infrastructure. To make matters worse, climate change led to a decline in the amount of surface water available. In 2015, Lake Poopó, the second largest lake in Bolivia, went dry and researchers are doubtful it will ever fully recover (see Figure 13.5.1).[39]



Figure 13.5.1: A fishing boat is stranded on the shrinking Lake Poopó, 2006.

In Cochabamba, organizing began in late 1999. Community members formed an organization called Coordinator for the Defense of Water and for Life, which was run using a direct form of democracy wherein everyone had an equal voice. This was empowering for peasants who were accustomed to being silenced and ignored in a centuries-old social hierarchy. This organization, in contrast, coordinated actions that cut across ethnic and class lines. As the situation came to a head, activists blockaded the roads in and out of the city and riot police were brought in from the capital. After several days of confrontations between the people and the military, local activists ousted the transnational company and reclaimed their water source.

Despite local's reclaiming control, however, they still lacked the infrastructure needed to effectively deliver what was once again "their" water. This forced them to look to international donors for assistance, which could recreate the very situation against which they so recently fought. Access to increasingly scarce water supplies is a growing problem. For example, plans to seize surface water from lakes creates conflicts with rural peasants who depend on these water sources for agricultural purposes. Unfortunately, such problems have emerged in many other places as well (such as throughout Africa and the Middle East), and are increasing in prevalence and severity amidst ongoing climate change. The question of whether or not water is a human right remains one that is heatedly debated by activists, CEOs, and others. (See a discussion of the position taken by Nestlé Chairman Peter Brabeck, who argues for the privatization of water, a position clearly at odds with the position taken by the United Nations General Assembly which, in 2010, recognized water and sanitation as human rights.)

NOTES

36. Steger, *Globalization*, 54. ↵
37. This case study is based on the work of Nicole Fabricant and Kathryn Hicks, "Bolivia's Next Water War: Historicizing the Struggles over Access to Water Resources in the Twenty-First Century" *Radical History Review* 116 (2013): 130-45. ↵
38. Ibid., 131. ↵

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13.6: Responses to Globalization

Cultures are dynamic and respond to changes in both the social and physical environments in which they are embedded. While culture provides a template for action, people are also active agents who respond to challenges and opportunities in a variety of ways, some of which may be quite creative and novel. As such, it would be inaccurate to only see globalization as an impersonal force dictating the lives of people in their various localities. Rather, people regularly use a variety of strategies in responding to global forces. While a comprehensive catalog of these strategies is beyond the scope of this chapter, here we outline two key responses.

SYNCRETISM

Syncretism refers to the combination of different beliefs—even those that are seemingly contradictory—into a new, harmonious whole. Though syncretism arises for a variety of reasons, in many cases it is as a response to globalization. In this section, we use the example of *Candomblé* as a way of demonstrating that syncretism is a form of agency used by people living under oppression.

Definition: syncretism

The combination of different beliefs, even those that are seemingly contradictory, into a new, harmonious whole.

Most often, anthropologists discuss syncretism within the context of religion. Anthropologists define religion as the cultural knowledge of the spiritual realm that humans use to cope with the ultimate problems of human existence (see the Religion chapter). *Candomblé* is an Afro-Brazilian spirit-possession religion, in which initiates serve as conduits between the human and supernatural realm. It is also an excellent example of a syncretic religion. The many gods in Candomblé, known as *orixás*, are personified: they all have personalities; experience the full range of human emotions like love, hatred, jealousy, and anger; and have individual histories that are known to practitioners. Each orixá is associated with a particular color, and practitioners of the religion often wear bead necklaces that correspond to the specific deity with whom they feel a connection (see Figure 4). Unlike Christianity (a monotheistic religion), Candomblé does not stress the duality of good and evil (or heaven and hell). Although on the surface these two religious traditions may seem very different, in actual practice, many adherents of Candomblé also identify as Christians, specifically Catholics. So how can this be?

