



CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

EIGHTH EDITION

BARBARA MILLER

Cultural Anthropology

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Cultural Anthropology

Eighth Edition

Barbara Miller

George Washington University

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Preface

“I had no idea all those cultures were out there,” said one of my students after taking my introductory cultural anthropology course. Another commented, “I’m a business major, but I am going to keep the books from this course because they will help me in my career. I need to understand people.”

Cultural anthropology opens up whole new worlds. Not just “out there,” but here, there, and everywhere. The subject matter of cultural anthropology may seem distant, exotic, and “other”—jungle drumbeats and painted faces, for example. This book helps students to encounter those faraway cultures and also to realize that their culture has its own versions of jungle drumbeats and painted faces. “Making the strange familiar” is essential learning in a globalizing world where cultural diversity may equal cultural survival for all of us. “Making the familiar strange” is a priceless revelation because it reduces the divide between “us” and the “other.” “We” becomes “other” through the insights of cultural anthropology.

To achieve this double goal, *Cultural Anthropology*, Eighth Edition, delivers exciting and updated information about the world’s cultures and promotes critical thinking and reflective learning. Students will find many points at which they can interact with the material, view their own culture as a culture, and make connections between anthropology and their everyday life in, for example, hairstyles, food symbolism, sleep deprivation, doctor–patient dialogues, racism and sexism, and the meaning of gestures.

The study of the world’s cultures and how they interact and change involves learning new words and analytical categories, but the effort will pay off in terms of bringing the world’s peoples and cultures closer to you. If this book achieves my aspirations, anyone who reads it will live a life that is more culturally aware, enriched, and tolerant.

How This Book Is Organized

The book’s organization and pedagogical features are designed to help ensure student engagement and enhanced learning. The 15 chapters are organized in the following way—but professors will find it easy to assign chapters out of order.

The first chapter describes the discipline of anthropology as a whole and provides the foundation for the rest of the book. The second chapter covers the evolution of humanity and culture, providing a bridge that spans our

living primate relatives and early human evolution to the emergence of agriculture, cities, and states. The third chapter moves to the subject of how cultural anthropologists define research topics, carry out research, and present their findings.

The next four chapters discuss how people make a living, their patterns of consumption and exchange, how they reproduce and raise children, and how different cultures deal with illness, suffering, and death. While these four chapters address basic questions of how people feed themselves, reproduce, and stay alive and well, the discussion in each case fans out to include a wide array of cultural interpretations and practices that go far beyond sheer basics.

The next three chapters look at people in groups. One chapter addresses kinship and its changing forms. Another looks at social ties that are not based on kinship. The third considers how people organize themselves politically, how they seek to maintain order, and how they deal with conflict.

Although symbolic behavior permeates the entire book, three chapters most directly focus on meaning and symbolism. The chapter on communication pulls much of the book together as it considers the origins and evolution of communication and language, with special attention to contemporary change. The chapter on religion provides cross-cultural categories of religious belief and practice as well as linking “world religions” to specific local transformations. Expressive culture is a wide-ranging subject, and the chapter on it embraces expected topics such as art and music and unexpected topics such as sports, leisure, and travel.

The last two chapters consider two of the most important topics shaping cultural change in our time: migration and international development. These chapters explicitly put culture into motion and show how people are affected by larger structures, such as globalization or violence, and how they exercise agency in attempting to create meaningful and secure lives.

Features

Several new and continued features make this textbook distinctive and effective.

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives are listed at the beginning of each chapter and below the three major chapter headings. At the end of the chapter, Learning Objectives Revisited provides

a helpful review of the key points related to the three Learning Objectives.

Anthro Connections

Each chapter begins with an attention-getting short piece on an aspect of culture that relates to recent events and connects to the chapter opening photo. This feature helps students see the relevance of anthropology to contemporary issues around the world.

Culturama

All chapters include a one-page profile of a cultural group with a mini-panorama of two photographs and a map with captions. These brief summaries provide an enticing glimpse into the culture presented.

