

Exploring Culture and Gender through Film

An OER Textbook

Christian Hammons

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Preface

This book is an Open Educational Resource (OER) designed specifically for the course Exploring Culture and Gender through Film, which I teach every semester at the University of Colorado Boulder. The course began as an introduction to cultural anthropology that used films to illustrate key concepts, but it has evolved over the years to become much more than that. Films can do things that written texts cannot; they can convey knowledge that cannot be conveyed in writing or any other medium. In the course, written texts and films now inform each other. The key concepts in cultural anthropology still provide context for the films, but just as importantly, the films convey a kind of cinematic knowledge that provides context for the key concepts. Together, they offer unique and compelling insights into the human condition.

This book introduces the key concepts, but at the end of each chapter, there are sections that begin to connect them to the films. "Now Showing" briefly describes a film that pairs well with the key concepts in the chapter and includes a list of suggested reading. "Thinking Critically" is a question that encourages the reader to connect the key concepts to the film.

SOURCES

With the exception of this preface, the introduction to each chapter, and the "Now Showing" and "Thinking Critically" sections at the end of each chapter, this book consists of lightly edited chapters from other OER textbooks. Eight of the 12 chapters are taken from *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Nina Brown, Thomas McIlwraith, and Laura Tubelle de Gonzalez (2020). Three chapters are taken from *The Art of Being Human* by Michael Wesch (2018), and one chapter is taken from *Moving Pictures: An Introduction to Cinema* by Russell Sharman (2020). All three books are licensed under the Creative Commons and can be reused with certain limitations. *Perspectives* has a CC BY-NC license. *The Art of Being Human* and *Moving Pictures* both have a CC-BY-NC-SA license. In accordance with Creative Commons rules, this book has a CC-BY-NC-SA license, which means that it can be remixed, adapted, and built upon non-commercially, as long as the authors are credited and new creations are licensed under identical terms.

SECTION 1: CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the most important concept in anthropology - culture - and the almost-as-important concept of ethnography, the description of culture. It also introduces the tools of film analysis and the subfield of media anthropology.

Chapter 1:

The Anthropological Perspective

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the anthropological perspective - the unique, holistic view of humans that distinguishes anthropology from other disciplines. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Introduction to Anthropology" by Katie Nelson and Lara Braff (2020). The film is *Hijabi World*.

INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY

Katie Nelson, Inver Hills Community College

knelson@inverhills.edu

<http://kanelson.com/>

Lara Braff, Grossmont College

lara.braff@gcccd.edu

Learning Objectives

- Identify the four subfields of anthropology and describe the kinds of research projects associated with each subfield.
- Define culture and the six characteristics of culture.
- Describe how anthropology developed from early explorations of the world through the professionalization of the discipline in the 19th century.
- Discuss ethnocentrism and the role it played in early attempts to understand other cultures.
- 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.

The first time I (Katie Nelson) heard the word anthropology, I was seventeen years old and sitting at the kitchen table in my home in rural Minnesota. My mother was stirring a pot of chili on the stove. My dog was barking (again) at the squirrels outside. Her low bawl filtered through the screen door left open on the porch. It was the summer before I was to start college and I had a Macalester College course catalog spread out in front of me as I set about carefully selecting the courses that would make up my fall class schedule. When I applied to college, I had indicated in my application that I was interested in studying creative writing, poetry specifically. But I also had a passion for languages and people: observing people, interacting with people and understanding people, especially those who were culturally different from myself. I noticed a course in the catalog entitled “Cultural Anthropology.” I did not know exactly what I would learn, but the course description appealed to me and I signed up for it. Several weeks later, I knew what my major would be— anthropology!

Like Katie, I (Lara Braff) started college with a curiosity about people but no clear major. In my second year, without knowing what anthropology was, I enrolled in an anthropology course called “Controlling Processes.” Throughout the semester, the professor encouraged us to question how social institutions (like the government, schools, etc.) affect the ways we think and act. This inquiry resonated with my upbringing: my mother, who had immigrated to the United States in her twenties, often questioned U.S. customs that were unfamiliar to her. At times, this was profoundly disappointing to me as a child. For example, she could not understand the joyous potential of filling up on candy at Halloween, a holiday not celebrated in her country. Yet, her outsider perspective inspired in me a healthy skepticism about things that others take to be “normal.” As I took more anthropology courses, I became intrigued by diverse notions of normality found around the world.

If you are reading this textbook for your first anthropology course, you are likely wondering, much like we did, what anthropology is all about. Perhaps the course description appealed to you in some way, but you had a hard time articulating what exactly drove you to enroll. With this book, you are in the right place!

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. You will read more about the development of this four-field approach in the [Doing Fieldwork chapter](#) (chapter three).

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.

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 cen-

tral 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). For more about Bourgois, please see the interview with him in the learning resources, *Anthropology in Our Moment in History*.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Cultural anthropologists study all aspects of culture, but what exactly is “culture”? When we (the authors) first ask students in our introductory cultural anthropology courses what culture means to them, our students typically say that culture is food, clothing, religion, language, traditions, art, music, and so forth. Indeed, culture includes many of these observable characteristics, but culture is also something deeper. Culture is a powerful defining characteristic of human groups that shapes our perceptions, behaviors, and relationships.

One reason that culture is difficult to define is that it encompasses all the intangible qualities that make people who they are. Culture is the “air we breathe:” it sustains and comprises us, yet we largely take it for granted. We are not always consciously aware of our own culture.

Furthermore, cultural anthropologists themselves do not always agree on what culture is. In defining culture, some anthropologists emphasize material life and objects (e.g. tools, clothing, and technologies); others emphasize culture as a system of intangible beliefs; and still others focus on practices or customs of daily life. We propose a broad definition of culture.³

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.

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. Yet, members of a culture share many things in common. 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 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. Yet, 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 not and even transform it.

In the definition above, *belief* refers not just to what we “believe” to be right or wrong, true or false. Belief also refers to all the mental aspects of culture including values, norms, philosophies, worldview, knowledge, and so forth. *Practices* refers to behaviors and actions that may be motivated by belief or performed without reflection as part of everyday routines.

Much like art and language, culture is also symbolic. A symbol is something that stands for something else, often without a 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. 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.

This definition of culture – shared, learned beliefs, practices, and symbols – allows us to understand that people everywhere are thinkers and actors shaped by their social contexts. As we will see throughout this book, these contexts are incredibly diverse, comprising the human cultural diversity that drew many of us to become anthropologists in the first place.

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 uniquely channels these urges in particular ways and 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.

Characteristics of Culture

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

1. Humans are born with the capacity to learn the culture of any social group. We learn culture both directly and indirectly.
2. Culture changes in response to both internal and external factors.
3. Humans are not bound by culture; they have the capacity to conform to it or not, and sometimes change it.
4. Culture is symbolic; individuals create and share the meanings of symbols within their group or society.
5. The degree to which humans rely on culture distinguishes us from other animals and shaped our evolution.
6. Human culture and biology are interrelated: Our biology, growth, and development are impacted by culture.

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.

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 ajaib 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: Statue of Zhang Qian in Chenggu, China. Zhang Qian is still celebrated today in China as an important diplomat and pioneer of the silk road. Image courtesy of Judy Wells and Debi Lander



Figure 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 the 1700s, 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 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 sat-

isfy 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.



Figure 4: Franz Boas, circa 1915.

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.

THE (OTHER) SUBFIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

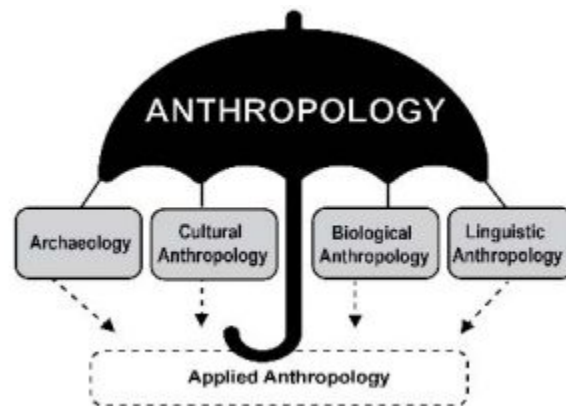


Figure 5: Anthropology and Its Subfields. Image by Katie Nelson.

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.

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 *Homo naledi*. 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.



Figure 7: Human skin color ranges from dark brown to light pink.

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).

Archaeology



Figure 6: 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 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

Archaeologists focus 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 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?

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 8: 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).



Figure 9: From the moment they are born, children learn through language and nonverbal forms of communication.

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.

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.



Figure 10: Paul Farmer in Haiti.

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, 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.

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.



Figure 11: By using a holistic approach, anthropologists learn how different aspects of humanity interact with and influence one another. Image by Mary Nelson.

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 contribute 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.

Cultural Relativism (versus Ethnocentrism)

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. Oftentimes, informants actively participate in the research process, helping the anthropologist ask better questions and understand different perspectives.

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 competing interests of the funding agency and the community? To address these questions,



Figure 12: Author Katie Nelson conducting ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented Mexican immigrant college students. Photo by Luke Berhow.

anthropologists are obligated to follow a professional code of ethics that guide us through ethical considerations in our research.⁶

Scientific vs 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.

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.

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

Cultural Anthropologist, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

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 13: Anthony Kwame Harrison, PhD. Photo by Jim Stroup.



Figure 14: 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 15: 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.

Cultural Anthropologist, Alfred University

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 con-



Figure 16: Bob Myers 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.

versations 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

Cultural Anthropologist, Colorado State University

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.



Figure 17: Lynn Kwiatkowski (second from left) Celebrating Tét, the Lunar New Year, with a family in their home village in rural, northern Vietnam. Photo courtesy of Lynn Kwiatkowski.

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.

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.



Figure 18: Family members gathered at their home in Ifugao Province, the Philippines. Photo courtesy of Lynn Kwiatkowski.

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

Cultural relativism: the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their own culture and not our own.

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.

Enculturation: the process of learning the characteristics and expectations of a culture or group.

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

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

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

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.

Paleoanthropologist: biological anthropologists who study ancient human relatives.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Katie Nelson is an instructor of anthropology at Inver Hills Community College. Her research focuses on migration, identity, belonging, and citizenship(s) in human history and in the contemporary United States, Mexico, and Morocco. She received her B.A. in anthropology and Latin American studies from Macalester College, her M.A. in anthropology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, an M.A. in education and instructional technology from the University of Saint Thomas, and her Ph.D. 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.

Katie views teaching and learning as central to her practice as an anthropologist and as mutually reinforcing elements of her professional life. She is the former chair of the Teaching Anthropology Interest Group (2016–2018) of the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association and currently serves as the online content editor for the [Teaching and Learning Anthropology Journal](#). She has contributed to several open access textbook projects, both as an author and an editor, and views the affordability of quality learning materials as an important piece of the equity and inclusion puzzle in higher education.¹⁰



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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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.
5. <https://www.nps.gov/afbg/index.htm>
6. See the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics: <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/>

statement/

7. See: American Anthropological Association Statement of Purpose: <https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1650>
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.
9. The statue I'm standing next to in the photograph remembers the awful story of the Inuit High Arctic Relocations in the early 1950s, a textbook case of the ways Canada has abused Native peoples. Inuit from Inukjuak (formerly Port Harrison) in northern Quebec and Pond Inlet on Baffin Island were forced to move to Resolute and Grise Fiord in the High-Arctic territory that is now called Nunavut. The government's promises of good conditions were deceptive and the Inuit struggled with a lack of shelter and food resources. Following the eventual public hearings in 1996, the Inuit were awarded a Can\$10 million settlement. For more information see Melanie McGrath's *The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
10. See: <http://perspectives.americananthro.org/> and <https://textbooks.opensuny.org/global-perspectives-on-gender/>

NOW SHOWING: *HIJABI WORLD*

Hijabi World is a short film about the practice of wearing a headscarf among young Muslim women in the United States. Produced by Julie Winokur and Ed Kashi (2015), the film is part of the "Newest Americans" series and is available on YouTube (<https://newestamericans.com/hijabi-world/>).

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" by Lila Abu-Lughod (2002)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why do the young Muslim women in *Hijabi World* wear the headscarf, and how do their reasons work against the assumptions of many non-Muslim Americans, such as those described in Abu-Lughod's "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"

Chapter 2: The Concept of Culture

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the most important concept in anthropology: culture. It's culture that makes us human, that sets us apart from nature and accounts for human diversity. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Culture" by Michael Wesch (2018). The film is *Honeyland*.

Culture

You can respond to human differences with hate or ignorance, or you can choose to open up to them and ask questions you have never considered before.

THE ART OF SEEING

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?" — David Foster Wallace

Culture is like water to us. We're so immersed in our own ideas and assumptions that we can't see them. It can be useful to jump out of the water now and then. This is one of the great virtues of encountering someone or some place that is radically different from what we know. We see the contrast between how we do things and how they do things, and we can then see ourselves in a new light.

The art of seeing can be broken up into four parts. First, we have to see our own seeing—that is, see how we see the world, recognizing our own taken-for-granted assumptions, and be able to set them aside. Second, we have to "see big," to see the larger cultural, social, economic, historical, and

political forces that shape our everyday lives. Third, we have to "see small," paying close attention to the smallest details and understanding their significance. And finally, we have to "see it all," piecing all of this together to see how everything we can see interacts from a holistic point of view.

Learning to see in this way is the essence of learning. As Neil Postman points out, "The ability to learn turns out to be a function of the extent to which one is capable of perception change. If a student goes through four years of school and comes out 'seeing' things in the way he did when he started ... he learned nothing."

Mastering the art of seeing offers many benefits beyond just the ability to learn. The most obvious benefit is that you become better at building and maintaining relationships. Being able to see your own seeing and set aside your assumptions, see big to see where another person is coming from, and see small to truly understand them from their point of view can help you through the most challenging of relationship troubles. It can help you build better friendships, and allow you to make more friends across boundaries rarely crossed.

But mastering the art of seeing offers something even more profound. When you master the art of seeing *you will never be bored*. You will see the strange in the familiar, and the familiar in the strange. And you will have the ability to find significance in the most mundane moments. As David Foster Wallace says, "if you really learn how to pay attention ... it will be in your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down."

While his metaphor of a fish in water is useful, culture is different from water in one very important way: it is not just the environment around us. It is a part of us. It is the very thing that allows us to see and notice things at all. We see the world through our culture. Leaping out of the water doesn't just allow you to see your own culture in a new light; it allows you to see your own seeing. And

sometimes, even something that looks familiar on the surface might be the source of a revealing difference.

SEEING YOUR OWN SEEING

Basketball arrived in my village just one year before me. Large groups of all ages gathered every afternoon on a dirt court that had been cleared of grass and pounded flat by nothing but bare human feet. The backboards were slats of wood carved with axes from the surrounding forest, and the rims were made of thick metal wire, salvaged from some other project. They played every day until sundown, the perfect end to a day of gardening and gathering firewood. It was a welcome and familiar sight, and I eagerly joined in.

I stepped onto the court and noticed that for the first time in my life, I was taller than everybody else. Even better, the rims had been set to about 8 feet, perfect for dunking. I rushed in for a massive dunk on my first opportunity, putting my team up 6-0. I looked to my friend Kodenim for a high five, but he looked concerned or even angry as he slapped his hand to his forearm as if to say, "Foul! Foul!"

I owned the court. I grabbed a steal and went in for another dunk, looking to Kodenim again for a fist pump or cheer. Instead, he gave me a stern look and pounded his bicep with his hand. He was trying to send me a signal, but I wasn't getting it.

Later I would find out that he was trying to send me a not-so-subtle reminder of the score. Rather than a "Base 10" counting system (cycling 1-10 then starting again 11-20 and so on), the villagers use a "Base 27" system and use their entire upper body to count it. 1-5 are on the hand, 6-10 along the arm, 11 at the neck, 12 is the ear, 13 the eye, 14 the nose, and then back down the other side. 6-0, Kodenim slaps his forearm. 8-0, he slaps his bicep.

It is a clever system that suits them well. There are no annual seasons to track in Papua New Guinea, so the most relevant natural cycle to track is not the path of the sun, but the path of the moon. A hunter can start counting from the new moon and know that as the count gets closer to his eyes (days 13, 14, and 15) he will be able to

see at night using the light of the full moon. Women can use it to count the days until their next menstrual cycle.