Much like the orixás, Catholic saints are personified and have unique roles within the Catholic tradition. This feature of Catholicism—more so than any other major Christian denomination—facilitated a fairly seamless overlay with orixá worship. For example, *Iemanja*, the orixá who rules over the seas and is associated with fertility, is syncretized with Our Lady of Conception. *Ogum*, whose domain is war and whose ritual implements are the sword and shield, is syncretized with Saint Anthony.



Figure 13.6.1: Candomblé practitioners, Embu das Artes, Brazil, 2012.

Just to be clear, syncretism is in no way unique to Brazil or the African Diaspora; it frequently occurs when one group is confronted with and influenced by another (and typically one with more power). The reason syncretism is particularly common within Latin American religious systems is due to 1) the tenacity with which African slaves clung to their traditional beliefs; 2) the fervor of the Spanish and Portuguese belief that slaves *should* receive instruction in Catholicism, and 3) the realities of colonial life in which religious instruction for slaves was haphazard at best. This created the perfect climate within which African slaves could hide their traditional religious practices in plain sight.

Syncretism serves as a response to globalization insofar as it mediates overlapping frameworks. It would be unnecessary if people lived in a world where boundaries were clearly defined with no ideological exchanges taking place across those boundaries (if such a world ever existed). Since that is far from the lived reality for most people though, syncretism often serves as what James C. Scott categorizes as a “weapon of the weak” – a concept referring to the ways in which marginalized peoples can resist without directly challenging their oppressors (which could incite retaliation).[40] Examples might include mocking the elite behind their backs, subtle subversion, sabotage, or participation in alternative economies that bypass the elite. In the classroom, it can be rolling one’s eyes behind the professor’s back, or thinking that you are “getting away with something” when texting in class. So too in the case of Candomblé. Syncretism allowed the slaves and their descendants, who continue the tradition today, to create a façade of

compliance with mandated worship within the Catholic tradition, while still continuing to pay homage to their own beliefs—and thus perpetuate their own ethnic identity—behind closed doors.

PARTICIPATION IN ALTERNATIVE MARKETS

As discussed earlier, structural adjustments mandated by international bodies like the IMF and WB have left farmers in developing nations particularly vulnerable to the whims of global markets. Within this framework, "fair trade" has emerged as a way for socially-conscious consumers to support small farmers and artisans who have been affected by these policies. To be certified as fair trade, vendors must agree to a "fair" price, which will be adjusted upwards if the world market price rises above the fair trade threshold. If the world market price drops, fair trade farmers still make a decent living, which allows them to continue farming rather than abandon their fields for wage labor. While admirable in its intent, and unassailably beneficial to many, anthropological research reminds us that every situation is complex and that there is never a "one size fits all" perfect solution.

As you read about in the chapter on Fieldwork, and have seen demonstrated throughout this text, anthropologists focus on the lived experience of people closest to the phenomenon they are studying. In the case of fair trade, then, anthropologists focus primarily on the farmers or artisans (although an anthropologist could also study the consumers or people who import fair trade goods or facilitate their sale). Looked at from farmers' perspectives, setting and maintaining fair wages for commodities like coffee or bananas ensures that farmers will not abandon farming when the world market prices drop. On the plus side, this helps ensure at least some stability for producers and consumers alike. One of the key features of fair trade is the social premium generated by fair trade contracts: the commitment that a certain percentage of the profit goes back into beneficial community projects such as education, infrastructure development, and healthcare. But, in order for this to be successful, it is the local community and not an outside entity (however well intentioned) that must get to decide how these premiums are used.