Anthropology Works

Although students may appreciate the interesting material that cultural anthropology offers, they are still likely to ask, “Does this knowledge have any practical applications?” Every chapter contains a compelling example of how knowledge and methods in cultural anthropology can prevent or solve social problems. Anthropology Works examples include: Paul Farmer’s role in providing health care in Haiti, Laura Tabac’s applied research on men’s risky sexual practices in New York City, and Australian Aboriginal women’s collaboration with an anthropologist to document and preserve their cultural heritage.

Think Like an Anthropologist

These examples connect anthropology to everyone’s lives and prompt reflective learning. Others introduce a problem and show how it has been studied or analyzed from different anthropological perspectives, providing links to the major theoretical debates in cultural anthropology presented in Chapter 1, and prompt critical thinking.

Eye on the Environment

This feature highlights the important relationship between culture and environment. Along with many in-text references to how culture and the environment interact, students will recognize culture-environment connections through examples from many cultures.

Map Program

The maps are carefully chosen and designed to provide the right amount of information to complement the text. Detailed captions lead students on to connect the map with other topics such as livelihood, population, and language.

In-Text Glossary

Definitions of the Key Concepts are provided where the concept is first mentioned and defined. A paginated list of the Key Concepts appears at the end of each chapter. The glossary at the end of the book contains a complete list of Key Concepts and their definitions.

Thinking Outside the Box

This feature provides two or three thought-provoking questions in each chapter, displayed at the end of the chapter. These questions prompt readers to relate a topic to their cultural experiences or provide an avenue for further research. They can promote class discussion or serve as a basis for a class project.

What’s New in This Edition

Each chapter contains updated material including examples from the latest research, current population statistics, and new and revised Key Concepts.

- Chapter 1: the relevance of cultural anthropology in addressing the Ebola epidemic
- Chapter 2: drumming among nonhuman primates
- Chapter 3: computational anthropology as a new Key Concept; discussion of “diffraction” in commodity studies; updates in the Culturama on the Trobriand Islands; sexual discrimination within the discipline
- Chapter 4: example of the ethnographic study of sanitation workers in New York City; updates in the Culturama on the Andaman Island peoples; division of labor and subjective well-being are two new Key Concepts
- Chapter 5: discussion of hyperconsumerism; example of effects of global consumer demand driving phosphate mining in a small Pacific island and displacement of the indigenous population; new Key Concept on mobile money
- Chapter 6: update on China’s One Child Policy as more flexible; discussion of commercial birth surrogacy as a recent aspect of reproduction that is linked to global and local social inequality; update in the Culturama on the Amish; heteronormativity is a new Key Concept
- Chapter 7: discussion of zoonotic diseases as a subtype of infectious diseases; stigma is a new Key Concept
- Chapter 8: new example of touch as a way of communicating kinship in Central India
- Chapter 9: material on emerging social inequality within “racial” categories in South Africa based on life histories; update in the Culturama on the Roma
- Chapter 10: revised statistics about incarceration; update in the Culturama on the Kurdish people

- Chapter 12: new material about the Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin and their land claims in Australia; revised Key Concept definition of revitalization movements
- Chapter 13: new material on the role of art in post-conflict situations
- Chapter 14: updated migration statistics throughout the chapter
- Chapter 15: updated statistics on indigenous peoples; material on careers in international development and how students can best pursue such careers

The Importance of Names

Since the beginning of modern humanity, people have been naming each other, naming their groups and other groups, and naming features of the places they inhabit. People of earlier times often referred to themselves in terms that translate roughly into “The People.” As far as they were concerned, they were The People: the only people on earth.

Things are more complicated now. European colonialism, starting in the fifteenth century, launched centuries of rapid contact between Europeans and thousands of indigenous groups around the world. The Europeans named and described these groups in their European languages. The names were not those that the people used for themselves, or if they were, the transliteration into a European language altered local names into something very different from the original.