I drifted into the background of the game as I tried to figure out what was going on. The other team started scoring, tying the game at 14. "14-14!" the score keeper announced with jubilation, pointing to his nose. Everybody cheered and walked off the court. *Where's everybody going?* I thought. *It's tied up.* "Next basket wins!" I suggested. Kodenim took me aside. "Mike, we like to end in a tie," he said, and then he smiled the way you smile at a four-year-old who is just learning the ways of the world, and gently recommended that I not do any more dunking. "People might be jealous."

The story illustrates the power of different types of cultural differences. Some differences, like the Base 27 counting system, are intellectually interesting, but they do not threaten our core beliefs, assumptions, or our moral sense of right and wrong. Such differences are fun to consider and give us an emotionally easy way to play with cultural differences and "see our own seeing."

Other differences, like the preference to end a game in a tie, are a little more challenging, because they force us to recognize that many of our core ideas and ideals are actually culturally constructed. They take what seem to be obvious and natural ideas – like the idea that sports are meant to be won or lost – and show that things need not be this way. We can then ask new questions. *Why do we value competition while they do not? What advantages are there to favoring competition vs. favoring a tie? What does this difference say about our society? What role has this obsession with winning played in my own development? Would my life be better or worse without the emphasis on winning?*

And then there are differences that shake you to your core. They are hard to see because they challenge your most foundational ideas, ideals and values. They might make you question everything about what you thought was right and wrong, real and unreal, possible and impossible.

I was about to find out that the most interesting difference I encountered on that basketball court that day was not the tie game or

the interesting method of counting. It was that last thing Kodenim said to me: "*People might be jealous.*"

A few weeks later, Kodenim would fall ill and be fighting for his life. His once-strong physique would wither until his arms and legs looked like little more than a skeleton, while his stomach would enlarge and become so distended that people would describe him as "pregnant." He would put the blame for his illness on jealousy and claim that someone – probably my adoptive father – was working witchcraft on him. With lives and reputations on the line, it would not be so easy to just put aside my own beliefs, ideals, and values or "see my own seeing." I would need more tools, more ways of seeing.

SEEING BIG

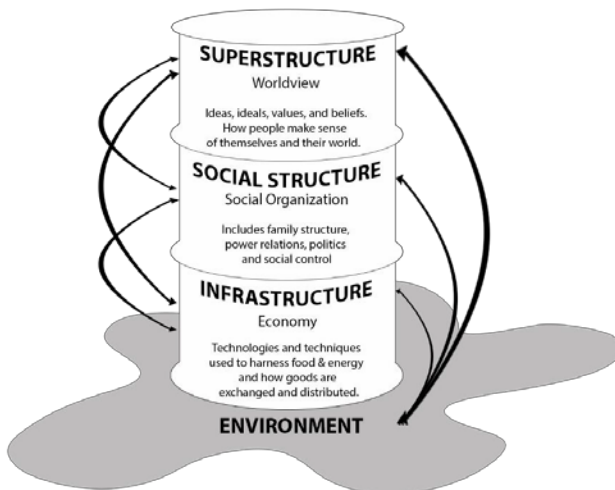
A basic assumption that anthropologists make about culture is that everything is connected. Culture is a complex system made up of many different but interrelated elements. You cannot understand any one part of a culture without understanding how it is related to other parts in the cultural system. Understanding culture will ultimately require that we take a holistic perspective. We have to practice "seeing big."

Given the complexity of culture, it can be useful to have a model. Anthropologists have devised many models and metaphors for understanding culture. Many of them refer in some way to the idea that culture can be divided into three levels: infrastructure, social structure, and superstructure. Here we will use the "barrel model" developed by anthropologist Harald Prins to demonstrate what these levels refer to and how they are interrelated.

The model captures three key features of culture:

1. It is structured.
2. It is pervasive and present in all aspects of our lives, from our economy to our worldview.
3. Each element of culture is integrated with the other elements.

First, by using the word "structure," the model expands upon our common-sense notions of culture. Most people tend to think of culture as "the beliefs and practices of a group of people," but this definition hides the ways in which the vast complex of beliefs and practices in a group ultimately form into formidable structures that shape our lives, just as wood and nails can be joined into complex patterns to form the structure of a house or building. We do not define a house as "wood and nails" because it would tell us nothing about the form of those wood and nails.



A rendition of the "barrel model of culture" developed by anthropologist Harald Prins, based on ideas first introduced by Karl Marx.

In the same way, we cannot simply describe culture as "beliefs and practices" because the long-term patterns of beliefs and practices become as real and formidable as the walls of a house. They form a structure that shapes our lives just as surely as wood and nails can form a structure that shapes a room.

Cultural structures can be difficult to see, so there is often a sense of "seeing beneath the surface of things" in order to understand why we do the things that we do. This is an especially exciting part about obtaining the ability to "see big." When we see big we are seeing big

patterns and structures that are usually hidden from our everyday consciousness.

It is like pulling back the curtain on the workings of the world or cracking open the box of culture to see what really makes us tick. The model then teases apart three different levels of structure, further expanding our notion of culture beyond mere "beliefs and practices." Culture can be divided into infrastructure, social structure, and superstructure, or, in other words, our economy (technologies, techniques, exchange & distribution systems); social organization (social, political, and family structures); and our worldview (ideas, ideals, beliefs and values).

The model demonstrates that culture permeates our lives, from how we make a living (economy) to what we live for (our ideals and values).

But perhaps the most important piece of the model is the double arrows, which point to the fact that culture is integrated and dynamic. Change one thing and you change them all. A shift in the environment or a new technology can have profound effects on social structure or worldview, and vice versa.

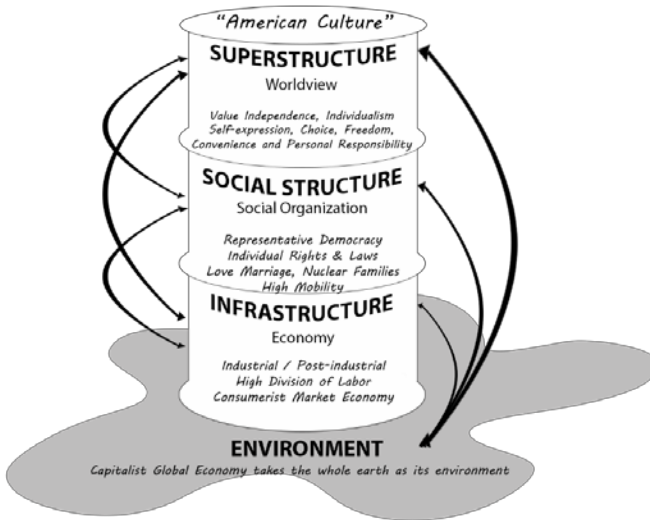
"Seeing big" takes practice. You cannot just memorize this model and suddenly be a master of seeing big. Structure is hard to see, and seeing the complex relationships between different levels of structure can be even harder. Unlike simple math, when you try to understand a culture, there is no point at which you will know beyond doubt that you "have it right." But despite this uncertainty, it is absolutely necessary.

Let's start our practice by using the barrel model to examine American culture. We can begin by simply plugging in some simple descriptions of American infrastructure, social structure and superstructure.

Our infrastructure might be described as industrial or post-industrial with a global capitalist economy. To survive, we each must find a job, earn money, and then exchange this money for food and

other goods. Our exchanges are meant to be efficient and simple exchanges of commodities.

Relationships are hidden or minimized. We usually have no idea who grew our food, who packaged it, who delivered it, or even who sold it to us. We certainly do not feel obligated to them in any way once we have paid for the goods.



This shapes and is shaped by a worldview with a powerful sense of independence and individualism. *I earned my money. I bought these things. They are mine now.* Choices are abundant, and we can demonstrate to others who we are by the choices we make.

We not only choose what we will eat, wear, or drive. We also choose what jobs we will do, who we will marry, and where we will live (mobility). Our political system further enshrines the value of choice as we vote to choose who will represent us and make our laws.

We value and nurture individualism in our schools when we give out individual grades or champion a student's unique creativity. We celebrate and elevate sports and movie stars for their unique individual talents. We seek individual salvation or enlightenment. The values of independence, individualism, choice and freedom permeate

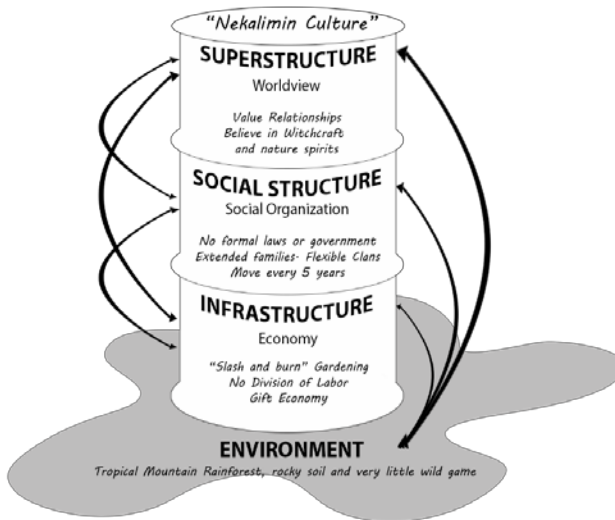
our lives, from infrastructure, to social structure, to superstructure. We can try to tease apart the culture and find causal relationships. *Does capitalism cause individualism? Or does individualism cause capitalism? Or more broadly, does infrastructure cause superstructure or vice versa?*

But the closer we look, the more we find these elements of culture are so intimately connected that there is no way to pull them apart. Instead of saying that one element shapes another, we often say that one element "shapes and is shaped by" another.

Capitalism shapes and is shaped by individualism. Individualism shapes and is shaped by the American political system. The American labor market shapes and is shaped by individualism. This kind of relationship is called "mutual constitution." Both elements are "constituted" (made up of and made possible by) each other.

If our value on individualism waned, capitalism would change as well. If capitalism changes, so do our individualistic values.

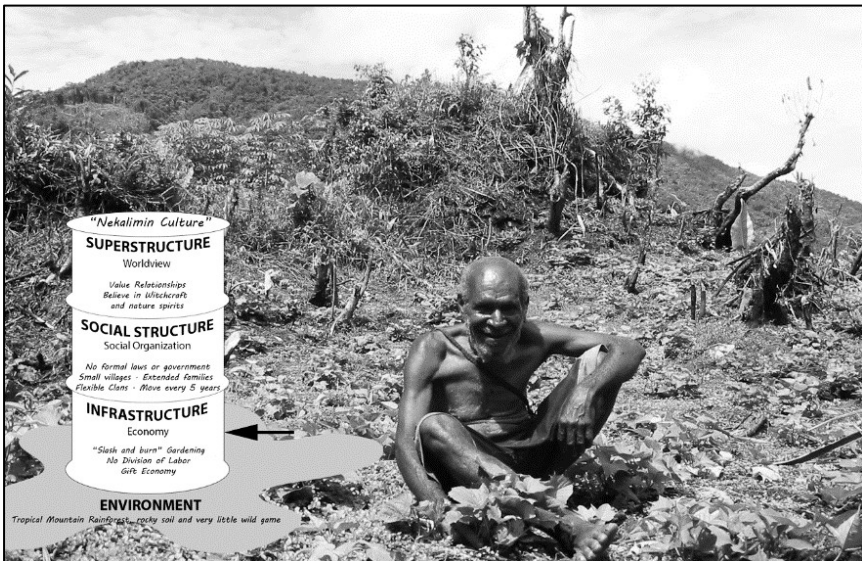
Now let's look at Nekalimin culture. A quick sketch of the key elements of their culture plugged into the barrel model looks like this:



Let's do a quick tour of their land to see what this looks like in reality. They live in a tropical mountain rainforest with rocky soils

and very little wild game. There is not enough game to support the culture, so they cannot survive on hunting alone. The soil is rocky, low in nutrients, and most of it is shaded by the forest canopy. However, by cutting down the forest they let the sunshine in and they can burn what they cut as a way of adding nutrients to the soil for their taro, sweet potato, and bananas.

Here is a picture of my father in his garden that has recently been cleared, burned and planted.

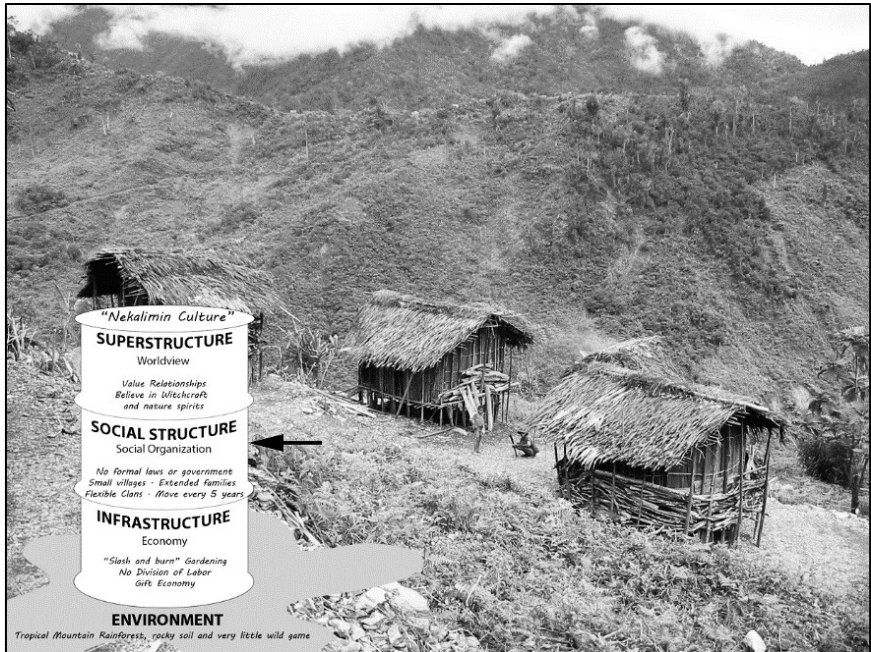


The nutrients from the burn will last about five years. After this, the area must be left alone so the forest can regenerate for about 30 years and then be cleared and burned again.

One immediate impact of this gardening practice is on the size and location of villages. A typical village has no more than 10 houses and a total population ranging from about 30 to 80. Anything larger requires longer and longer walks to access gardens and sources of firewood. Villages also move about every 5-10 years as the nutrients from a burned area are depleted and left to regenerate.

There are no markets or money exchanges. Food and goods are shared and exchanged as gifts rather than bought and sold as

commodities. When someone gives a gift, they do not expect immediate payment. As I discovered, offering immediate cash payment can be offensive, as it suggests that you are trying to end the relationship and not have to remember them.



In this gift economy, it is the relationships that have lasting value, not goods or money. People work hard to maintain strong relationships because they know they can then call on them when they are in need. There is no incentive to hoard goods, since most of their goods (like sweet potatoes and bananas) would rot and wither away.

As the nutrients of their current gardens are depleted, people have to think about where they will make their next garden. This gives them still more incentive to maintain good relationships. They will have to make a claim on land and with no written records or deeds of ownership, those claims will depend on a general consensus that their claims are valid. These claims are made through clan membership, which is flexible enough to allow people to move from

one clan area to another as long as their claims are recognized by current clan members.

With such a strong emphasis on good relations, there is no need for formal or written laws, rules or policies. There are no lawyers, rulers, or police. All people have a natural incentive to be good and to build and maintain good relationships with others because their livelihood depends on it. Since nobody has any official power over anyone else, and there is no division of labor, it is mostly an egalitarian society, with very little difference in status and wealth.

So unlike the American worldview which is dominated by the ideas and ideals of individualism and independence, the Nekalimin worldview is dominated by a focus on relationships. This focus on relationships dominates their consciousness and allows them to see and think about the world in a very different way than we do. They see and understand their connections and relationships to each other and their land much more sharply. They are keenly conscientious and aware of the complex relationships that link them to others and are able to do extraordinarily complex relationship calculus as they try to solve social problems. They believe in spirits of nature with whom they must maintain strong relationships, offering small bits of pork to the spirit of a grove or hillside in hopes that they will have good health and a good harvest. They do not see themselves as individuals separated from the world. They see themselves and their bodies as intimately connected to other people and the world around them.

And they believe in witchcraft. As Kodenim grew ever more ill, a shaman was called in to investigate. He went into a trance, the house started shaking, and a small bundle of food, smaller than a golf ball, fell in front of him, as if it had fallen from the spirit world and right into our own. He picked it up and confirmed Kodenim's worst fears. He had been bewitched.