Although fair trade is very appealing, it bears remembering that not everyone benefits from fair trade in the same way. Individuals in leadership positions within fair trade cooperatives tend to have stronger relationships with the vendors than do average members, leading them to have more positive associations with the whole business of fair trade.[41] Similarly, people with more cultural and social capital will have more access to the benefits of fair trade. A cacao farmer with whom Lauren works in Belize, for example, pointed out that farmers with less education will always be taken advantage of by predatory traders, which is why they need the assistance of a well-structured growers' association when entering the free trade market. Also of concern is that in some communities fair trade disrupts traditional roles and relationships. For example in a Maya village in Guatemala, traditional gender roles were compromised, with men becoming even more dominant because their commodity (coffee) had a fair trade market whereas the women's main commodity (weaving) did not.[42]

In addition to the challenge of finding a market for one's goods, there are additional barriers to becoming involved in fair trade. For example, it used to be that farmers could sell relatively low quality coffee to fair trade organizations interested in social justice. Now, however, fair trade coffee must be of exceptional quality to compete with specialty coffees.[43] In and of itself this is not a bad thing, but remember that some of the elite coffee producers of today were once the low quality producers of old. In other words, the first generation of fair trade coffee farmers benefited from the many ways in which fair trade companies invested in their farms, their processing equipment, and their education in a way that newer participants cannot replicate. Indeed, once these initial farmers achieved a high quality coffee bean, there was less incentive for fair trade vendors to invest in new farms. Now that the bar has been set so high, it is much more difficult for new farmers to break into the fair trade market because they lack the equipment, experience, knowledge, and networks of farmers who have more longstanding relationships with fair trade companies.

Also worth noting are the many situations in which global standards conflict with local norms of decision making. To be labeled as fair trade within the European Union banana market, for example, bananas must be of an exceptionally high quality. Banana farms must conform to a number of other guidelines such as avoiding pesticides and creating a buffer zone between the banana trees and water sources. While this all may make sense in theory, it can be problematic in practice, such as in parts of the Caribbean where land is customarily passed from one generation to the next without being subdivide into individual parcels. In these cases, decisions about land use have to be made collectively. If some of the landowners want to farm according to fair trade guidelines but other individuals refuse to meet these globally mandated standards, the whole family is blocked from entering the fair trade market.[44]

NOTES

40. Thomson Reuters, "Lake Poopo, Bolivia's 2nd-Largest Lake, Dries Up" December 18, 2015, http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/lake-poopo-bolivia-dries-up-1.3371359. ↵
41. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). ↵
42. Sarah Lyon and and Mark Moberg, eds. *Fair Trade and Social Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). ↵

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13.7: Implications for Anthropology

As has been argued throughout this text, culture is dynamic. So too is anthropology as the field of study dedicated to culture. Although many students of anthropology (let alone the public at large) may have romantic visions of the lone ethnographer immersing her or himself in the rich community life of a rural village in a remote land, this is not the reality for most anthropologists today. An increasing number of anthropologists find themselves working in applied settings (see the Seeing Like an Anthropologist chapter), but even many of the more strictly identified "academic" anthropologists—those employed at colleges and universities—have begun working in settings that might well be familiar to the average person. Now that anthropologists understand the importance of global flows of money, people, and ideas the importance of doing research everywhere that these issues play out—at home (wherever that may be) as much as abroad—is clear.

URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Globalization has become a powerful buzzword in contemporary society and it would be difficult to find anyone who has not been affected by it in at least some small way. The widespread influence of globalization on daily life around the world—whether directly (such as through multinational businesses) or indirectly (such as via climate change)—raises a number of questions that anthropologists have begun to ask. For example, an anthropologist might investigate the effects of global policies on people in different regions of the world. Why is it that the monetary policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank typically result in rich countries getting richer and the poor countries getting poorer? In her book *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora* (1997), for example, Norma Iglesias Prieto gives an up-close portrait of the lives of Mexican women working in factories in the infamous border zone of Tijuana.[45] Although the working conditions in these factories are dangerous and the women are subjected to invasive scrutiny by male supervisors, many of the women profiled in the book nonetheless appreciate the little luxuries afforded by their work. Others value the opportunity to support their household or gain a small degree of financial independence from the male figures in their life. Unable to offer any artificially flat answer concerning whether globalization has been "good" or "bad" for such individuals, anthropologists focus on the lived experience of the people most affected by these global forces. What is it like to live in such environments? How has it changed over time? What have been the costs and benefits?