The Spanish explorers’ naming of all the indigenous peoples of North America as Indians is a famous example of a misnomer. Beyond being wrong by thinking they had reached India, the Spanish conquerors who renamed thousands of people and claimed their territory simultaneously erased much of the indigenous people’s heritage and identity.

The challenge of using the preferred names for people and places of the world faces us today as people worldwide wrestle with the issue of what they want to be called. Until recently, indigenous peoples of the present-day United States mainland preferred to be called Native Americans, rejecting the pejorative term “Indian.” Now, they are claiming and recasting the term “Indian.” In Alaska, the preferred term is “Alaska Native,” and in Hawai’i it is “Native Hawai’ian.” In Canada, preferred terms are “First Nations,” “Native Peoples,” and “Northern Peoples.”

From small-scale groups to entire countries, people are attempting to revive precolonial group names and place names. Bombay is now Mumbai, and Calcutta is Kolkata. Group names and place names are frequently contested. Is someone Hispanic or Latino? Is it the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Gulf? Is it Greenland or Kalaallit Nunaat? Does it matter? The answer is yes, resoundingly, yes.

This book strives to provide the most currently accepted names for people, places, objects, activities, and ideas. By the time it is printed, however, some names and their English spellings will have changed. It is an ongoing challenge to keep track of such changes, but doing so is part of our job as citizens of a transforming world.

The Cover Image

A girl of Timor-Leste wears a traditional headdress that signifies her social and ritual high status. East Timor, or Timor-Leste, is a small island country in the south Pacific, occupying the eastern half of the island of Timor. Portugal occupied it from the sixteenth century to 1975 when it was then taken over by Indonesia. After years of conflict with Indonesia, it gained independence in 2002. Although East Timor, like much of Southeast Asia, has a heritage of respect for girls and women, over the many years of occupation and conflict, the situation has degraded, and domestic violence and forms of gender-based violence are now common. International organizations, such as UN Women, are working with Timorese people to promote peace and security for everyone in this relatively new country.

In Thanks

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Barbara Miller
Washington, DC

Support for Instructors and Students

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About the Author

Barbara D. Miller

Barbara Miller is Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs in the Elliott School of International Affairs of the George Washington University in Washington, DC. She is Director of the Elliott School's Institute for Global and International Studies as well as Director of two of its affiliated research groups, the Culture in Global Affairs Program and the Global Gender Program. Before coming to GW in 1994, she taught at Syracuse University, the University of Rochester, SUNY Cortland, Ithaca College, Cornell University, and the University of Pittsburgh.

For over 30 years, Barbara's research has focused on gender-based inequalities in India, especially the nutritional and medical neglect of daughters in northern regions of the country, and sex-selective abortion. She has also conducted research on culture and rural development in Bangladesh, on low-income household dynamics in Jamaica, and on Hindu adolescents in Pittsburgh. Her current interests include continued research on gender inequalities in health in South Asia and the role of cultural anthropology in informing policy, especially as related to women, children, and other disadvantaged groups.

She teaches course on introductory cultural anthropology, medical anthropology, development anthropology, culture and population, health and development in



South Asia, migration and mental health, and global gender policy.

Barbara has published many scholarly articles and book chapters and several books including *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press 1997), an edited volume, *Sex and Gender Hierarchies* (Cambridge University Press 1993), and a co-edited volume with Alf Hildebeitel, *Hair:*

Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures (SUNY Press 1998). In addition to *Cultural Anthropology*, Eight Edition, she is the author of *Cultural Anthropology in a Globalizing World*, Fourth Edition (Pearson 2017) and the lead author of a four-field textbook entitled *Anthropology*, Second Edition (Pearson 2008).

She launched a blog in 2009 called anthropologyworks where she and other contributors present informed opinion pieces about important social issues, a weekly feature covering anthropology in the mainstream media, and other features. Since its beginning, the blog has had 120,000 visits from people in nearly every country of the world. You can follow her, along with over 17,000 people worldwide, via Twitter @anthroworks and Facebook. In 2010, she launched a second blog called globalgendercurrent, which highlights new research and debates about global women's issues as informed by grounded research and cutting-edge policy questions. She Tweets and Facebooks about global gender issues.