The shaman explained that the small packet of food that came to him in a trance was a piece of sweet potato that Kodenim had eaten. It had been placed under the spiky roots of a pandanus fruit, which was now causing his stomach pain and swelling. The shaman could

not identify the witch, but suggested that Kodenim try to find out who the witch might be, address the core problem between them in order to heal the relationship, and ask the witch to stop. Every night until he could solve this problem, the witches would be feasting on his body, and he would continue to wither away and die.



Despite my growing capacities to "see big" and understand these beliefs within a larger cultural context that places strong emphasis on relationships, I simply could not go along with the idea that Kodenim was being consumed by witches. I begged his family to let me take him to a hospital on the next flight out, but Kodenim himself refused. By his reckoning, his only chance of survival was to stay and fix his relationships. As a compromise I took pictures of his swollen belly and skeletal-thin limbs and attached them to a letter to a friend of mine, a doctor at the Mayo Clinic specializing in tropical diseases. Maybe he would know what was wrong and we could still save Kodenim.

Meanwhile, I knew that I was failing as an anthropologist in my efforts to truly "see" and understand my New Guinea friends. Humans are meaning-makers. We make sense of the world. The

anthropologist has endless faith that no matter how odd or exotic a belief might seem, it will make sense once all the details are laid out and understood. For this, I would need yet another tool.

SEEING SMALL

Anthropologists are passionate connoisseurs of the little things. We want to understand the blooming, buzzing complexity of life in all of its nuance and detail. There are no details too small. Clifford Geertz calls it "thick description," and in the seminal article of the same name he famously spends several pages describing the many meanings one might imply or infer from something as simple and small as the wink of an eye. Our goal, as Geertz writes, is to see the "Grand Realities" of "Power, Change, Faith, Oppression, Work, Passion, Authority, Beauty, Violence, Love, and Prestige" in the give and take detail and minutia of everyday life so as to "take the capital letters off of them."

We must pay close attention not only to what is said, but also who said it, how they said it, who they said it to, when, where, and if at all possible to decipher, why. Long-term fieldwork of many months or even several years is a must for this kind of seeing. It takes time not only to learn the language but also to tune your senses and start to see what matters and what does not.

Understanding a culture in its own terms (following the foundational premise of cultural relativism) means that we must understand all the details and nuance of their worldview. Just by using the word "witchcraft" to translate their beliefs, we are already putting them into our own terms. For us, witchcraft is a backwards superstition standing against a more rational and scientific understanding of the world. We associate it with beliefs wiped out by the Enlightenment several hundred years ago.

The more I started paying attention to the little things, the more I understood that these local beliefs that I was categorizing as witchcraft were actually just one piece of a much larger, richer, and more convincing worldview. I started noticing the care and concern

given to analyzing each and every gift exchange. I noticed how each gift was given along with a short and carefully delivered speech about where the materials came from, who made it, who delivered it, and who cared for it along the way. I noticed how they talked about such gifts as "building a road" or "tying a string" between the two parties so that they would always remember each other. And soon, this careful attention to relationships and the gifts that bind them was helping me understand why dunking a basketball or otherwise showboating, or looking to crush your opponent, is not valued. I started noticing a great deal of concern about jealousy and other elements that could eat away at a relationship.

What eventually emerged from these close and careful observations was an entirely different understanding of health and well-being. They understand themselves to be physically made up of their relationships. It starts from the basic recognition that the food they eat becomes who they are. This is, of course, actually true. We process the food we eat and its energy fuels our growth. For them, every piece of food they ever consume from the time they are a small child is a gift, and they are taught to know where it came from and all of the people that helped bring it into their hands and into their bodies.

The food was created through the hard work of others tending the gardens and is itself made up of the nutrients of the earth. The nutrients of the earth are in turn made up from the death and decay of plants, animals, and their own ancestors. As they take in this food it literally becomes them, and as the food itself is made up of the relationships that made it, so their bodies are made up of the relationships that made the food and brought it into their being. They understand that every last element – every atom – of their body was in one way or another given to them by their relationships. They literally *are* their relationships.

It makes perfect sense, then, that when they get sick, they would turn to an analysis of their relationships. From our Western perspective, based on a model of the body as a separate individual,

we think that it is impossible that one body could magically harm another body simply by willing harm and placing their food in a bundle at the base of a pandanus tree. We call it "witchcraft." But if you see yourself as actually made up of your relationships to others and the land, it makes sense. So when Kodenim became ill, he and his closest friends started analyzing his relationships, taking inventory of all the times Kodenim had wronged another person. He had stolen a pig from my father, so my father was at the top of the list. He had also lied to Kenny, killed and eaten Ona's chicken, and had a strained relationship with his in-laws, who were especially upset with him.

My father offered to wash Kodenim as a show of his innocence. Washing is a ritual thought to "cool" the witchcraft. If my father was the witch, the soap and water would cool his witchcraft and remove it from Kodenim.

Kodenim knelt before my father as he stirred the water, and my father began to wash him. He prayed as he washed, calling on God to be his witness that he had no reason to harm Kodenim, that he loved him, and that they were really just one family. He reminisced about how Kodenim's father was like a brother to him, and that he had always looked upon Kodenim like a son of his own. I swallowed hard with emotion, knowing their history and the gravity of the situation, and noticed that Kodenim's friends and family who were standing nearby were also in a somber reflective mood, their eyes moist as they held back their tears.

Kodenim's health did not improve. So a few days later, a much larger ritual was arranged. Kenny (whom he had lied to) and Ona (he stole her chicken), as well as all of my father's extended family, attended. The event started with an open admission of the wrongs Kodenim had done, followed by heartfelt statements of forgiveness forgiveness from Kenny, Ona, and others he had wronged. Then Kodenim took a seat on a log as dozens of people lined up to wash him. This time there was no holding back the emotion of the moment. One by one, those he had wronged as well as their extended families moistened their hands and washed his head, often saying a prayer of care and

forgiveness as they did this. Kodenim looked especially ill. People lingered long after the ritual, like they didn't want to let Kodenim or this special moment go.



The next day, the plane came in with news from my friend at the Mayo Clinic. He said that they would need to do blood tests to find out more, but even then he was not confident that anything could be done. He recommended staying in the village.

Kodenim died two days later.



The aftermath was difficult. Kodenim's family was hurt and angry, as we all were, and came to my father asking for compensation. They wanted a huge amount of wealth by local standards – several bushknives, two axes, clothes, bags, bows and arrows. Altogether, their request was many times the wealth of any single individual.

The request deeply offended and angered me. It challenged my most fundamental understandings of justice. Kodenim had stolen a pig from my father, causing a rift in the relationship. His family was sure it was this that had killed him. Maybe my father did not work the witchcraft himself, but he should have been looking after him more carefully, especially since Kodenim lived in the same village as my father. On my scales of justice, we were the ones who were wronged, and we were the ones who deserved payment. Kodenim had stolen from us, not the other way around.

I felt lost and confused, and tried to drift into the background and grieve Kodenim's death in my own way. I started spending more time alone, and when I was around other people, I always brought my camera and just hid behind the viewfinder. In this way, I could pretend to be doing "work" and hope to not be bothered, but my father called my bluff. "My son," he said, looking into the camera, "why don't you use that thing to show them I am not a witch!" and then gave a hearty laugh. He liked to play the "stupid old man" who didn't understand these new technologies like cameras, but he knew perfectly well that my camera could not exonerate him. He just

wanted me to stop hiding. I realized something very important in that moment:

Participation is not a choice.

Only how we participate is a choice.

Sitting back and doing nothing is in itself a form of participation. You can't pretend like your actions do not matter and stand off to the side of social life.

But what to do? I did not want to contribute to the compensation as I was being asked to do. I would need to finally put it all together and practice the full art of seeing.

SEEING IT ALL

No matter how good you get at seeing your own seeing, seeing big, and seeing small, you can never really see the world as they see it. You can't "go native" and be just like them. Despite my best efforts, I could not really bring myself to believe that Kodenim had been killed by witchcraft, and that the death could have been avoided if my father had nurtured a healthier relationship with him.

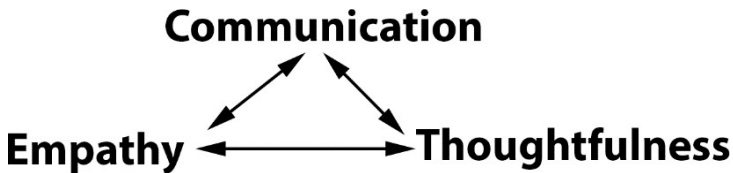
"Being true to yourself" is an equally troublesome strategy. If you simply stick to your own ideas, ideals, beliefs, and values, then you are refusing to learn and grow. You fail to nurture any true empathy and understanding.

What is needed is some method that can be practiced day in and day out that slowly moves us closer and closer toward understanding. It has to be something we can remember when times get hard, something that can keep us on track even when our own feelings, emotions, fears, and biases start clouding our vision.

It was during hard times like these that I turned to the most important tools in the anthropologist's toolkit: Communication, Empathy, and Thoughtfulness. We have to keep talking to people (communication), work toward understanding them in their own terms (empathy), using and revising our knowledge and models as we

go (thoughtfulness). As we improve in each one of these areas, the others improve as well. Communicating helps us understand their perspective (empathy) and revise our analytical models (thoughtfulness).

As our empathy improves, we can communicate better and improve our thoughtfulness, and as our thoughtfulness improves we are better able to imagine our way into their perspective (empathy) and communicate more clearly with them. We can summarize these relationships like this:



Seeing small had allowed me to understand their logic. Seeing big allowed me to see how this logic fit in with other elements of their culture. The more I communicated, empathized, and thought through the matter, the more I started to understand – not as an academic studying the matter, but as a human being deeply enmeshed in the matter myself. From that insider perspective, I now realized that witchcraft beliefs were an integral part of a much larger system that had remained hidden until then.

What was apparent as an insider was that our choice to pay or not pay the compensation would have life and death consequences for the village. We could pay the compensation, thereby reconnecting two family networks and saving the village, or we could simply choose to move out and start a new village. It turns out that witchcraft, more than the depletion of nutrients in the soil, is the engine that keeps people moving. Most villages trace their origin to a witchcraft accusation. If you stand on a high peak and look at the villages dotting the landscape, you are looking at a history of accusations, deaths, and failed compensations.

Most villages are made up of no more than a handful of families. When someone gets sick or dies, they analyze their relationships to find a strained relation. Usually one of the most strained relationships is between two families within the village. In this case, Kodenim's family blames my family. When Kodenim died, it was not just Kodenim that died. Kodenim, like anyone else in the culture, is also seen as a node in a vast network of relations. His death leaves a vast void in the network that must be repaired, or it threatens to tear apart the fabric of the society. Large compensation gifts can repair this void by reconnecting the extended families and networks that Kodenim once connected.

The entire model of culture we laid out earlier now makes sense in a whole new way. "Witchcraft" is not just this strange belief. It is an integral part of their entire culture.

"Witchcraft" makes sense at every level of culture. First, at the level of superstructure we can say that it is logical in that it makes sense within a sound and logically consistent worldview that focuses on relationships. Furthermore, witchcraft is generally called upon to explain *why* someone is sick, not *how*. Many people can offer sophisticated biomedical explanations for how someone died, but this only explains how; it does not explain why this particular person died at this particular time. Nobody has an answer for "the big Why" of death. Many in the West turn to explanations such as "it was God's will" or it was just "bad luck." These are no more scientifically verifiable than witchcraft.

Second, at the level of social structure, we can say that it is sociological. It makes sense socially. Witchcraft beliefs encourage people to be kind to each other and take care of their relationships in the absence of formal rules and laws. Furthermore, if a relationship does sour, there are rituals such as the washings described earlier that heal relationships.

And finally, at the level of infrastructure, we can say that witchcraft beliefs are ecological. They make sense for the environment. As villages grow to over fifty people, they tend to break

up and split apart due to witchcraft accusations. This is ecologically sound, because it keeps people spread out and well within the total carrying capacity of their land. Rather than suffering massive ecological collapse and starvation during a drought, their low population density spread over many miles of land is sustained even through hard times.

Being able to truly see and understand this put me at ease. I now realized that my contribution to the compensation would heal the relationships of a village I had come to deeply love and care about. The size of the gift forced my father to call in debts of friends and friends of friends, his whole network of relations. The gift was large not only as a sign of respect and love for Kodenim and his family, it also assured us that they would never forget us and that they would one day give something in return. These gifts would make their way back through the vast network we had to call upon to bring this gift together. Still more gifts would then be given in return, and so on. We were retying the ties that once bound us together, filling the void left by Kodenim's departure.

The gifts were set out at the center of the village early one morning. Kodenim's father led his entire extended family down the path and into the village to collect the bounty. There had been much strain in these relationships ever since Kodenim first stole my father's pig. Kodenim's father examined the pile of gifts that had been brought forth. All the wealth in the world cannot replace a son, and no father wants to bury their child. But the sentiment was strong and well-received. He thanked my father and they extended hands for a handshake, tears in their eyes. The handshake soon collapsed into a hug which others joined in on, while others clapped and cried.

My own spirit was still aching from the loss of Kodenim. But as I watched the tears flow down the cheeks of my father, Kodenim's father, and the others who had gathered for that hug, I realized something that filled my soul with gratitude and peace:

This was a beautiful death.

In his final days, Kodenim was able to publicly admit his every sin. He was offered heartfelt forgiveness from those who he had wronged, all because of their beliefs in witchcraft. It may not have cleared his body of whatever it was that killed him, but it sure seemed to cleanse his soul. He died at peace.

And the hole he left in our world was filled with gifts, kindness, and good will.

GROWING UP AMONG THE NACIREMA

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

– T. S. Eliot

If viewing an exotic and very different culture can help us leap out of the water of our own culture to truly see it, the Nacirema need to be high on our list of cultures to examine. In 1956, cultural anthropologist Horace Miner's original article about the Nacirema provided an in-depth look at their ritual behaviors that show, in Miner's words, "the extremes to which human behavior can go." The work was so shocking and revealing that the article went on to be the most widely read article in the history of Anthropology.

As Miner explains in the article, the Nacirema are obsessed with the body, which they believe is intrinsically ugly and prone to debility and disease. Each Nacirema household has a shrine or sometimes several shrines in which private rituals are performed to mitigate what they see as ever-present and pervasive threats to their bodies. Various

charms provided by medicine men are ingested, and they perform several rites of ablution throughout the day using a special purified water secured from the main Water Temple of the community.

Since Miner's time, the Nacirema have started building very large temples called "*mygs*" that contain rows and rows of various body torture devices which they use to punish their own bodies. The devices are designed to tear and damage muscles, causing them to swell. Others are designed to completely exhaust the body and use up all of its energy so that the body starts to consume itself in order to provide energy for movement.

While the Nacirema believe that these rituals make their bodies stronger and more resilient to disease, the primary purpose of these rituals seems to be to transform the shape of the body to conform to Nacirema ideals. These ideals are so extreme that they are beyond the reach of natural human capacity. To achieve these ideals, some Nacirema go so far as to have ritual specialists cut them open and inject liquids into areas of their body that they desire to be larger, or remove soft body tissues and make other parts of their body smaller.

These new temples are just one example of how cultures are always changing, and over the past 70 years, the Nacirema have changed dramatically. For the Nacirema of Miner's study in 1956, even simple black-and-white televisions were a new and exotic technology. Today the Nacirema can be found across the social media landscape on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. This offers us the ability to observe this exotic culture simply by tuning in to their YouTube channels.

One of the more interesting rituals of the Nacirema is the *strecnoc*. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of people attend these rituals which take place around a large, elevated ritual platform known as an *egats*. The rituals are often at night, so the *egats* is lit up in spectacular fashion. Attendees gather in the dark around the *egats* and often consume mind-altering substances such as *lobocla* and *ananjiram* while they wait for the ritual leader to arrive. Attendees are often shaking with anticipation as they wait for the ritual to begin, and the first

sighting of the ritual leader on the egats can send attendees into a frenzy of excitement, jumping up and down, screaming, with arms high in the air as if struggling to reach out and touch the ritual leader and feel their power.