Especially amidst the overlapping flows of people and ideas, questions concerning mobility, transnationalism, and identity have all become increasingly important to the field of anthropology. Although some exceptions exist (see quinoa case study below), the general trend is for globalization to result in urbanization. With neoliberalism comes the loss of state-funded programs and jobs, the unsustainability of small farms, and the need for economic alternatives that are most commonly found in urban areas. While anthropologists have long studied cities and urban life, the concentration of populations in urban centers has added increasing importance to anthropologies of the city/metropolis in recent years.[46] Indeed, the term **urban anthropology** came into use to describe experiences of living in cities and the relationships of city life to broader social, political, and economic contexts including issues of globalization, poverty, and neoliberalism.[47] The heightened focus on the city in global context has also heightened awareness of and attention to issues of transnationalism: the understanding that people's lives may be lived and/or significantly influenced by events that cross the geopolitical borders of nation states.[48]

Definition: urban anthropology

The study of living in cities and the relationships of city life to broader social, political, and economic contexts including issues of globalization, poverty, and neoliberalism.

Case Study: Global Demand for Quinoa

When a group of people is afforded little status in a society, their food is often likewise denigrated.[49] Until recently, this held true for quinoa in Bolivian society, which was associated with indigenous peasants.[50] Mirroring "first world" patterns from the U.S. and Europe, city dwellers preferred foods like pasta and wheat-based products. Conspicuous consumption of these products provided them with an opportunity to showcase their "sophisticated" choices and tastes. Not surprisingly, there was little local demand for quinoa in Bolivian markets. Further undercutting the appeal of producing quinoa, the Bolivian government's adoption of neoliberal policies eliminated the meager financial protections available to peasant farmers. If that was not bad enough, a significant drought in the early 1980s spelled disaster for many small farmers in the southern Altiplano region of Bolivia. As a result of these overlapping and amplifying obstacles, many people moved to 1) cities, like La Paz; 2) nearby countries, like Chile, and even 3) to Europe.

The situation faced by Bolivian peasants is not unique. More than half of the world's people currently live in cities. This is the result of widespread urbanization that began at the end of World War II and stretched into the 1990s. As a result, many peasants lost access to their traditional modes of subsistence. Although migration to the city can provide benefits like access to education, infrastructure, and wage-labor, it can also result in a loss of identity and many peasants who migrate into cities are forced to subsist on the margins in substandard conditions, especially as they most often arrive without the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in this new environment.

Fortuitously for indigenous Bolivians, the structural adjustments adopted by their government coincided with foreigners' growing interest in organic and health foods. Although it is often assumed that rural peasants only produce food for their own subsistence and for very local markets, this is not always the case. In some situations, peasants may bypass local markets entirely and export their commodities to places where they have more cultural capital, and hence financial value (see discussion of taste above). In the 1970s, the introduction of tractors to the region enabled farmers to cultivate quinoa in the lowlands in addition to the hillside terraces they had previously favored. In the 1980s, cooperative groups of farmers were able to find buyers in the Global North who were willing to import quinoa. These cooperatives researched the best ways to expand production and invested in machines to make the process more efficient. Now, quinoa is such a valuable commodity that many of those individuals who had previously abandoned the region are now returning to the Altiplano. Yet this is not a simple success story, especially because there are serious issues associated with the re-peasantization of the Bolivian countryside and with the fact that a healthy local crop has been removed from many people's regular diets since it can be sold to the Global North.

Another serious issue raised by the reverse migration from the cities back to the Altiplano concerns environmental sustainability. It is easier to grow large quantities of quinoa in the flat lowlands than it is on the steep hillsides, but the lowland soil is much less conducive to its growth. The use of machinery has helped a great deal, but has also led to a decline in the use of llamas, which have a symbiotic relationship with quinoa. Farmers must now invest in fertilizer rather than using manure provided by their own animals. The global quinoa boom also raises questions about identity and communal decision-making. Conflict has arisen between families that stayed in the region and those that are returning from the cities. Pedro, a farmer who stayed in the region, says of the others "those people have returned – but as strangers."[51] The two groups often clash in terms of what it means to respect the land and how money from this new cash crop should be used.