“Cultural anthropology is exciting because it connects with everything, from food to art. And it can help prevent or solve world problems related to social inequality and injustice.”

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Chapter 1

Anthropology and the Study of Culture



Outline

Introducing Anthropology's Four Fields

Anthropology Works:
Delivering Health Care in
Rural Haiti

Introducing Cultural Anthropology

Think Like an
Anthropologist: Power in
the Kitchen

Culturama: San Peoples of
Southern Africa

Distinctive Features of Cultural Anthropology



Learning Objectives

1.1 Define what is anthropology.

1.2 Recognize what is cultural anthropology.

1.3 Summarize the distinctive features of cultural anthropology.

Anthro Connections

A Zhuang (zhoo-ANG) girl works in the famously beautiful rice terraces of southern China near its border with Vietnam. The Zhuang number about 18 million, making them the largest ethnic minority in China. In addition to growing tourism in the Zhuang region, it is now a favored retirement destination for elderly Chinese. One major attraction is the quality of the drinking water that comes from

natural springs (Lin and Huang 2012). Another is the area’s reputation for having many people who live for a long time, including China’s oldest person who is 127 years old. An elderly resident comments, “My high blood pressure was brought under control after I spent a month here. I would get epileptic attacks about once in two months, but it never strikes now.”

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

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

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

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

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

Introducing Anthropology’s Four Fields

1.1 Define what is anthropology.

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

- **Biological anthropology** or physical anthropology—the study of humans as biological organisms, including evolution and contemporary variation.

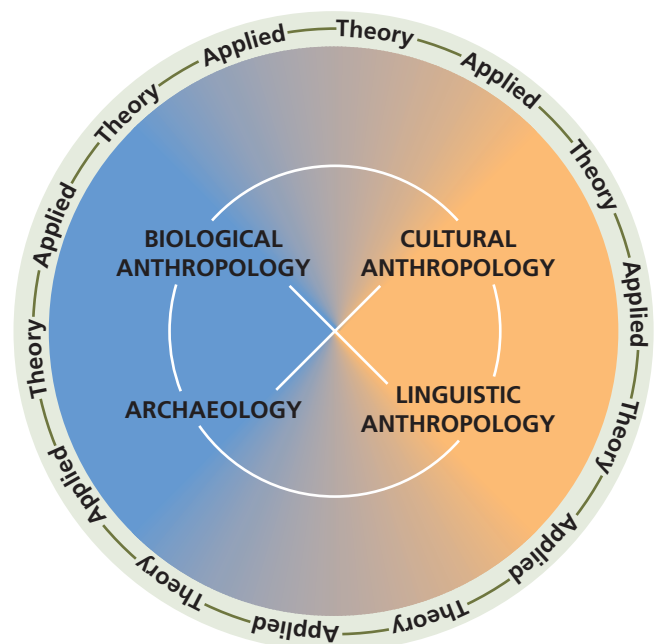


Figure 1.1 The Four Fields of Anthropology



Anthropologists study the entire diversity of humanity, past, and present. Cultural anthropologists study living people including (top) contemporary Silicon Valley culture in California and (bottom) the Dani people, of West Papua, the Indonesian part of the island of New Guinea, who still value their stone tools.

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



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

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

Biological or Physical Anthropology

Biological anthropology encompasses three subfields. The first, primatology, is the study of the nonhuman members of the order of mammals called primates, which includes a wide range of animals from very small, nocturnal

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

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

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

culture people's learned and shared behaviors and beliefs.

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



Maya people watch as a forensic anthropologist conducts an exhumation of more than 50 bodies in a highland Guatemalan village in 1997. Such work is ongoing in Guatemala and many other places in the world. It gives closure to the survivors.

■ *Are courses in forensic anthropology offered at your school?*

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

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



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

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

The third subfield is the study of contemporary human biological variation. Anthropologists working in this area seek to explain differences in the biological makeup and behavior of contemporary humans. They study such biological factors as DNA within and across populations, body size and shape, human nutrition and disease, and human growth and development.