In the late summer of 2013, I decided to examine one of these rituals in more detail. I did a YouTube search and watched the most-watched strencoc of recent days. A large effigy of a bear, one of the most dangerous and feared animals among the Nacirema, was placed at the center of the egats. The bear was approximately 30 feet tall and styled to look like the small toy bears of Nacirema children.

Nacirema children, who are often required by their parents to sleep alone (a rare practice across cultures around the world), often sleep with these small toy bears, seeing them as protectors and often building up strong imaginary friendships with them.

Suddenly, a door opened up in the stomach of the large bear and the ritual leader stepped out from inside. Dancers in toy bear costumes rushed in from the sides of the egats to join her. Together they took to the center of the egats and started doing a special dance that is normally only performed in the privacy of one's own room. It is an especially wild dance, not really meant for anyone to see, in which you simply allow your body to do whatever it feels like doing. This often results in a steady but awkward thrusting or shaking motion while the arms spontaneously mimic whatever is heard in the music. If a handheld string instrument is being played, the arms might move as if to hold it (*ria rating*). If drums are being played, the arms move as if to play the drums (*ria smurd*), and so on. It is a very fun form of dance to do, but it is usually not meant to be seen, and some attendees were uncomfortable watching it, especially as the ritual leader moved more deeply into this private dance and let her entire body move freely but awkwardly. Even her tongue seemed to be out of control, flailing wildly about her face.

"*Make some noise!*" the ritual leader called to the attendees. They screamed into a frenzy as she started the core of the ritual, the *gnos*. The *gnos* is a poetry performance set to music and dance. The *gnos*

began with a voice entering the room, projected from somewhere outside of the egats:

It's our party we can do what we want.

It's our party we can say what we want.

It's our party we can love who we want

We can kiss who we want

We can see who we want

As the voice continued to poetically espouse these core Nacirema ideals of freedom and free choice, the ritual leader continued to demonstrate these values with her body. She bent over and started shaking her backside in an attempt to isolate a contraction of her gluteus maximus muscles which then send the fatty area of the buttocks region into a wave-like motion known as *gnikrent*. This is often interpreted as being very sexually suggestive, and the mixture of childhood toys along with such sexually suggestive dancing (tongue flailing about, buttocks shaking), was simply too much for some of the attendees.

Some were especially shocked because this ritual leader had until recently been known as Annah Anatnom, a hero among children. And she is the daughter of another famous ritual specialist, Yllib Yar Suryc, who is best known for his wholesome family-friendly performances such as "Some Gave All," (a tribute to military families) and "Achy Breaky Heart."



_nkedbang
@AntoineeG35



WTF ??? #MileyCyrus #VMA

11:05 PM - 25 Aug 2013

← ↻ 6 ❤️ 2



Karson Tager ✓
@karsonwithak



Will Smith & his family reacting to Miley Cyrus on stage at #VMAs just won the Internet.

10:18 PM - 25 Aug 2013

← ↻ 2,859 ❤️ 1,583



Ann Elizabeth
@Ann_Eber



But seriously... WHAT HAPPENED?! 😱 #MileyCyrus

11:01 PM - 25 Aug 2013

👤 361 ❤️ 112

Ultimately, the Nacirema were deeply divided on the quality of the performance. It seemed as if there was no middle ground. You either hated it, or you loved it.



Megan Amram
@meganamram

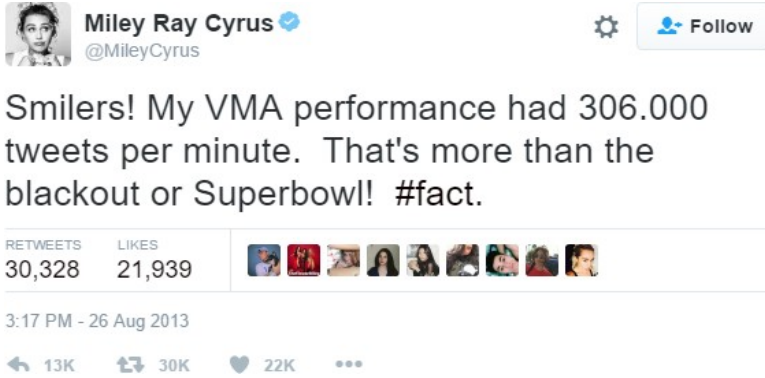


my mom emailed me "Don't believe the press; MILEY CYRUS WAS FANTASTIC!!"

10:25 PM - 26 Aug 2013

👤 130 ❤️ 365

Even as the media criticized her performance, with many saying that it was likely the end of her career, the ritual leader, Yelim, turned their words to her advantage and celebrated the event as a great success.



As an anthropologist, I thought it was one of the most significant artistic performances I had ever seen, a telling portrait of what it is like to grow up among the Nacirema. The toy bears, the awkward “dance like nobody’s watching” dancing that you do in your room as a young child, and the ritual dress that included a cartoon mouse on a little girl's tutu were clear marks of childhood, all of which were shed throughout the performance. The bears transformed into full-bodied voluptuous women. The little girl's tutu was shed to reveal a flesh-toned bikini, and the awkward and childish dancing transformed into a sexual feast of humping, grinding, and *gnikrewt*. She was shedding the skin of her childhood, initiating herself into her own adulthood right in front of our eyes, struggling to show the world that she is now a full adult, not that little girl Aannah Anatnom.

Those Nacirema who had to turn away and just couldn't stand to watch it were probably seeing a little too much of their own awkward childhood and transition to adulthood, for the Nacirema transition to adulthood is always awkward. It is, as they say, a "hot mess."



The cost of their core values of freedom and choice is that there are no limitations or guidelines on how to grow up properly. There are no clearly defined rules for what it means to be an adult. There are no clearly defined pathways for becoming independent. Instead, there are options at every turn of life. The Nacirema cherish these options. But they also make growing up very, very hard.

Children are raised with the idea that they can "be whatever they want to be." They are taught to question and distrust any message that attempts to tell them who they are or how they should behave. "Be true to yourself," is a commonly espoused Nacirema proverb. Yelim echoed these sentiments in her performance, "*We don't take nothing from nobody.*" But because they "don't take nothing from nobody," like advice or values, they are left with nothing to guide them. They set off on a lifelong quest to figure out what they want to do and who they want to be. "Who am I?" is a question that dominates the Nacirema psyche.

As a result, many Nacirema make it their life goal to "find" their "self." Though most Nacirema take this goal for granted, it has not always been this way. Even in Miner's time, the 1950s, things were different. Back then people were often encouraged to conform and follow the rules of society. But by the late 1970s, books like William Glasser's "The Identity Society" and Christopher Lasch's "Culture of Narcissism" documented a shift from a culture that valued humility

and "finding one's place" to one that valued self-expression and "finding one's self."

THE POWER OF CONTINGENCY AND "MAKING THINGS FRAGILE"

It is obvious at this point that the Nacirema are not some exotic culture, but are in fact American, and that "Nacirema" is just "American" spelled backwards. This was Miner's trick. He forced us to see the strange in the familiar and used the art of seeing like an anthropologist on his own culture.

This trick is one method of "seeing your own seeing" without going to an exotic culture. You can find the exotic right around you, and the more mundane, the better. Because when you reveal that even the most mundane beliefs and practices that make up your life can be viewed as strange and exotic, they also become *contingent*, which is a fancy way of saying that they need not exist or that they could have been different. Our beliefs and practices are *contingent* upon the historical and cultural conditions that led to them. And once we recognize them as contingent, we can ask new questions about them.

What is a self? Is it really a thing? Or is it something you do? Would it be better to say that we "create" ourselves rather than "find" it? And what did that other great poet, Marshall Mathers, mean when he said "You gotta lose yourself"? Is it possible that you have to lose your self in order to find your self? If so, what is this "self" that must be lost? Am "I" the same thing as my "self"? If they are the same, how can I say "I" need to find my "self"? Can "I" really find, lose, or create my "self" or do I just need to let the "I" be my "self"?

These are a special kind of questions. These questions do not require answers; the questions are insights in themselves. They give you new alternatives for how to think about your life. They give you

a little bit of freedom from the limited perspectives offered by your taken-for-granted assumptions, ideas, and ideals.

Michel Foucault, a social theorist and historian who has had a large impact on anthropology, says that this kind of analysis is a way of "making things more fragile." It shows that "what appears obvious is not at all so obvious." In his work, Foucault he tries to show that many of the "obvious" facts of our lives that we take for granted can be "made fragile" through cultural and historical analysis. In this way, we "give them back the mobility they had and that they should always have." The ideas and ideals of our culture do not have to have total power over us. We can play with them, make them more fragile, and thereby take some of that power back.

This particular power of the anthropological perspective has been at the heart of anthropology since its founding in the late 1800s. Franz Boas, the father of American Anthropology, said that his whole outlook on life had been determined by one question:

*How can we recognize the shackles that tradition has laid upon us?
For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them.*



LEARN MORE

- ❖ Body Ritual Among the Nacirema, by Horace Miner

Challenge Two: Fieldwork of the Familiar

Your challenge is to do fieldwork in your own culture, find the strange in the familiar, and produce a compelling photo essay of your insights.

Objective: Practice the anthropological method of seeing your own seeing – to see the strange in the familiar – and to understand how our taken-for-granted everyday life is actually contingent on specific historical and cultural conditions.

Start by thinking of things that are done in your culture that might strike an Anthropologist from Mars as strange. For example, the Nacirema keep small animals called *teps*, heal themselves through the ritual of *gnippobs*, spend lots of time obsessing over their bodies while they *exicrixe*, spend 13 to 25 years of their lives simply training for the complexity of their lives in special places called *loobs*, etc.

Next, go to a location where you can really observe this behavior. Try to come up with four or five interesting observations about this behavior. These observations will be the text of your essay. Then, take a photograph for each of your key points that captures what you are trying to say. This will help you construct your final photo essay that will include four or five compelling images along with the text. Submit your essay on Instagram with [#anth101challenge2](#)

Go to ANTH101.com/challenge2 for additional tips and information.

NOW SHOWING: *HONEYLAND*

Honeyland is about a wild beekeeper in North Macedonia whose life reveals profound truths about how humans relate to each other and the natural world. Directed by Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov, and released in 2019, the film was nominated for an Academy Award.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Shakespeare in the Bush" by Laura Bohannon (1966)

"On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant" by David Graeber (2013)

"The Anthropology of Bees" by John Colman Wood (2019)

"'Honeyland' Review: The Sting and the Sweetness" by A.O. Scott (2019)

"A Rare Nature Documentary That Tells a Deeply Human Story" by David Sims (2019)

"'Honeyland,' Reviewed: A Gripping, Frustrating Documentary about a Beekeeper's Fragile Isolation" by Richard Brody (2019)

THINKING CRITICALLY

In the film *Honeyland*, how are Hatidze and her new neighbors similar and different? How does culture shape the capacity of humans to relate to each other and the natural world?

Chapter 3: Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the concept of ethnography, a term that refers to both the method that anthropologists use to study culture and a representation of a particular culture. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Doing Fieldwork" by Katie Nelson (2020). The film is a double feature: *District 9* and *Arrival*.

DOING FIELDWORK: METHODS IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Katie Nelson, Inver Hills Community College

knelson@inverhills.edu

<http://kanelson.com/>

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.

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**.



Children Playing Outside a Home on the Jenipapo-Kanindé Reservation, 2001



Author Katie Nelson (center) with her Brazilian Host Family, 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.



A young Jenipapo-Kanindé boy shows off his grass skirt prior to a community dance, 2001.

Doing Anthropology

In this short film, Stefan Helmreich, Erica James, and Heather Paxson, three members of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Anthropology Department, [talk about their current work and the process of doing fieldwork](#).

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.

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.

Etic perspectives refer to explanations for behavior 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.

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.

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 the 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*.

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 anthro-

pological 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.

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 in groups such as Native Americans and other traditional societies experiencing rapid change due to modernization, dislocation, and contact with outside groups.



Bronislaw Malinowski (center) with Trobriand Islanders circa 1918

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), Robery 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.

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-literate 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.

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

OBJECTIVE FIELD	SPEAKER (SENDER)	HEARER (RECEIVER)	HANDLING OF TOPIC, RUNNING OF THIRD PERSON
SITUATION 1 a. 			ENGLISH... "HE IS RUNNING" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 1 b. OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK DEVOID OF RUNNING			ENGLISH... "HE RAN" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 2 			ENGLISH... "HE IS RUNNING" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 3 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE RAN" HOPI... "ERA WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT FROM MEMORY)
SITUATION 4 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE WILL RUN" HOPI... "WARIKNI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF EXPECTATION)
SITUATION 5 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE RUNS" (E.G. ON THE TRACK TEAM) HOPI... "WARIKNGWE" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF LAW)

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

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

Pirahã Numerical Terms

In this short film, linguist Daniel Everett [illustrates Pirahã numerical terms](#).

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.

ETHNOGRAPHY TODAY

Anthropology's 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 pre-defined 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.

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.

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.

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.

ETHNOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism

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.

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.

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-qual-

ity 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.

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.

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 ethnocentrism 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.

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.

Science and Humanism

Anthropologists have described their field as the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities. Early anthropologists fought to legitimize anthropology as a robust scientific field of study. To do so, they borrowed methods and techniques from the physical sciences and applied them to anthropological inquiry. Indeed, anthropology today is categorized as a social science in most academic institutions in the United States alongside sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. However, in recent decades, many cultural anthropologists have distanced themselves from science-oriented research and embraced more-humanistic approaches, including symbolic and interpretive perspectives. Interpretive anthropology treats culture as a body of “texts” rather than attempting to test a hypothesis based on deductive or inductive reasoning. The texts present a particular picture from a particular subjective point of view. Interpretive anthropologists believe that it is not necessary (or even possible) to objectively interrogate a text. Rather, they study the texts to untangle the various webs of meaning embedded in them. Consequently, interpretive anthropologists include the context of their interpretations, their own perspectives and, importantly, how the research participants view themselves and the meanings they attribute to their lives.

Anthropologists are unlikely to conclude that a single approach is best. Instead, anthropologists can apply any and all of the approaches that best suit their particular problem. Anthropology is unique among academic disciplines for the diversity of approaches used to conduct research and for the broad range of orientations that fall under its umbrella.

Science in Anthropology

For a discussion of science in anthropology, see the following article published by the American Anthropological Association: [AAA Responds to Public Controversy Over Science in Anthropology](#).

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-ayes”) 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

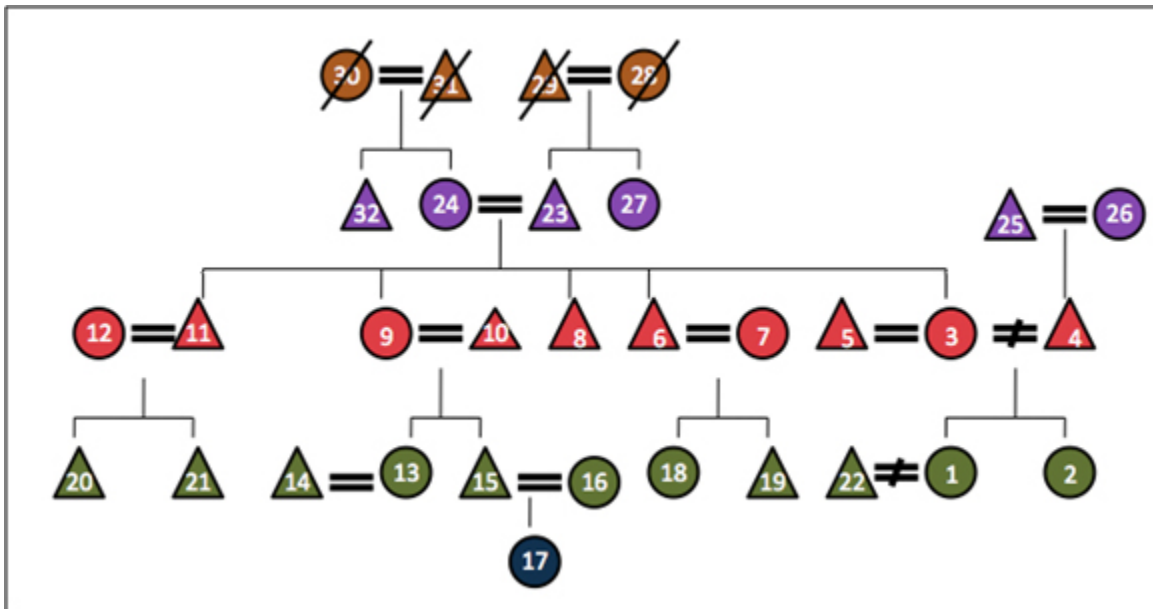
Collecting a personal narrative of someone's life is a valuable ethnographic technique and is often combined with other techniques. Life histories provide the context in which culture is experienced and created by individuals and describe how individuals have reacted, responded, and contributed to changes 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 diagrammed 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.