So has the international demand for quinoa been a good thing for rural Bolivian peasants? In some ways yes, but in other ways no.; on the whole, it may be too soon to know for sure.



Figure 13.7.1: Aymara couple Alicia and Julio harvest wheat on their land above Lake Titicaca in Southern Peru. Other subsistence crops they raised included quinoa, barley, and potatoes, but the global market pressures such subsistence farmers to grow more quinoa as a "cash" crop to capitalize on the world demand. Juli, Peru, 2005. Photo by Jerome W. Crowder. All rights reserved.

Changes in How—and "Where"—We Conduct Research

Globalization has changed not only what anthropologists research, but also how they approach those topics. Foregrounding the links between global processes and local settings, multi-sited ethnography examines specific topics and issues across different geographic field sites.[52] Multi-sited ethnography may be conducted when the subject of one's study involve and/or impact multiple locations and can be best understood by accounting for those multiple geographic contexts. For example, in her study of yoga, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures*, Sarah Strauss (2005) found that her study would be incomplete if she focused only on Indians studying yoga. To understand this transnational phenomenon, she recognized the importance of also focusing on non-Indian practitioners of yoga who had gone to study yoga in its homeland.[53] Work such as that of Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, who studies news media correspondents, highlights the ways that people can be on the move, creating a community of study that is both multi-sited and multilocal.[54] Further work has expanded on these models, highlighting various *translocal* fieldsites: "locations" that cannot be geographically defined. Such models include calls for an activity-based anthropology (where it is the activity itself that is the "site" of the culture and/or the basis of the community)[55] and digital anthropology (where the field site exists online).[56]

Globalization in Application: The Syrian Situation Today (courtesy of Laurie King)

Syria today presents us with an apocalyptic landscape: major cities such as Homs have been reduced to rubble and anyone remaining there is starving. Since 2011, over 250,000 civilians have been killed by barrel bombs, shelling, internecine terrorist attacks, drone strikes, the use of chemical weapons, and Russian aerial assaults. Well-armed and well-funded Islamist militias control large swathes of the country and have, for all intents and purposes, erased the border between Syria and Iraq, thereby undoing the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement that established the new nation-states of the modern Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The so-called Islamic State (IS/Da`esh) has destroyed world heritage sites such as Palmyra (Tadmur), ethnically cleansed non-Muslim towns, enslaved women, and flooded the global media with horrific images of beheadings, immolations, and mass executions. Aleppo, a city of stunning architectural beauty with a rich multi-cultural heritage, is now damaged beyond repair and largely uninhabitable as the result of fighting between IS, Syrian regime forces, and a diverse but largely Islamist Syrian opposition.

Farming in the Syrian countryside has come to a virtual halt. Since 2003, Syrian agriculture had been suffering from a prolonged drought, pushing many rural families into urban centers such as Damascus and Aleppo.[57] In 2015, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (the “Doomsday Seed Vault”) in Norway was accessed for the first time to obtain seeds needed for crops to feed the Syrian population.[58] Meanwhile, as any glance at the evening news demonstrates, millions of refugees continue to flow out of the country, mostly through the Syrian-Turkish border, before making dangerous trips in unsafe boats to Greece, hoping to get their families to Europe and away from the hell-scape that their country has become.

Five years ago, no scholar of Syrian society and politics could have predicted the dire conditions Syria now faces. Given the Assad regime’s iron grip on all aspects of Syrian society since 1970, the dramatic transformations of the last five years were inconceivable at the beginning of 2011. The scapes and flows of globalization enumerated by Appadurai were largely absent from Syria over the last 40 years. The hardline Baathist regime of Hafez al-Assad, who came to power in 1970 through a bloodless coup, was profoundly insular and not open to the world – whether regionally or internationally – in the realms of finance and commerce. Never a major petroleum power, and not blessed with vast tracts of fertile land for farming, Syria’s economy centered largely on industry and commerce.