Archaeology

Archaeology means, literally, the “study of the old,” but “the old” is limited to human culture. Therefore, the time depth of archaeology goes back only to the beginnings of *Homo sapiens*, between 300,000 and 160,000 years ago, when they first emerged in Africa. Archaeology encompasses two major areas: prehistoric archaeology, which concerns the human past before written records, and historical archaeology, which deals with the human past in societies that have written documents. Prehistoric



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

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

archaeologists often identify themselves with broad geographic regions, studying, for example, Old World archaeology (Africa, Europe, and Asia) or New World archaeology (North, Central, and South America).

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

The archaeology of the recent past is an important research direction. Industrial archaeology focuses on social change during and since the Industrial Revolution. It is especially active in the United Kingdom, home of the Industrial Revolution. There, industrial archaeologists study such topics as the design of iron bridges, the growth and distribution of china potteries, miners’ housing, and cotton mills. Industrial archaeologists seek to conserve industrial sites, which are more likely to be neglected or destroyed than are sites that have natural beauty or cultural glamour attached to them.

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

because of sheer quantity. This information can improve recycling efforts worldwide.

Linguistic Anthropology

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

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

Cultural Anthropology

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

Anthropology Works

Delivering Health Care in Rural Haiti

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

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

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

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



A woman cares for her sick child while he receives treatment for cholera at a clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 2011. Cholera has affected more than 450,000 people in this country of 10 million, or nearly five percent of the population, and it has killed more than 6,000. Haiti continues to seek reparations from the United Nations because it was their staff who brought cholera to Haiti.

Students are choosing courses and selecting majors and minors to help them achieve that goal.

I began to notice the PFE in 2010, and it is still growing. Because of the PFE, more students each year combine their academic interests in anthropology, global health, and international affairs. These students are beginning to graduate and are going on to pursue humanitarian careers. Thanks to Paul Farmer and the PFE, they are more powerfully informed to make the world a better place.

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

Applied Anthropology: Separate Field or Cross-Cutting Focus?

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

Many anthropologists feel that applied anthropology should be considered a fifth field of anthropology, standing on its own. Many others think that the application of

knowledge to solve problems, just like theory, should be part of each field (see Figure 1.1). The latter is the author's position, and, therefore, many examples of applied anthropology appear throughout this book.

Applied anthropology can be found in all four fields of anthropology, for example:

- Archaeologists are employed in cultural resource management (CRM), assessing the presence of possible archaeological remains before construction projects, such as roads and buildings, can proceed.
- Biological anthropologists are employed as forensic anthropologists, participating in criminal investigations through laboratory work identifying bodily remains. Others work in nonhuman primate conservation, helping to protect their habitats and survival.

- Linguistic anthropologists consult with educational institutions about how to improve standardized tests for bilingual populations and conduct policy research for governments.
- Cultural anthropologists apply their knowledge to poverty reduction, education, health care, international business, and conflict prevention and resolution (see *Anthropology Works* throughout this book for examples).

Introducing Cultural Anthropology

1.2 Recognize what is cultural anthropology.

Cultural anthropology is devoted to studying human cultures worldwide, both their similarities and differences. Cultural anthropology makes “the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Spiro 1990). It teaches us to look at ourselves from the “outside” as a somewhat “strange” culture. A compelling example of making the familiar strange is the case of the Nacirema (nah-see-RAY-muh), a “culture” first described in 1956:

The Nacirema are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and the Tarahumara of Mexico, and the Carib and the Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, though tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a culture hero, Notgnihsaw, who is otherwise known for two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the Spirit of Truth resided (Miner 1965 [1956]:415).