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.

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.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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 promise 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 work places 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.

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.

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.

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.

Discussion Questions

1. What is unique about ethnographic fieldwork and how did it emerge as a key strategy in anthropology?
2. How do traditional approaches to ethnographic fieldwork contrast with contemporary approaches?
3. What are some of the contemporary ethnographic fieldwork techniques and perspectives and why are they important to anthropology?
4. What are some of the ethical considerations in doing anthropological fieldwork and why are they important?
5. 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

Contested identity: a dispute within a group about the collective identity or identities of the group.

Cultural relativism: the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their own culture and not our own.

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.

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.

Diaspora: the scattering of a group of people who have left their original homeland and now live in various locations. Examples of people living in the diaspora are Salvadorian immigrants in the United States and Europe, Somalian refugees in various countries, and Jewish people living around the world.

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

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

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.

Indigenous: people who have continually lived in a particular location for a long period of time (prior to the arrival of others) or who have historical ties to a location and who are culturally distinct from the dominant population surrounding them. Other terms used to refer to indigenous people are aboriginal, native, original, first nation, and first people. Some examples of indigenous people are Native Americans of North America, Australian Aborigines, and the Berber (or Amazigh) of North Africa.

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.

Kinship: blood ties, common ancestry, and social relationships that form families within human groups.

Land tenure: how property rights to land are allocated within societies, including how permissions are granted to access, use, control, and transfer land.

Noble savage: an inaccurate way of portraying indigenous groups or minority cultures as innocent, childlike, or uncorrupted by the negative characteristics of "civilization."

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

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.

Remittances: money that migrants laboring outside of the region or country send back to their hometowns and families. In Mexico, remittances make up a substantial share of the total income of some towns' populations.

Thick description: a term coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his 1973 book *The Interpretation of Cultures* to describe a detailed description of the studied group that not only explains the behavior or cultural event in question but also the context in which it occurs and anthropological interpretations of it.

Undocumented: the preferred term for immigrants who live in a country without formal authorization from the state. Undocumented refers to the fact that these people lack the official documents that would legally permit them to reside in the country. Other terms such as illegal immigrant and illegal alien are often used to refer to this population. Anthropologists consider those terms to be discriminatory and dehumanizing. The word undocumented acknowledges the human dignity and cultural and political ties immigrants have developed in their country of residence despite their inability to establish formal residence permissions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Katie Nelson is an instructor of anthropology at Inver Hills Community College. Her research focuses on migration, identity, belonging, and citizenship(s) in human history and in the contemporary United States, Mexico, and Morocco. She received her B.A. in anthropology and Latin American studies from Macalester College, her M.A. in anthropology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, an M.A. in education and instructional technology from the University of Saint Thomas, and her Ph.D. 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.

Katie views teaching and learning as central to her practice as an anthropologist and as mutually reinforcing elements of her professional life. She is the former chair of the Teaching Anthropology Interest Group (2016–2018) of the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association and currently serves as the online content editor for the [Teaching and Learning Anthropology Journal](#). She has contributed to several open access textbook projects, both as an author and an editor, and views the affordability of quality learning materials as an important piece of the equity and inclusion puzzle in higher education.

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Notes

1. Franz Boas, "Foreward," in *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead (New York: William Morrow, 1928).
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.
4. Peter Gordon, "Numerical Cognition Without Words: Evidence from Amazonia," *Science* 306 no. 5695 (2004): 496-499.
5. Janice Bodd, *Civilizing Women: British Crusades in Colonial Sudan* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
6. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 25.
7. Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," in *Violence in War and Peace*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe I. Bourgois (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 171.

NOW SHOWING: DOUBLE FEATURE: *DISTRICT 9* AND *ARRIVAL*

Both *District 9* and *Arrival* are science fiction. Set in South Africa with its history of apartheid, *District 9* is about a corporate lackey who comes to question how humans treat alien refugees. Directed by Neill Blomkamp, the film was released in 2009. *Arrival* is about an anthropologist who learns to speak the language of aliens, changing her experience and understanding of the world. Directed by Denis Villeneuve and starring Amy Adams, the film was released in 2016 and received eight Academy Award nominations.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Eating Christmas in the Kalahari" by Richard Borshay Lee (1969)

"The Uses of 'Ex-centricity': Cool Reflections from Hot Places" by Jean Comaroff (2012)

"Proficiency: Arrival" by Nick Seaver (2017)

Consider watching:

Off the Verandah: Bronislaw Malinowski, directed by Andre Singer (1986)

THINKING CRITICALLY

How do fieldwork, participant-observation, and the experiences of Wikus van der Merwe in *District 9* and Louise Banks in *Arrival* demonstrate the concept of ex-centricity?

Chapter 4: Film

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the language of cinema and film analysis. It consists of a lightly edited version of "How to Watch a Movie" by Russell Sharman (2020). The film is *The Eagle Huntress*.

HOW TO WATCH A MOVIE

Step One: Evolve an optic nerve that “refreshes” at a rate of about 13 to 30 hertz in a normal active state.¹ That’s 13 to 30 cycles per second. Fortunately, that bit has already been taken care of over the past several million years. You have one of them in your head right now.

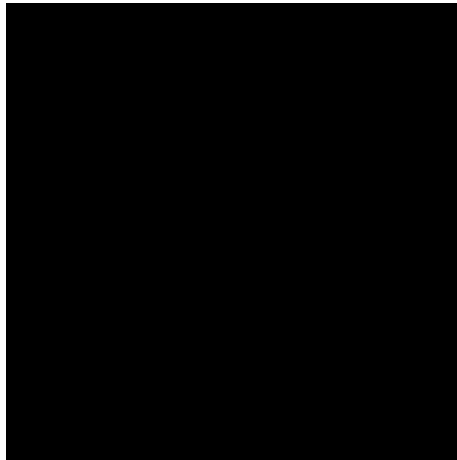
Step Two: Project a series of still images captured in

1. Okay, it's actually a lot more complicated than that. Optic nerves don't "refresh" in the way we normally think of that term. In fact, the optic nerve is part of a complex system that includes your eyeballs, retinas and brain, each of which performs at varying degrees of efficiency and changes as we age. But the numbers here are a good rule of thumb for thinking about how quickly we can process images. For more on how the optic nerve works, check this out: <https://wolfcrow.com/notes-by-dr-optoglass-motion-and-the-frame-rate-of-the-human-eye/>

sequence at a rate at least twice that of your optic nerve's ability to respond. Let's say 24 images, or frames, per second.

Step Three: Don't talk during the movie. That's super annoying.

Okay, that last part is optional (though it is super annoying), but here's the point: Cinema is built on a lie. It is not, in fact, a "motion" picture. It is, at a minimum, 24 still images flying past your retinas every second. Your brain interprets those dozens of photographs per second as movement, but it's actually just the **illusion of movement**, a trick of the mind known as **beta movement**: the neurological phenomenon that interprets two stimuli shown in quick succession as the movement of a single object.



An example of beta movement.

Because all of this happens so fast, faster than our optic nerves and synaptic responses can perceive, the mechanics are invisible. There may be 24 individual

photographs flashing before our eyes every second, but all we *see* is one continuous moving picture. It's a trick. An illusion.

The same applies to cinematic language. The way cinema communicates is the product of many different tools and techniques, from production design to narrative structure to lighting, camera movement, sound design, performance and editing. But all of these are employed to manipulate the viewer without us ever noticing. In fact, that's kind of the point. The tools and techniques – the mechanics of the form – are invisible. There may be a thousand different elements flashing before our eyes – a subtle dolly-in here, a rack focus there, a bit of color in the set design that echoes in the wardrobe of the protagonist, a music cue that signals the emotional state of a character, a cut on an action that matches an identical action in the next scene, and on and on and on – but all we *see* is one continuous moving picture. A trick. An illusion.

In this chapter, we'll explore how cinematic language works, a bit like breaking down the grammar and rules of spoken language, then we'll take a look at how to watch cinema with these “rules” in mind. We may not be able to speed up the refresh rate of our optic nerve to catch each of those still images, but we can train our interpretive skills to see how filmmakers use the various tools and techniques at their disposal.

CINEMATIC LANGUAGE

Like any language, we can break cinematic language

down to its most fundamental elements. Before grammar and syntax can shape meaning by arranging words or phrases in a particular order, the words themselves must be built up from letters, characters or symbols. The basic building blocks. In cinema, those basic building blocks are **shots**. A shot is one continuous capture of a span of action by a motion picture camera. It could last minutes (or even hours), or could last less than a second. Basically, a shot is everything that happens within the **frame** of the camera – that is, the visible border of the captured image – from the moment the director calls “Action!” to the moment she calls “Cut!”

These discrete shots rarely mean much in isolation. They are full of potential and may be quite interesting to look at on their own, but cinema is built up from the *juxtaposition* of these shots, dozens or hundreds of them, arranged in a particular order – a cinematic syntax – that renders a story with a collectively discernable meaning. We have a word for that too: **Editing**. Editing arranges shots into patterns that make up scenes, sequences and acts to tell a story, just like other forms of language communicate through words, sentences and paragraphs.

From these basic building blocks, we have developed a **cinematic language**, a set of rules and conventions by which cinema communicates meaning to the viewer. And by “we” I mean all of us, filmmakers and audiences alike, from the earliest motion picture to the latest VR experience. Cinematic language – just like any other language – is an organic, constantly evolving shared form of communication. It is an iterative process, one that is refined each time a filmmaker builds a story through a discrete number of shots, and each time an audience responds to that iteration, accepting or rejecting, but

always engaging in the process. Together, we have developed a **visual lexicon**. A lexicon describes the shared set of meaningful units in any language. Think of it as the list of all available words and parts of words in a language we carry around in our heads. A visual lexicon is likewise the shared set of meaningful units in our collective cinematic language: images, angles, transitions and camera moves that we all understand *mean* something when employed in a motion picture.

But here's the trick: We're not supposed to notice any of it. The visual lexicon that underpins our cinematic language is invisible, or at least, it is meant to recede into the background of our comprehension. Cinema can't communicate without it, but if we pay too much attention to it, we'll miss what it all means. A nifty little paradox. But not so strange or unfamiliar when you think about it. It's precisely the same with any other language. As you read these characters, words, sentences and paragraphs, you are not stopping to parse each unit of meaning, analyze the syntax or double check the sentence structure. All those rules fade to the background of your own fluency and the meaning communicated becomes clear (or at least, I sure hope it does). And that goes double for spoken language. We speak and comprehend in a fluent flow of grammar and syntax, never pausing over the rules that have become second nature, invisible and unnoticed.

So, what are some of those meaningful units of our cinematic language? Perhaps not surprisingly, a lot of them are based on how we experience the world in our everyday lives. Camera placement, for example, can subtly orient our perspective on a character or situation. Place the camera mere inches from a character's face –

known as a **close-up** – and we'll feel more intimately connected to their experience than if the camera were further away, as in a **medium shot** or **long shot**. Place the camera below the eyeline of a character, pointing up – known as a **low-angle shot** – and that character will feel dominant, powerful, worthy of respect. We are literally looking up to them. Place the camera at eye level, we feel like equals. Let the camera hover above a character or situation – known as a **high-angle shot** – and we feel like gods, looking down on everyone and everything. Each choice effects how we see and interpret the shot, scene and story.

We can say the same about **transitions** from shot to shot. Think of them as conjunctions in grammar, words meant to connect ideas seamlessly. The more obvious examples, like **fade-ins** and **fade-outs** or long **dissolves**, are still drawn from our experience. Think of a slow fade-out, where the screen drifts into blackness, as an echo of our experience of falling asleep, drifting out of consciousness. In fact, fade-outs are most often used in cinema to indicate the close of an act or segment of story, much like the end of a long day. And dissolves are not unlike the way we remember events from our own experience, one moment bleeding into and overlapping with another in our memory.

But perhaps the most common and least noticed transition, by design, is a hard cut that bridges some physical action on screen. It's called **cutting on action** and it's a critical part of our visual lexicon, enabling filmmakers to join shots, often from radically different angles and positions, while remaining largely invisible to the viewer. The concept is simple: whenever a filmmaker wants to cut from one shot to the next for a new angle

on a scene, she ends the first shot in the middle of some on-screen action, opening a door or setting down a glass, then begins the next shot in the middle of that same action. The viewer's eye is drawn to the action on screen and not the cut itself, rendering the transition relatively seamless, if not invisible to the viewer.

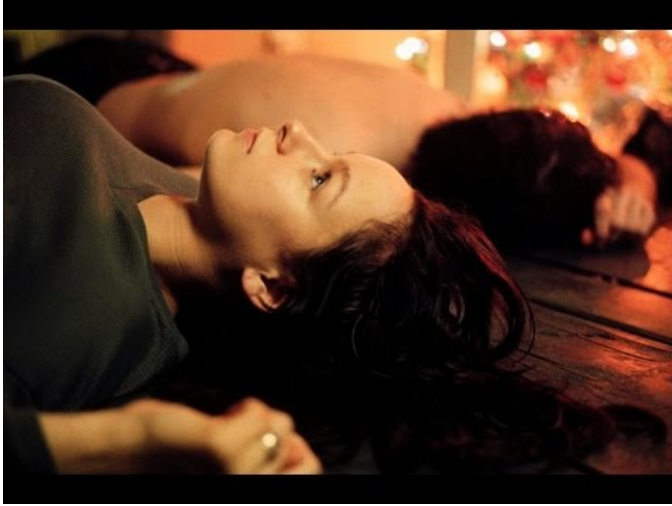
Camera placement and transitions, along with camera movement, lighting style, color palette and a host of other elements make up the visual lexicon of cinematic language, all of which we will explore in the chapters to follow. In the hands of a gifted filmmaker, these subtle adjustments work together to create a coherent whole that communicates effectively (and invisibly). In the hands of not so gifted filmmakers, these choices can feel haphazard, unmotivated, or perhaps worse, “showy” – all style and no substance – creating a dissonant, ineffective cinematic experience. But even then, the techniques themselves remain largely invisible. We are simply left with the feeling that it was a “bad” movie, even if we can't quite explain why. (Though by the end of this book, you should be able to explain why in great detail, probably to the great annoyance of your date. You're welcome.)

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT MEANING

Once we have a grasp on these small, meaningful units of our collective cinematic language we can begin to analyze how they work together to communicate bigger, more complex ideas.

Take the work of Lynne Ramsay, for example. As a director, Ramsay builds a cinematic experience by paying

attention to the details, the little things we might otherwise never notice:



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Cinema, like literature, builds up meaning through the creative combination of these smaller units, but, also like literature, the whole is – or should be – much more than the sum of its parts. For example, *Moby Dick* is a novel that explores the nature of obsession, the futility of revenge and humanity’s essential conflict with nature. But in the more than 200,000 words that make up that book, few if any of them communicate those ideas directly. In fact, we can distinguish between **explicit meaning**, that is the obvious, directly expressed meaning of a work of art, be it a novel, painting or film, and **implicit meaning**, the deeper, essential meaning, suggested but not necessarily directly expressed by any one element. *Moby Dick* is explicitly about a man trying to

catch a whale, but as any literature professor will tell you, it was never *really* about the whale.

That comparison between cinema and literature is not accidental. Both start with the same fundamental element, that is, a story. As we will explore in a later chapter, before a single frame is photographed, cinema begins with the written word in the form of a screenplay. And like any literary form, screenplays are built around a narrative structure. Yes, that's a fancy way of saying story, but it's more than simply a plot or an explicit sequence of events. A well-conceived narrative structure provides a foundation for that deeper, implicit meaning a filmmaker, or really any storyteller, will explore through their work.

Another way to think about that deeper, implicit meaning is as a **theme**, an idea that unifies every element of the work, gives it coherence and communicates what the work is *really* about. And really great cinema manages to suggest and express that theme through every shot, scene and sequence. Every camera angle and camera move, every line of dialogue and sound effect, every music cue and editing transition will underscore, emphasize and point to that theme without ever needing to spell it out or make it explicit. An essential part of analyzing cinema is the ability to identify that thematic intent and then trace its presence throughout.