Up until the mid-1980s, Syria had a highly centralized economy that eschewed private ownership of industry or services. With the end of the Cold War (during which Syria had been a client state of the USSR), and the ensuing dramatic shifts in regional power dynamics – most notably the 1991 Iraq war, which saw the rout of Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait and the diminution of the Iraqi Baathist regime’s power—Syria emerged as a key regional player capable of leveraging concessions from other Arab states as well as the West. In exchange for joining the US-led coalition against Iraq, the United States and the international community raised no objections to Syria asserting direct and indirect control over its neighbor (and former mandatory province) Lebanon, where a series of interconnected civil, regional, and global wars had raged for fifteen years.

Syrian political and military control effectively put the Lebanese wars into a deep freeze between 1992 and 2005. While freedom of speech in Lebanon declined significantly under Syria’s tutelage, an unregulated market economy flourished, centering on the massive post-war reconstruction boom. The Syrian economic elite—largely co-terminous with the regime—benefited significantly from business deals in Lebanon, while thousands of Syrian workers flooded into Lebanon to do construction work on the new city center and infrastructural repairs. The influx of money from Lebanon strengthened and entrenched the patron-client ties between the Syrian regime (whose members were also relatives by blood or marriage) and a growing class of wealthy businessmen, who owed their wealth to the regime. As Bassam Haddad notes, the insularity of and corruption within the regime and big business blurred the line between private and public domains, while sharpening class divisions within Syria.[59] Any attempts to foster political reform, economic transparency, and international commerce were viewed suspiciously by Syria’s political, commercial, and military/intelligence elite.

In June 2000, Hafez Al-Assad died. His son Bashar, an ophthalmologist who had lived in London for many years, succeeded him. Local and international observers wondered if the new, foreign-educated young president would launch an era of economic reform and political decentralization. Bashar seemed keen to bring Syria into the Internet era, and his first years in power witnessed relatively free discussion of the need for economic and political reforms, heralded by the closing of the infamous Mezzeh prison, where many political prisoners had been tortured and killed. But power remained in the hands of the few in the upper reaches of the Baath party, some of whom did not know whether or not to trust Bashar, who lacked the steely reserve and unquestioned authority of his father.

Although Syria lacked the sort of material and financial capital enjoyed by its neighbors, such as the oil-rich Gulf states, it enjoyed the benefits of symbolic capital as the sole, front-line Arab nationalist state opposing Israel and resisting any normalization of ties with the Jewish state in the post-Cold war era, even as the Palestinian Liberation organization and Jordan joined Egypt in establishing peace treaties with Israel. In the hope that Syria would come into the fold, the United States did not make harsh demands on Syria for internal reforms or regional economic integration.

In February 2005, in the wake of growing Lebanese dissatisfaction with Syria's control of the country, Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri and over a dozen of his colleagues were killed in a massive suicide bomb while traveling in a motorcade through downtown Beirut. (To this day, no one knows decisively who was behind the car bomb, though many suspect Syrian involvement.) Massive, largely peaceful, demonstrations erupted in Beirut immediately, and within a matter of weeks, Syria was forced to end its occupation of Lebanon and retreat.

While Syria had not experienced a significant flow of people and wealth in and out of its borders for years, media and technology flows were growing in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The flow of ideas and images from Tunisia and Egypt in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010-11 heralded Syria's first sustained experience with the dynamics of globalization, described in this text by political scientist Manfred Steger as: "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away, and vice versa."[60]

In February 2011, the regime lifted the ban on Facebook and You Tube following unprecedented street protests on January 26, the day after the Egyptian protests began. (Before this, Syrians contravened the ban through proxy servers.) Soon, Facebook groups were organizing and even calling for a "Day of Rage" and encouraging people to come out to the streets to protest against the regime. Nothing came of this, though. Despite garnering thousands of "likes," no one seemed to be following the directives of the new Facebook pages.[61]

The Internet's impact in the Arab world has built upon the phenomenon of satellite television, particularly that of Al-Jazeera, which opened up new spaces of discourse and debate about political and human rights issues in the Arab world, thereby undermining the legitimacy and validity of state-owned news programs and the power structures underpinning them. While Al Jazeera instilled a powerful reformist spirit, blogs were particularly crucial in advancing and fortifying Arab activism efforts.