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

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

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

Highlights in the History of Cultural Anthropology

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

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

The concept of evolution was important in the thinking of early cultural anthropologists. The most important founding figures of cultural anthropology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Sir Edward Tylor and Sir James Frazer in England and Lewis Henry Morgan in the United States (see Figure 1.2 on page 8). They developed a model of cultural evolution whereby all cultures evolve from lower to higher forms over time. This view placed non-Western peoples at a “primitive” stage and Euro-American culture as “civilization.” It assumed that non-Western cultures would either catch up to the level of Western civilization or die out.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a major figure in modern cultural anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century, established a theoretical approach called **functionalism**. It says that a culture is similar to a biological organism: the parts work together to support the operation of the whole. Religion and family organization, for example, contribute to the functioning of the whole culture. Franz Boas is considered the founder of North American cultural anthropology (see photo on page 9). Born in Germany and educated in physics and geography, he came to the United

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

Figure 1.2 Key Contributors to Euro-American Cultural Anthropology

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

States in 1887 (Patterson 2001:46ff). He brought with him a skepticism toward Western science gained from a year's study with the Inuit, indigenous people of Baffin Island, Canada (see Map 3.4). He learned from the Inuit that people in different cultures may have different perceptions of even basic physical substances, such as "water." Boas came to recognize the individuality and validity of different cultures. He introduced the concept of **cultural relativism**, or the view that each culture must be understood in terms of the values and ideas of that culture and not be judged by the standards of another. According to Boas, no culture is "better" than any other, a view that contrasted markedly with that of the nineteenth-century cultural evolutionists.

Margaret Mead, the most famous student of Boas (see photo on page 9), contributed to understanding how culture, specifically child-rearing, shapes personality and gender roles. Her writings had wide influence on U.S. child-care patterns in the 1950s. Mead was thus an early public anthropologist who took seriously the importance

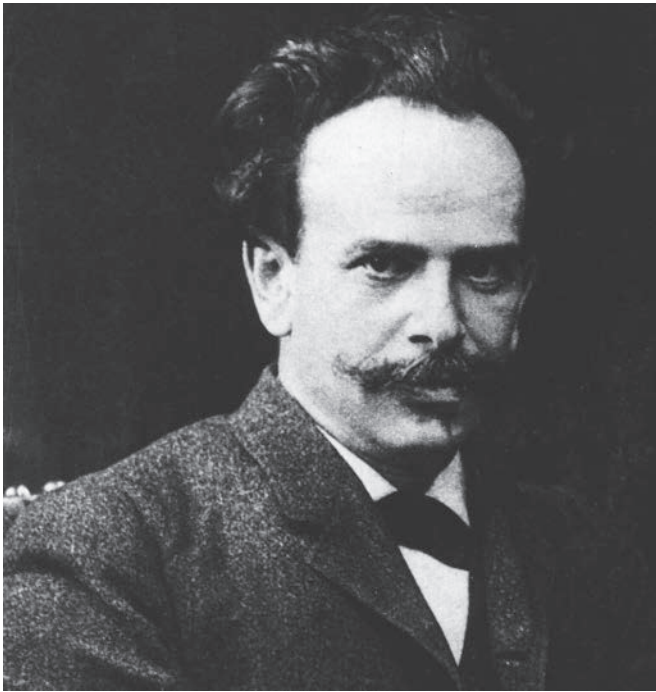
of bringing cultural anthropology knowledge to the general public to create positive social change.

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

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

In the 1960s, Marxist theory emerged in anthropology, stating the importance of people's access to the means of livelihood. It inspired the emergence of a new theoretical

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



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

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

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

Three Debates

Three debates in anthropology go to the heart of basic questions of why people differ and are similar across

cultures, why they behave and think the way they do, and how anthropologists should proceed to understand these questions. The first debate engages biological anthropology with cultural anthropology. The second and third are debates specifically within cultural anthropology.

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM VERSUS CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONISM **Biological determinism** seeks to explain people's behavior and thinking by considering biological factors such as people's genes and hormones. Thus, biological determinists search for the gene or hormone that contributes to behavior such as homicide, alcoholism, or adolescent stress. They also examine cultural

cultural materialism an approach to studying culture by emphasizing the material aspects of life, including people's environment, how people make a living, and differences in wealth and power.

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

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

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

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