Unless there is no thematic intent, or the filmmaker did not take the time to make it a unifying idea. Then you may have a "bad" movie on your hands. But at least you're well on your way to understanding why!

So far, this discussion of explicit and implicit meaning, theme, and narrative structure points to a deep kinship between cinema and literature. But cinema has far more

tools and techniques at its disposal to communicate meaning, implicit or otherwise. Sound, performance and visual composition all point to deep ties with music, theater, and painting or photography as well. And while each of those art forms employ their own strategies for communicating explicit and implicit meaning, cinema draws on all of them at once in a complex, multi-layered system.

Let's take sound, for example. As you know from the brief history of cinema in the last chapter, cinema existed long before the introduction of synchronized sound in 1927, but since then, sound has become an equal partner with the moving image in the communication of meaning. Sound can shape the way we perceive an image, just as an image can change the way we perceive a sound. It's a relationship we call **co-expressive**.

This is perhaps most obvious in the use of music. A **non-diegetic** musical score, that is music that only the audience can hear as it exists outside the world of the characters, can drive us toward an action-packed climax, or sweep us up in a romantic moment. Or it can contradict what we see on the screen, creating a sense of unease at an otherwise happy family gathering or making us laugh during a moment of excruciating violence. In fact, this powerful combination of moving image and music pre-dates synchronized sound. Even some of the earliest silent films were shipped to theaters with a musical score meant to be played during projection.

But as powerful as music can be, sound in cinema is much more than just music. **Sound design** includes music, but also dialog, sound effects and ambient sound to create a rich sonic context for what we see on the screen. From the crunch of leaves underfoot, to the

steady hum of city traffic, to the subtle crackle of a cigarette burning, what we hear – and what we *don't* hear – can put us in the scene with the characters in a way that images alone could never do, and as a result, add immeasurably to the effective communication of both explicit and implicit meaning.

We can say the same about the relationship between cinema and theater. Both use a carefully planned ***mise-en-scene*** – the overall look of the production including set design, costume, make-up – to evoke a sense of place and visual continuity. And both employ the talents of well-trained actors to embody characters and enact the narrative structure laid out in the script.

Let's focus on acting for a moment. Theater, like cinema, relies on actors' performances to communicate not only the subtleties of human behavior, but also the interplay of explicit and implicit meaning. How an actor interprets a line of dialog can make all the difference in how a performance shifts our perspective, draws us in or pushes us away. And nothing ruins a cinematic or theatrical experience like "bad" acting. But what do we really mean by that? Often it means the performance wasn't connected to the thematic intent of the story, the unifying idea that holds it all together. We'll even use words like, "The actor seemed like they were in a different movie from everyone else." That could be because the director didn't clarify a theme in the first place, or perhaps they didn't shape, or direct, an actor's performance toward one. It could also simply be poor casting.

All of the above applies to both cinema and theater, but cinema has one distinct advantage: the intimacy and flexibility of the camera. Unlike theater, where your

experience of a performance is dictated by how far you are from the stage, the filmmaker has complete control over your point of view. She can pull you in close, allowing you to observe every tiny detail of a character's expression, or she can push you out further than the cheapest seats in a theater, showing you a vast and potentially limitless context. And perhaps most importantly, cinema can move between these points of view in the blink of an eye, manipulating space and time in a way live theater never can. And all of those choices effect how we engage the thematic intent of the story, how we connect to what that particular cinematic experience *really* means. And because of that, in cinema, whether we realize it or not, we identify most closely with the *camera*. No matter how much we feel for our hero up on the screen, we view it all through the lens of the camera.

And that central importance of the camera is why the most obvious tool cinema has at its disposal in communicating meaning is visual composition. Despite the above emphasis on the importance of sound, cinema is still described as a visual medium. Even the title of this chapter is *How to Watch a Movie*. Not so surprising when you think about the lineage of cinema and its origin in the fixed images of the camera obscura, daguerreotypes and series photography. All of which owe a debt to painting, both as an art form and a form of communication. In fact, the cinematic concept of **framing** has a clear connection to the literal frame, or physical border, of paintings. And one of the most powerful tools filmmakers – and photographers and painters – have at their disposal for communicating both explicit and implicit meaning is

simply what they place inside the frame and what they leave out.

Another word for this is **composition**, the arrangement of people, objects and setting within the frame of an image. And if you've ever pulled out your phone to snap a selfie, or maybe a photo of your meal to post on social media (I know, I'm old, but really? Why is that a thing?), you are intimately aware of the power of composition. Adjusting your phone this way and that to get just the right angle, to include just the right bits of your outfit, maybe edge Greg out of the frame just in case things don't work out (sorry, Greg). Point is, composing a shot is a powerful way we tell stories about ourselves every day. Filmmakers, the really good ones, are masters of this technique. And once you understand this principle, you can start to analyze *how* a filmmaker uses composition to serve their underlying thematic intent, to help tell their story.

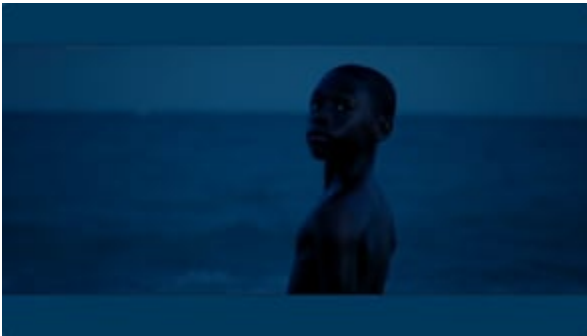
One of the most important ways a filmmaker uses composition to tell their story is through repetition, a pattern of recurring images that echoes a similar framing and connects to a central idea. And like the relationship between shots and editing – where individual shots only really makes sense once they are juxtaposed with others – a well-composed image may be interesting or even beautiful on its own, but it only starts to make sense in relation to the implicit meaning or theme of the overall work when we see it as part of a pattern.

Take, for example, Stanley Kubrick and his use of one-point perspective:



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Or how Barry Jenkins uses color in *Moonlight* (2016):



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Or how Sofia Coppola tends to trap her protagonists in gilded cages:



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These recurring images are part of that largely invisible cinematic language. We aren't necessarily supposed to notice them, but we are meant to feel their effects. And it's not just visual patterns that can serve the filmmaker's purposes. Recurring patterns, or **motifs**, can emerge in the sound design, narrative structure, mise-en-scene, dialog and music.

But there is one distinction that should be made between how we think about composition and patterns in cinema and how we think about those concepts in photography or painting. While all of the above employ framing to achieve their effects, photography and painting are limited to what is fixed in that frame by the artist at the moment of creation. Only cinema adds an entirely new and distinct dimension to the composition: **movement**. That includes movement *within* the frame – as actors and objects move freely, recomposing themselves within the fixed frame of a shot – as well as movement *of* the frame itself, as the filmmaker moves the camera in the setting and around those same actors and objects. This increases the compositional possibilities

exponentially for cinema, allowing filmmakers to layer in even more patterns that serve the story and help us connect to their thematic intent.

FORM, CONTENT AND THE POWER OF CINEMA

As we become more attuned to the various tools and techniques that filmmakers use to communicate their ideas, we will be able to better analyze their effectiveness. We'll be able to *see* what was once invisible. A kind of magic trick in itself. But as I tried to make clear from the beginning, my goal is not to focus solely on form, to dissect cinema into its constituent parts and lose sight of its overall power. Cinema, like any art form, is more than the sum of its parts. And it should be clear already that form and content go hand in hand. Pure form, all technique and no substance, is meaningless. And pure content, all story and no style, is didactic and, frankly, boring. How the story is told is as important as what the story is about.

However, just as we *can* analyze technique, the formal properties of cinema, to better understand *how* a story is communicated, we can also analyze content, that is, *what* stories are communicating to better understand how they fit into the wider cultural context. Cinema, again like literature, can represent valuable cultural documents, reflecting our own ideas, values and morals back to us as filmmakers and audiences.

We'll spend more time on content analysis – the idea of cinema as a cultural document – in the last couple of chapters of this book, but I want to take a moment

to highlight one aspect of that analysis in advance. I've discussed at length the idea of a cinematic language, and the fact that as a form of communication it is largely invisible or subconscious. Interestingly, the same can be said for cinematic content. Or, more specifically, the cultural norms that *shape* cinematic content. Cinema is an art form like any other, shaped by humans bound up in a given historical and cultural context. And no matter how enlightened and advanced those humans may be, that historical and cultural context is so vast and complex they cannot possibly grasp every aspect of how it shapes their view of the world. Inevitably, those cultural blind spots, the unexamined norms and values that makes us who we are, filter into the cinematic stories we tell and how we tell them.

The result is a kind of cultural feedback loop where cinema both influences and is influenced by the context in which it is created.

Because of this, on the whole, cinema is inherently conservative. That is to say, as a form of communication it is more effective at conserving or re-affirming a particular view of the world than challenging or changing it. This is due in part to the economic reality that cinema, historically a very expensive medium, must appeal to the masses to survive. As such, it tends to avoid offending our collective sensibilities, to make us feel better about who we already think we are. And it is also due in part to the social reality that the people who have historically had access to the capital required to produce that very expensive medium tend to all look alike. That is, mostly white, and mostly men. And when the same kind of people with the same kind of experiences tend to have the most consistent access to the medium, we tend to get

the same kinds of stories, reproducing the same, often unexamined, norms, values and ideas.

But that doesn't mean cinema *can't* challenge the status quo, or at least reflect real, systemic change in the wider culture already underway. That's what makes the study of cinema, particularly in regard to content, so endlessly fascinating. Whether it's tracking the way cinema reflects the dominant cultural norms of a given period, or the way it sometimes rides the leading edge of change in those same norms, cinema is a window – or frame (see what I did there) – through which we can observe the mechanics of cultural production, the inner-workings of how meaning is produced, shared, and sometimes broken down over time.

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC

One final word on how to watch a movie before we move on to the specific tools and techniques employed by filmmakers. In as much as cinema is a cultural phenomenon, a mass medium with a crucial role in the production of meaning, it's also an art form meant to entertain. And while I think one can assess the difference between a “good” movie and a “bad” movie in terms of its effectiveness, that has little to do with whether one likes it or not.

In other words, you don't have to necessarily *like* a movie to analyze its use of a unifying theme or the way the filmmaker employs mise-en-scene, narrative structure, cinematography, sound and editing to effectively communicate that theme. *Citizen Kane* (Orson

Welles, 1941), arguably one of the greatest films ever made, is an incredibly *effective* motion picture. But it's not my favorite. Between you and me, I don't even really like it all that much. But I still show it to my students every semester. Which means I've seen it dozens and dozens of times and it never ceases to astonish in its formal technique and innovative use of cinematic language.

Fortunately, the opposite is also true: You can really, really like a movie that isn't necessarily all that good. Maybe there's no unifying theme, maybe the cinematography is all style and no substance (or no style *and* no substance), maybe the narrative structure is made out of toothpicks and the acting is equally thin and wooden. (That's right, *Twilight*, I'm looking at you.) Who cares? You like it. You've watched it more often than I've seen *Citizen Kane* and you *still* like it.

That's great. Embrace it. Because *taste* in cinema is subjective. But *analysis* of cinema doesn't have to be. You can analyze anything. Even things you don't like.

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[MOONLIGHT // BLUE](#) by [Russell Leigh Sharman](#). Standard Vimeo License.

[Sofia Coppola: Gilded Cages](#) by [Fandor](#). Standard Vimeo License.

NOW SHOWING: *THE EAGLE HUNTRESS*

The Eagle Huntress is documentary film about the first female eagle hunter among the nomadic Kazakh people in Mongolia. Directed by Otto Bell and released in 2016, the film was a critical and commercial success, but some viewers have questioned its truth claims and representation of the Kazakh people.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction by Patricia Aufderheide (2007)

"Manufacturing Vision: Kino-Eye, The Man with a Movie Camera, and the Perceptual Reconstruction of Social Identity" by David Tomas (2007)

"The Eagle Huntress: how a Mongolian teenager triumphed over tradition" by John Patterson (2016)

"Teenage 'Eagle Huntress' Overturns 2000 Years of Male Tradition" by Barbara J. King (2016)

"Is the Eagle Huntress really a documentary?" by Stephen Mulvey (2017)

Consider watching:

Nanook of the North, directed by Robert Flaherty (1922)

Man with a Movie Camera, directed by Dziga Vertov (1929)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you agree with some reviewers that *The Eagle Huntress* is a Disney-fied version of Kazakh culture? Why or why not?

Chapter 5: Media Anthropology

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces media anthropology, which includes both the use of media in ethnographic research and the ethnographic analysis of film and other media. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Media Anthropology" by Bryce Peake (2020). The film is *Angry Inuk*.

MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY: MEANING, EMBODIMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ACTIVISM

Bryce Peake, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
bpeake@umbc.edu

Learning Objectives

- Describe the history of media anthropology including initial resistance to media as a topic of anthropological study.
- Identify the major categories of media that are studied by anthropologists.
- Explain how anthropologists explore the meaning of media and media experiences including the ways meaning can be shared or contested by individuals and communities.
- Evaluate innovative approaches to media anthropology including autoethnography, photo voice, participatory photography, and fabrication.
- Assess the importance of mechanical and cultural infrastructure for the exchange of ideas.

Media is a word that can be used to describe a set of technologies that connect multiple people at one time to shared content. Media anthropologists study mass communication (broadcast radio and television) and digital media (Internet, streaming, and mobile telephony) with a particular interest in the ways in which media are designed or adapted for use by specific communities or cultural groups. Many

research projects focus on **media practices**, the habits or behaviors of the people who produce media, the audiences who interact with media, and everyone in between.

Many classic anthropological concepts are incorporated in studies of media. For example, in her ethnography of Egyptian television soap operas, *Dramas of Nationhood* (2004), Lila Abu-Lughod sought to understand how watching these programs contributed to a shared sense of Egyptian cultural identity. In her ethnography, *Romance on the Global Stage* (2003), Nicole Constable examined how the Internet was transforming ideas about marriage and love by contributing to new kinds of “mail-order bride” economies in which men in the United States could communicate with women thousands of miles away. Utilizing classic ideas about ritual and community life pioneered by Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski, Tom Boellstorff’s book *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2015) explored the ways that people were building realistic communities using virtual reality software like Second Life. Anthropological concepts of ritual, magic, taboo, and organic solidarity can be used effectively to examine the role that media plays in the lives of individuals and communities. Like other specializations in anthropology, studies of media are also organized around a commitment to long-term ethnographic fieldwork and cultural relativism.

This chapter introduces some of the theories, insights, and methodologies of media anthropology. At the heart of media anthropology is the assertion that **media practices are not universal**. Whether we are discussing how television is viewed, how public relations coordinators negotiate corporate hierarchies, how Facebook statuses are created and circulated, or how cellular towers are built, the local cultural context plays an important role.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Media anthropology has a surprisingly long history. In 1950, Hortense Powdermaker completed the first ethnographic and social scientific study of Hollywood studios. Her book, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, preceded by approximately a decade the formation of the academic field of media studies and the theories of mass culture that are popular today. Powdermaker, a student of Franz Boas, was at the forefront of mass communication studies.

Powdermaker’s groundbreaking study of media was immediately disavowed by others in the social sciences who believed that media was a topic unworthy of study. “Hollywood as ‘Dream Factory’ Just Nightmare to Femme Anthropologist,” a book review in *Variety* read.¹ A review of the book in the *American Sociological Review* dismissively stated: “The notion, for some time suspect, that previous investigation of a primitive tribe uniquely qualifies a person to study a sophisticated society... is now revealed to be absurd. The anthropological method *here* [in sophisticated society] consists of little more than a series of inane analogies.”² And so, with the continuation of time, anthropology left the study of mass media to scholars in sociology, political science, and psychology.



Figure 1: Anthropologists have only recently begun ethnographically studying journalists. Here, a Latina journalist working for a conservative, Catholic news outlet interviews a Donald Trump impersonator at a pro-Trump Rally. How, anthropologists might ask, do transnational identities and religion impact perceptions of American politics? Photo by Bryce Peake.