Before blogs, there were chat rooms, listservs, and email communication, all of which enhanced and expanded a cyber world of public discourse in some Arab states, but not in Syria. Some Egyptian bloggers called the Internet and social media "our lungs. If they cut them off, we will suffocate." As a result of Internet communications technology (ICT), social isolation in the Arab world began to give way to the formation of communities of conversation and debate, which ultimately evolved into social movements that took to the streets and made history in the real world. Our "networked society," to use Manuel Castell's phrase, connects us horizontally and allows us not only to communicate, but to self-communicate and self-create.[62] We not only consume the news, we now evaluate, filter, and respond to the news. We not only read headlines, our networked actions and reactions to breaking news can ripple out across countries and continents and make headlines.

While Western media paid considerable attention to Egypt's uprising, the Syrian uprisings were not as well covered. Perhaps this is because Egypt is part of the West's cultural imaginary. (Hollywood movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and popular culture depictions of pyramids, pharaohs, and the Valley of the Kings are all evidence of this.) Syria, a tightly controlled authoritarian state, had not been a destination for Western tourists, scholars, film producers, or even journalists for decades, so its street protests and popular struggles did not loom large in Western media coverage. While every major American news agency covered the uprising in Tahrir Square in Cairo in real time, news of protests and civil society activism in Syria did not always reach the rest of the world.

It seems that the Syrian regime underestimated its ability to channel or harness public opinion by lifting the ban on social media. Vigils, protests, and marches, all initially peaceful, began to appear on Syria's streets, drawing larger and larger crowds. The response of the regime, unaccustomed to public political expression, was quick and brutally repressive. Rather than scaring people into silence, the regime now confronted an armed opposition. Within just one year, social media protests had become street protests, which became street battles between pro- and anti-regime forces. Globalization, as experienced in Syria, has revealed the limits of an authoritarian regime's ability to control and constrain social action in the age of social media.

Syria is now experiencing flows of people across borders. Syrians are escaping to Turkey, Europe, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq by the millions, creating the world's worst refugee crisis. Meanwhile, drawn to the message of the Islamic State (IS), young men

and women from across the Middle East and as far afield as Europe and North America are traveling to the IS controlled territories of eastern Syria and Western Iraq to join in a "global jihad."

As the high-quality and gory video productions of IS demonstrate, technological and media resources, skills, and knowledge are flowing in and out of Syria's borders. Financial flows in oil wealth are now in the hands of IS, and food resources are flowing into the country when possible from international non-governmental organizations such as Mercy Corps. Syria is an example of the disadvantages of globalization, as well as an illustration of how quickly one country's crises can become global crises.

CONCLUSION

The term "globalization" is not simply a verbal shortcut for talking about contact, transmission, and transportation on the global scale. This chapter has shown that contact has existed across disparate locations throughout much of human history. As it is used and understood today, however, globalization is about much more than the total scope of contact; it references the speed and scale of such contact. Understood in this way, globalization *is* a modern phenomenon; it is not just how many places are connected, but in how many ways and with what frequency.

Where people once had to rely on horses or sail-driven ships to bring them to new locations, mass transportation (especially air travel) makes such commutes a part of many people's daily lives, and someone who had never seen a TV one week might end up visiting Jakarta, Cairo, or Toronto the next. News, which might have raced ahead via carrier pigeons can now be transmitted in a virtual instant, and information once confined to physical libraries can now be accessed on the smart phones carried by peoples around the world. Neither "good" nor "bad," globalization is a fact of life today. Whether a business woman flies between international hubs on a weekly basis or a man tends his garden on a remote plateau, both of their lives may be equally influenced by how a specific crop is received on the world market. Providing both opportunities and constraints, globalization now serves as the background—if not the stage—for how life gets lived, on the ground, by us all.