Mass media became a central part of life after World War I and influenced even those cultures that outsiders considered isolated or “primitive.” Anthropologists of that era developed two different excuses for avoiding the study of media. The first was the need to distinguish cultural anthropology from journalism. As Elizabeth Bird (2009) wrote, ethnographers were often dismissed as overqualified journalists. Anthropologists who wanted to be seen as scientists (as sociologists often were) wanted to distance themselves as much as possible from mass media, a subject regarded as unserious. Cultural anthropologists also suspected that elitist book and journal editors might dismiss poor ethnographic work as “mere journalism” undeserving of “serious” scholarly consideration.

Second, through the 1980s, the discipline of cultural anthropology wanted to distinguish itself from the rising fields of American and British cultural studies, disciplines that had a central interest in interpreting media as “texts” that could reveal cultural values. The cultural studies approach was generally not based on holistic ethnography, which cultural anthropologists continued to see as the defining feature of their profession.³

Today, media is a much more mainstream object of analysis in American cultural anthropology and media research also offers a significant career path for many young anthropologists. [The company ReD](#), for example, hires anthropologists as consultants to help telecommunication and media companies innovate new technologies. These anthropologists use social theory and ethnographic methods to help create media technologies for the future. Similarly, major technology companies like Intel and Microsoft employ a number of anthropologists in their artificial intelligence, social media, networked systems, and “Internet of Things” labs. These anthropologists combine corporate work with research, publishing some of the most cutting edge research in the fields of anthropology *and* technology in disciplines like Human Centered Computing. These professionals draw on debates in media anthropology to inform new developments in media technologies, communication and advertising strategies, and culturally-specific programming.

MEANINGFUL MEDIA

What do media anthropologists do to better understand media practices? Media anthropologists typically organize their studies of media in two ways. **First**, they choose a category or type of media: mobile telephones, radio, television, Internet, or others. The choice of media to be studied varies widely between anthropologists. Some media anthropologists work on a topic that crosses multiple technologies (such as radio, which is both broadcast via airwaves and streamed via the internet). Others concern themselves with a particular technology like mobile phones (which play music, allow for phone calls, and support gaming communities) and explore how that single technology contributes to different types of media practices. Some media anthropologists even study the people who study media (such as

a study of people who work as advertising researchers, or studies of media scientists in different countries).

Second, media anthropologists locate their ethnographic studies within a particular community. The way media anthropologists define “community” varies. Some may choose to study a “virtual” community like Tom Boellstorff did in his study of the virtual reality platform Second Life. Others may choose to study how a geographical community, such as a town or a region, uses, adapts, or transforms under the influence of a certain kind of media or technology. This is the approach taken by Lila Abu-Lughod and Nicole Constable in the examples mentioned above. Media anthropologists may also study the ways that mass communication and digital media connect diasporic communities, cultural communities dispersed from their original homelands.

Many media anthropology projects have focused on questions of meaning. **Meaning** refers to the ideas or values that accompany the exchange of information. Historically, some media scientists assumed that the meaning of information was unaffected by its transfer between communities or by the medium of its transfer. In other words, they believed that information would be

interpreted the same way regardless of how it was communicated, or who was receiving it. Anthropologists have demonstrated that the reality is much more complex. In her book *Dramas of Nationhood*, Lila Abu-Lughod asked questions about how nationally televised Egyptian soap operas were interpreted by those who watched them. Her research revealed several important insights. First, what soap opera directors and writers *intended* for a television show to mean was not necessarily what communities of watchers *interpreted* the show to mean. Simply put, producers cannot wholly control meaning or the value(s) that will be identified by a group of watchers. Second, different media give different messages or meanings. If the same message is broadcast on radio and television, the histories and cultural associations of these two technologies affects the meaning of the message being conveyed. Televised soap operas were interpreted quite differently, for instance, than the spoken poetry Abu-Lughod had studied in her previous research in Egypt. Third, Abu-Lughod demonstrated that **there is no universal way of consuming media; media consumption is bound to culture**. How Egyptian women participate in listening to or watching soap operas together, the practices of who sits where, of what can or cannot be eaten during a show, or of when a show might be aired, is all bound to the norms and values of the community. These three assertions about meaning are broadly applicable to all cultures and have set the agenda for most academic and professional research in media anthropology.

Unlike other academic fields that study media and meaning, **media anthropologists focus on how producers and audiences share or contest different types of meaning**. Ethnographies by media anthropologists typically focus on the ways producers of media assume, or seek to stimulate, a particular set of feelings in audiences, and how audiences can give feedback to media producers. In his ethnography of advertising agencies in Sri Lanka, for example, Steven Kemper (2001) observed that “when they are able, advertising agencies hire local staff” because they can “think like,” and thus sell to, local audiences.⁴ In the process, local advertising staff become the audiences they imagine others to be and



Figure 2: Media anthropologists frequently study the connection between politics and representation. Here, a Brexit information booth sponsored by the Gibraltar government provides an Instagram frame to pose with. An anthropologist might ask: why do people think Instagram, and photos, are a medium for political participation? Photo by Bryce Peake.

their work helps to define a new class of consumers who purchase globalized media products. Media production and consumption are interconnected, one creating the conditions for the other.

Many media anthropology projects have focused on mass communication, the process of sending a message to many people in a way that allows the sender complete control over the content of a message—although, as described above, not control over the meaning. This is the definition of **mass communication**: one-to-many communication that privileges the sender and/or owner of the technology that transmits the media. Such a description is not without its challenges. As Francisco Osorio (2005) argues, talking drums like those used in New Guinea not only fit the definition of mass communication—a message sent from one to many that privileges the sender—the talking drums example also reveals the ways in which there is an implicit prioritization of electricity in media anthropology, an assumption that mass communication involves electrical technology. This is ethnocentric given the uneven distribution of electrical infrastructure. Dominic Boyer, an anthropologist who has written ethnographies about both energy infrastructures like electricity and German journalists writing international news, proposed that we move from media anthropology to an “anthropology of mediation.”⁵ Rather than use a universal definition of what counts as media to the anthropologist, Boyer’s term **anthropology of mediation** focuses on the way images, speech, people, and things become socially significant or meaningful as they are communicated. The focus is shifted away from the technology itself, a controversial approach that some have criticized for transforming media anthropology into an “anthropology of everything.”

As a result of this proposal for an anthropology of mediation, some anthropologists have started to study the physical human senses that make meaningful interactions with media possible. As Charles Hirschkind (2006) argues for example, the power of a cassette tape sermon in Egypt in “lies not simply in its capacity to disseminate ideas or instill religious ideologies but in its effect on the human sensorium... the soundscape produced through the circulation of this medium animates and sustains a substrate of sensory knowledges and embodied aptitudes.”⁶ Hirschkind is suggesting that the feeling that Muslim listeners experience while listening to the sermons—rather than the precise meaning or value of the information—is more significant for understanding the appeal of these tapes. This is an example of research that focuses on mediation rather than simply assessing the meaning of the information transferred.

Sensory approaches to mediation present some methodological dilemmas. When media anthropologists study meaning ethnographically they can ask audiences what a particular example of media *means* or what a person finds *meaningful* about it. Anthropologists studying the sensory dimensions of mediation do not have direct access to how audiences *feel* media. We can ask how audiences feel, but describing a feeling involves translating physical sensation into language, a difficult process. To get around this problem, ethnographers of mediation have used innovative approaches to participant-observation that include techniques from psychoanalysis,⁷ depth interviews that closely analyze how audiences create meaning rather than what meaning is,⁸ and autoethnographic approaches in which the anthropologist



Figure 3: Media anthropologists frequently ask how transnational media create a sense of community and change the ways people engage with their environments. At this Indian restaurant on the Mediterranean island of Gozo, restaurant owners have removed a street sign and mounted a TV in its place in order to show Italy playing in a European Union Football Association Cup Match. A family sits and eats. As Mario, the man on the end, explained “It was the only seat to watch the match left in the entire [village]... I would be the only person on the island that didn’t [watch it] if I wasn’t here.” Photo by Bryce Peake.

explores his or her own personal experiences. These research techniques are used to reduce the gap between what people experience and what they can describe.⁹

Debates about the significance of media, mediation, meaning and the senses have occurred primarily in the context of studies of mass communication because mass communication technologies like broadcast radio, television, and cinema are the most globally available. While people in Europe and the United States might speak of the death of older “legacy” media like radio and VHS tapes, these mediums play crucial roles in the lives of peoples in other places. Lynn Stephen (2012), for example, describes how the takeover of a local radio station by a group of women protesters was crucial to their efforts to organize around human rights issues in Oaxaca, Mexico.¹⁰ Brian Larkin (2008) has discussed the economic importance of pirated VHS tapes of recent films in Nigeria, a country in which gross domestic product cannot be easily calculated due to the size of various shadow economies.

While mass communication is a form of one-to-many communication typically broadcast on widely available channels, digital media is a much more personalized many-to-many communication that involves the use of digital signals. In her ethnography of LGBT youth in rural America, Mary Gray (2009) argued that the Internet’s more closely controlled access points allowed queer youth to carve out online spaces for their emerging identities. The importance of these online spaces for developing personal identity also meant that it was difficult to distinguish between “online” and “offline” personas. Gray took a meaning-focused approach to understand the ways in which rural LGBT youth create identities and feelings of belongingness in concealed online worlds. Jeffrey Juris (2008) has argued that the Internet interactions allowed anti-corporate, anti-globalization activists in Spain, Indonesia, and the United States to *feel* the threat represented by the Group of Eight summit (a meeting of eight of the largest world economies). These feelings generated a sense of solidarity that was not reducible to language. Both these projects demonstrate the relationship between meaning and feeling that is a part of mass communication.

If digital media has opened up a space for us to think critically about the transformation of mass media and people’s relationships with it, so too has digital media opened up new career paths for anthropologists. Increasingly, media anthropologists are taking key positions in technology, advertising, public relations, and broadcasting industries. Dawn Nafus, an ethnographer who works and conducts research in open-source software communities, has led multiple user experience research projects at Intel Labs. Her time is divided between writing academic publications on the anthropology of emerging technologies and doing user testing for Intel’s latest innovations in computing and wearable technology.¹¹

WHAT MAKES MEDIA POSSIBLE?



Figure 4: In Madrid, cables for internet, telephony, and television run alongside the train tracks. Historically, train routes have been principle to media infrastructure. How, media anthropologists ask, does media infrastructure change our understanding and relationship to travel? Photo by Bryce Peake.

was based on the colonial requirement that there be a 440 yard buffer zone between white and black populations. This requirement controlled the ways that electrical grids and transportation routes were developed. In this way, various entangled infrastructures are implicated in the forms of taboo, desire, and fantasy shared by members of a society in locations like the movie theater. Similarly, in his ethnography of Brazil's first telecommunication engineers, Gerald Lombardi (1999) describes how engineers "spoke in reverent tones about the selfless dedication of ... fellow workers as they fought... to keep Brazil at the forefront of telephonic progress."¹² "Telephonic progress" via infrastructure was an ideal of the Brazilian state and its workers because it was considered "modern" and made Brazil competitive in the eyes of global spectators. It was not phones that made Brazilian engineers feel or describe themselves as modern, but the capacity for making telephony possible.

There are two types of media infrastructure: mechanical infrastructure and cultural infrastructure. **Mechanical Infrastructure** includes the apparatuses that bring networks of technology into existence. **Cultural Infrastructure** refers to the values and beliefs of communities, states, and/or societies that make the imagining of a particular type of network possible. In the foreword to an ethnography on India and the rise of historical archives, Nicholas Dirks (2002) captures the sense of a cultural infrastructure perfectly when he describes how archives *function*, that is how the archive does ideological work, in producing *and* preserving ideas about Indian nationalism. It was the belief in nationalism that made the colonial archive possible as a container of various media—letters and notes, newspapers and telegraphs believed to define the Indian state.

Since the 1990s, anthropologists have successfully studied a range of mass communication and digital media, but it is only recently that anthropologists have started studying the technologies that make these forms of connection possible. Broadly speaking, infrastructures are the material technological networks that allow for the exchange of goods, ideas, waste, people, power and finance over space. When used to refer to media, infrastructure includes the pipes, concrete, wires, people, values, electricity, software protocols and other technologies that allow for the movement of information. Brian Larkin (2008), a media anthropologist working in Nigeria, noted that the geographical location of cinemas in the city of Kano

Complicating the study of mechanical infrastructure is the fact that this infrastructure consists of the same technology it uses to run. Information systems, for instance are both made of and run by computers. Typically, an infrastructure is different from a technology. A road is the infrastructure for a car; a pipe is the infrastructure for oil. As Graham and Marvin (2001) argue about the computer, computing is made possible by the electricity that powers the computer, the system of telematics that allow computers to transmit and receive information, and software protocols that delimit a computer's uses. The electricity, the telematics, and the software protocols all rely on computing. What may distinguish the twenty-first century is its reliance on computing as the infrastructure of everything, from oil production to data storage, electricity management to the production of concrete.

For media anthropologists, the ways in which media and communication infrastructure organize everyday life are significant. Mechanical infrastructure affects not only the engineers and bureaucrats who execute and plan projects, but also the millions of people who rely on information exchanged through the infrastructure, drive vehicles through the infrastructure, and whose property rights are often usurped by the construction of infrastructure. At the same time, cultural infrastructure is also important. As Christian Sandvig (2012) describes in his ethnography of building indigenous Internet infrastructure on the Santa Ysabel Native American Reservation, anthropological studies of media and communication infrastructure must weave together considerations of both kinds of infrastructure in order to understand how these infrastructures are transformed by cultural values, technological standards, legal regulations, and scientific and engineering techniques. Some anthropologists work professionally designing media technologies or consulting with engineers, bureaucrats, and communities on the construction of media infrastructures. Cathy Baldwin, for example, is an anthropologist at the World Resources Institute Urban Development and Mobility Project. She is known for her research on civil engineering and community participation. Working with communities to maximize various forms of access, Baldwin's career is based on the belief that physical and natural environments should strengthen a community's capacity to stay resilient when afflicted by human-created and natural disasters—particularly climate change.



Figure 5: Media anthropologists frequently use unique methods to better understand how technology users make sense of their use habits. Here, anthropologists with Intel Labs use a pile and sort approach, asking the user to write down meaningful types of data on sticky notes they will then organize. Photo by Bryce Peake.

Practicing Anthropologist: Cathy Baldwin

Cathy Baldwin is an interdisciplinary anthropologist, writer, musician, and consultant who has done anthropological research on city and urban infrastructure, environment, and health.

How did you bring your anthropological training into consultancy work?

My objective was always to be an applied researcher working in policy or think tanks, but I didn't think about how until I graduated. During my

doctoral fieldwork, I gave regular feedback to a government minister (Member of Parliament in my fieldwork town) who was working on a program to promote an inclusive British identity. After graduating I did some applied research and a book chapter for a think tank at Oslo University on how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) used information and computing technologies (ICTs) to empower poor communities in developing countries.

What types of collaborators does an anthropologist studying infrastructure encounter?

When doing impact assessments in the infrastructure sector, you work with distressed community members worried about uncertain change, so it's crucial to have a sympathetic, diplomatic manner in order to talk effectively with them. You also need to be able to find ways of communicating social issues to engineers. This can be challenging as it is often unfamiliar territory and beyond their concerns. The most effective solution is to be able to present community concern as it might apply to them and their family members. For instance, "How would your mum feel if...." The policy world is full of people who like findings summarized in short bullet points in non-anthropological language. By the time you are ready with your material to do so, any theory used to underpin an argument that leads to a practical, implementable recommendation has been amalgamated into a point expressed in everyday language. It is still possible to use anthropological ideas at this stage, but they have to be grounded in practical action.

If you could choose one substantial contribution anthropologists can make to both the development and study of city infrastructure, what would it be?

Social anthropologists are well equipped to foresee, understand, and analyze how dynamic social change processes springing from the physical, biophysical or industrial landscape affect communities, and to study how people engage with technologies. These are important skills that can guide the design of projects or structures, and inform strategies adopted to manage the good and bad effects. While I see my colleagues mapping economic, environmental, or physical changes and processes, I can insert the social aspect.

What advice do you have for current anthropology students interested in working on infrastructure, and perhaps media and communications infrastructure, in the future?

Diversify your skill set as much as possible beyond just ethnographic methods as they are just one small option outside academia. Intern at the World Bank in one of its urban programs, or a large engineering consultancy, or an urban development think tank or policy organization. Media and communications infrastructure is a totally separate topic, but there are some urban firms that look at telecommunications infrastructure as well as standard city systems.