NOTES

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46. See, especially, Setha M. Low, "The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996):383-409 and Ulf Hannerz, *Exploring the City: Inquiries toward an Urban Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). ↵
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54. Ulf Hannerz, "Being there… and there… and there! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography" *Ethnography* 4 no. 2 (2003): 201-216. ↵
55. Jonathan S. Marion, "Beyond Ballroom: Activity as Performance, Embodiment, and Identity" *Human Mosaic* 36 no. 2 (2006): 7-16, 2006. Also see Jonathan S. Marion, *Ballroom: Culture and Costume in Competitive Dance* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishing, 2008) and Jonathan S. Marion, "Circulation as Destination: Considerations from the Translocal Culture of Competitive Ballroom Dance" *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* 17 no. (2012). ↵

56. See Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton University Press, 2009). For more on theory and method see Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller, eds. *Digital* Anthropology (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2012); and Sarah Pink, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi, *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice.* (Thousand Oaks, CA*:* Sage, 2015). ↵
57. Bassam Haddad, "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone," *Middle East Report*, 262 no. 42 (2012). http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/syrian-regimes-business-backbone↵
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13.8: End of Chapter Discussion

Discussion

- In his research, Kelsey Timmerman discovered that the average American is wearing clothes made in many different countries. This demonstrates how everyday items can involve all five of Arjun Appadurai's scapes. Choose another product that is part of your everyday life. How many scapes can you connect it to?
- Globalization makes new forms of consumption possible, but the effects of globalization on an individual's lifestyle vary based on many factors including socioeconomic status. In what ways is globalization experienced differently by people from wealthy countries compared to people in developing countries? How are producers of commodities like clothing or food affected differently by globalization than consumers?
- In Latin America, globalization and neoliberalism have led to the development of policies, such as the privatization of the water supply, that reduce local control over important resources. In what ways is globalization a "double-edged" sword that brings both benefits and problems to developing countries?
- Globalization presents the possibility of engaging in activity-based anthropology, where it is the activity itself that is the '"site"' studied, or digital anthropology, where the field site exists online. What kinds of activities or digital environments do you think would be interesting to study using this approach?

GLOSSARY

Ethnoscape: the flow of people across boundaries.

Financescape: the flow of money across political borders.

Global North: refers to the wealthier countries of the world. The definition includes countries that are sometimes called "First World" or"Highly Developed Economies."

Global South: refers to the poorest countries of the world. The definition includes countries that are sometimes called "Third World" or "Least Developed Economies."

Globalization: the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

Glocalization: the adaptation of global ideas into locally palatable forms.

Habitus: the dispositions, attitudes, or preferences that are the learned basis for personal "taste" and lifestyles.

Ideoscape: the global flow of ideas.

Mediascape: the flow of media across borders.

Neoliberalism: the ideology of free-market capitalism emphasizing privatization and unregulated markets.

Syncretism: the combination of different beliefs, even those that are seemingly contradictory, into a new, harmonious whole.

Technoscape: the global flows of technology.

Urban anthropology: The study of living in cities and the relationships of city life to broader social, political, and economic contexts including issues of globalization, poverty, and neoliberalism.

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13.9: About the Authors

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

14: Supplemental Resources

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Additional Chapters

- CULTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY: ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE
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- MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY: MEANING, EMBODIMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ACTIVISM
- HEALTH AND MEDICINE
- SEEING LIKE AN ANTHROPOLOGIST: ANTHROPOLOGY IN PRACTICE
- PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Chapter 12

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Access for free at https://open.lib.umn.edu/sociology.

SUPPLEMENTAL STUDENT AND FACULTY RESOURCES

For more resources for both faculty and students, you can visit the Cultures of the World: Perspectives on Culture companion website.

On the companion website you will find:

- Supplemental readings such as free classic and contemporary ethnographies available online either under Public Domain or to Borrow through a Digital Library.
- A list of documentaries available from Digital Libraries. Some digital libraries may require an institutional license for access.
- Miscellaneous student resources.
- Faculty resources such as PowerPoints and a form to request test banks.

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