ICT4D, or information and communications technologies for development, is an interesting branch of international development where there are studies and NGOs working on practical projects with communities and anthropological input is valued. Also some of the ICT or technology companies such as Microsoft and Intel employ anthropologists to do consumer studies of how people use media and technologies. Genevieve Bell is the most famous employee of Intel, as their in-house corporate anthropologist.

With all infrastructure topics, anthropologists inevitably analyze how people interact with their structures, use infrastructure, what its social and cultural effects are, what values and assumptions inform its design etc. You need to be good at thinking in practical terms about the social and community consequences of hard structures. Understanding dynamic social change processes is also an asset, and how much change is caused by structural as opposed to subjective factors.

I would say that working as an anthropologist outside academia can be very lonely unless you are in a consulting firm that has a special focus on ethnographic methods. At both the civil engineering firm and think tank, I was the only one with my skillset and missed having others to learn directly from. That said, I have enjoyed becoming friendly with economists, civil and environmental engineers, environmental scientists, public health specialists and others. The field attracts nice people with the practical skills to implement things, which I prefer to academic anthropology.

Interview by Bryce Peake

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA AND MEDIA ACTIVISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The resurgence of media anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s was heralded by experiments, research, and debates in visual anthropology and ethnographic film surrounding **indigenous media**, media produced by and for indigenous communities often outside of the mainstream commercial market. Portable recording technologies, televisual production, and copy-making technologies made it possible for local communities to use media for cultural expression. People like Eric Michaels (1987), Faye Ginsburg (1991), and Terry Turner (Crocker 1991) used new technologies to help indigenous communities produce media about their local cultures, and the various environmental, legislative, social, and cultural threats they faced. In the Kayapo Video Project, anthropologist Terence Turner understood his role as empowering local Kayapo leaders, who then compiled a comprehensive video archive of Kayapo culture, including ceremonies, oral history, ecological knowledge, and mythology, recounted by older members of the community whose knowledge would disappear with their death. As Turner wrote, “in addition to the uses of video self-documentation for education and as a repository of cultural knowledge against losses from death and acculturation, many Kayapo see video as a means of reaching out to non-Kayapo, presenting their culture and way of life in a form that others can understand, respect, and support. They see this as an essential part of their struggle to sustain and defend their society and environment.”¹³

For anthropologists, projects like the Kayapo video sparked a debate: do Western inventions like the movie camera endanger or replace indigenous forms of storytelling, or do they empower new forms of cultural creativity and experimentation? How, anthropologists on one side of the debate argued, could technologies used to create the Disney film *Fantasia*, the American television show *Dallas*, and other Western televisual and cinematic stories possibly create the complex narrative forms traditionally used for storytelling in other cultures? On the other side of the debate, media anthropologists asked why one would assume that these technologies could not be used in new ways?



Figure 6: Maltese film makers make a short film celebrating the history of their village. Where indigenous media projects were initially crucial to introducing new technologies to cultural communities, today many communities have robust media infrastructure and channels. Media anthropologists frequently ask how these outlets influence and are influenced by global media industries. Photo by Bryce Peake.



Figure 7: A student in the [Off the Beaten Track](#) fieldschool videotapes her edits of an audio ethnography she made with café workers at a local Gozitan café. Photo by Bryce Peake.

process of media creation and collaboration. Rather than asking how indigenous peoples interpret representations, Ginsburg's work examines how indigenous media producers *create* representations of their and other cultures. Her fieldwork addresses the debate about the limits of Western media technologies, while also pushing video-based media in new directions. Both Ginsburg and Turner's work can be seen as an argument *against* anthropologists who suggest that the use of new technologies to capture indigenous stories or concerns constitutes a form of imperialism. These anthropologists, Turner suggested, hold an outdated and static perception of indigenous groups. Rather than assuming that maintaining traditional modes of communication or storytelling is the only way to safeguard cultural traditions, he suggested that new media technologies can aid indigenous activists in transmitting cultural beliefs into the future.

In addition to documenting traditional cultural beliefs, media technologies can be absorbed into communities in ways that strengthen them. Zeinabu Davis' videowork on Yoruba trance rituals, for example, demonstrates the way in which the meaning of media is not set by the technologies used to create it. For the Yoruba ritual actors who were the subjects of the film, and who watched the film following its production, portable video technologies increased the *ache* (Yoruba for "power of realization") of both trance states and Yoruba communities. According to Yoruba spiritual ideas, images have a presence and can bring things closer together. The actors believed the video would help grow and sustain the Yoruba community by bringing viewers closer to the spiritual dimensions of the ritual. Meaning, in other words, was not the only source of *meaningfulness* for Davis and her Yoruba partners.

Practicing Anthropologist: Kyle Jones

Kyle Jones is an anthropologist who completed his fieldwork with hip-hop artists in Peru and now works in human-centered design. Below, Kyle talks about applied anthropology and experimental methods.

Your ethnographic fieldwork on hip hop in Peru was supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropology, with some funds dedicated to the *applied* dimensions of your project. What is applied anthropology, and how did it figure into your project?

To me, applied anthropology is about taking the next step in the research process to translate what you've learned into other domains of practice, often toward some kind of solution to a problem someone faces. The Wenner-Gren Foundation's Osmundsen Initiative urges anthropol-

ogists to think about the broader social concerns and contributions of their research projects. For my project, I had learned that one of the most important activities for the young people I was working with was putting on various kinds of events, such as concerts or workshops. Despite their obvious passion for hip-hop and motivation to produce events, a lack of funds (among other factors) nearly always proved a significant barrier to their efforts. So what I did was try to support those efforts by facilitating the production of events among each of the three groups I was researching. Led by these different groups in different cities, these events took many different forms, from a series of relatively small concerts, workshops, and competitions spread out over two weeks to large all-day festivals in city plazas. Methodologically, these events dovetailed with the other collaborative and participant-driven methods I was using, and also led to new opportunities for exploring my research topics.

In your ethnographic work, you use some very different methods: photovoice and participatory photography. What are these, and how do you relate them to applied anthropology?

Photovoice is a method used across scholarly, policy, and many other types of research that puts cameras into people's hands so they can make their own representations of their lives and the activities related to your research questions. I similarly engaged in collaborative media production, which included such things as helping to film video clips, playing and recording music, taking promotional photos, promoting and producing events, and designing and circulating imagery. In these things, I played a supporting role, using what resources I had to facilitate the projects of the groups I was researching. These methods are participatory in the sense that they encourage collaborators to get involved in the research process and help bring questions about power in research interactions to the fore. From an epistemological standpoint, these methods might be better termed participant-driven because of how they enable individuals to actively shape the direction of the research through the conscious creation of media (i.e. the research data itself). These methods were also particularly useful in doing research across locales because they can be done remotely via the internet; I could keep up conversations and data creation-collection even when I wasn't in the same city as my interlocutors, including when I was back home in the U.S.

While I did not view them as applied at first because of how they developed in the context of my graduate training, I now see them as a valuable part of my applied/practicing toolkit. Using the media that my collaborators themselves created is a powerful way to tell a story no matter the context of the work. They also entail that element of pushing your work into new domains of practice and problem-solving, while also prompting you to think reflexively. These kinds of methods help in recognizing the power and privileges that you bring as a researcher, but then also entail thinking through how you can translate the resources those things confer (expertise, time, technology, social connections, etc.) to support the efforts of your interlocutors on their own terms.

Interview by Bryce Peake

Research on indigenous media has primarily focused on cultural information and entertainment, but anthropologists have also explored the capacity of indigenous media to contribute to the production of localized science. The Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Unit at the University of New South Wales, for example, has designed software that allows indigenous and Aboriginal communities in Australia to share culture knowledge about astronomy.¹⁶ For many of these groups, astronomic knowledge includes using the sun, moon, and stars for predictive purposes in navigation, time-keeping, seasonal calendars, and food practices. The stars in particular inform sacred law, customs and social structure, such as totem and kinship status and marriage. This knowledge was traditionally passed down through artistic and poetic practices that have since disappeared from some communities. The researchers in the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Unit are harnessing the power of [Microsoft's WorldWide telescope](#) and [Rich Interactive Narrative technology](#) to help new generations "reclaim" forms of indigenous knowledge production from archival records and contemporary astronomical data in collaboration with community elders. For these scholars, the project is not simply one of "giving back" to the community; rather, they recognize that indigenous astronomical traditions are underpinned by a philosophy of knowledge that enables a different understanding of how humans relate to the natural world. This knowledge can produce new forms of intercultural understandings about climate and environmental change.

For many of these participatory media projects, the stakes are highly politicized. For those anthropologists working in Australia, Africa, and South America, legacies of colonial violence are still omnipresent. How can anthropologists use their research to not only understand culture, but to also mitigate some of the violent residue of inequality that came from colonialism? This is a key question that undergirds much of this participatory media research. Along with research that addresses that

question comes a host of ethical considerations: how should media recordings be stored, who should control the intellectual property developed through media technologies, and who defines the project and how it will be developed. These may seem as though they are only practical questions, but for many media anthropologists engaged in participatory methods they are also research questions. They are also questions about power and fairness. By posing and answering these questions in their projects, media anthropologists doing participatory media methods have contributed to the development of new approaches to ethnography.

Digital media poses several additional ethical issues particularly in terms of protecting the anonymity of research subjects. In her work on the hackers and trolls turned political collective Anonymous, Gabriella Coleman (2014) wrote about the fact that much of her research depended on the anonymity of the hackers with whom she worked. How, she asked, should an anthropologist balance the hacker collective's need for anonymity while still confirming the validity or real identities of research subjects. In the process of researching groups like Anonymous, how should anthropologists try to balance the positive impact of the privacy activism this group engages in with the misogynist, anti-political antics of some members of the group? In other words, what does it mean for a researcher to "call out" Anonymous on its shortcomings while still protecting the true identities of its members? Similarly, in her ethnography of online dating in Australia, Susan Frohlick found herself needing to "dis-identify" daters who had written particularly offensive or poorly constructed dating profiles. So poorly built, or "uniquely horrible," were these profiles that to describe them as her interviewees did would violate the authors' right to anonymity.¹⁷ Frohlick argued that exploring themes of masculinity and dating were more important to the research than personally identifying individuals with bad dating profiles.

Ethnographers working with digital and social media in particular, have devised multiple strategies for anonymizing participatory media subjects. Annette Markham (2012), for example, has developed the strategy of **fabrication**. Writing ethnographic work about child sexuality and queer bloggers, Markham urges ethnographers to take the essence of what is being said by people, to combine or rearrange it, and fabricate an ethnographic account that demonstrates the points most relevant for the research. Doing so, she argues, is not new; it is common practice to use direct quotes from research subjects in ethnography even though the quote may be off by a few words because it was heard while spinning pots or cooking or participating in some other activity. Such a practice poses many other ethical questions, and it is this ethical conundrum that Markham says is most important for thinking through methodological and ethical issues in media anthropology.¹⁸ While this fabrication approach is by no means perfect, and is open to criticism, it demonstrates the necessity of ethical considerations when conducting methodological experimentation in media anthropology.

CONCLUSION



Figure 8: A Gozitan man shoots video and photos inside his village church to send to his parents who now live in Toronto. Media anthropologists are increasingly interested in how the mediation of spirituality is requiring new forms of theological thinking in religious communities. Photo by Bryce Peake.

Media anthropologists are concerned with many of the classic subjects of cultural anthropology: kinship, religion, mythology, identity, and the transmission of cultural meaning. How, for instance, does media allow people create and maintain kinship ties across large geographical distances? How are religious beliefs transformed as they are communicated through platforms like television and the Internet? How does media contribute to the development of a sense of self or group identities? On the Mediterranean island of Gozo, for example, cellular phones have allowed distant relatives in North America to remain part of the community by participating in the yearly celebrations of village saints. Local Catholic priests in Greece have been forced to consider the spiritual force of religious icons as they are transformed from a statue honored in-person during religious ceremonies into mediated images people see from afar.¹⁹ If the Virgin Mary appears to be weeping in a video, but the statue shows no effect, does it count as a miracle? Rather than answer this question, media anthropologists are interested in why people are concerned with it in the first place.

While class anthropological subjects remain important, media anthropologists are also engaging with new problems and debates while interacting with other academic disciplines such as Media and Communication Studies, Digital Sociology, and New Media Art. For instance, media anthropologists question the assumption that there is a universal media psychology that predicts the ways that people will interpret media. They have pointed out that the impact social media has on individuals is a function of culture, not just political economic conditions.²⁰ Media anthropologists have even engaged with questions about how basic human ideas about beauty or the passage of time translate into mediums like film and radio.²¹

While grappling with a range of old and new themes, one thing continues to separate media anthropologists from other media scholars: a commitment to long-term, participant-observation based fieldwork. Media anthropologists push the boundaries of what counts as ethnographic research and academic writing, but they continue to rely on deep relationships with people and holistic consideration of the full range of media practices found around the world.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between interpreting and producing media? How have anthropologists studied these processes differently?
2. How do anthropologists study media consumption, media production, and infrastructure? What different types of approaches did the anthropologists in this chapter use? What sets media anthropologists apart from other types of media scholars?
3. Where do media anthropologists work? What types of topics do they focus on?

GLOSSARY

Cultural infrastructure: The values and beliefs of communities, states, and/or societies that make the imagining of a particular type of network possible.

Fabrication: A technique for reporting on research data that involves mixing information provided by various people into a narrative account that demonstrates the point of focus for researchers.

Indigenous media: Media produced by and for indigenous communities often outside of the commercial mainstream.

Mass communication: One-to-many communication that privileges the sender and/or owner of the technology that transmits the media.

Media: A word that used to describe a set of technologies that connect multiple people at one time to shared content.

Media practices: The habits or behaviors of the people who produce media, the audiences who interact with media, and everyone in between.

Mechanical infrastructure: The apparatuses that bring networks of technology into existence.

Photovoice: A research method that puts cameras into people's hands so they can make their own representations of their lives and the activities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bryce Peake is an assistant professor of Media & Communication Studies and an affiliate faculty member in Gender Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His current research focuses on masculinity, media, and science in the post-World War II British Mediterranean spaces of Gibraltar and Gozo. He has also published multimodal projects on race in the United States, and been recognized by the American Anthropological Association for his ethnographic photography. Bryce currently runs the *Anthropology, Mediated* workshop on the island of Gozo, a 15 day ethnographic media fieldschool for undergraduates. Prior to arriving at UMBC, Bryce was a Julie & Rocky Dixon Fellow in Graduate Innovation, and worked with anthropologists at Intel Labs to develop a data-tracking application for users living with Tinnitus.

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Notes

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10. Lynn Stephen, "Community and Indigenous Radio in Oaxaca: Testimony and Participatory Democracy," in *Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucas Bessire (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
11. See Dawn Nafus, "Patches Don't Have Gender: What Is Not Open in Open Source Software," *New Media & Society* 14 no. 4 (2012): 669–683; and Dawn Nafus and Jamie Sherman, "Big Data, Big Questions| This One Does Not Go Up To 11: The Quantified Self Movement as an Alternative Big Data Practice," *International Journal of Communication* 8(2014): 11.
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14. Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6(1): 94.
15. Ibid.
16. Geoffrey Wyatt, "Dreamtime Astronomy: Development of a New Indigenous Program at Sydney Observatory," *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 17 no. 2 (2014): 195–204.
17. See Susan Frohlick, "Fluid Exchanges: The Negotiation of Intimacy between Tourist Women and Local Men in a Transnational Town in Caribbean Costa Rica." *City & Society* 19 no. 1(2007): 139–168 and Susan Frohlick "I'm More Sexy Here: Erotic Subjectivities of Female Toursits in the Sexual Paradise of the Costa Rican Caribbean," in *Gendered Mobilities*, ed. Tanu Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell, 199–223 (New York: Ashgate, 2008).
18. Annette Markham, "Fabrication as Ethical Practice," *Information, Communication & Society* 15 no. 3 (2012): 334–353.

19. See the forthcoming 2018 article by Bryce Peake, "Gozo, Mediated" *Omertaa: A Journal of Applied Anthropology*: 670–675.
20. Ilana Gershon, *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
21. Mark Auslander, "Objects of Kinship," *Transition* 122 (2017): 206–216.

NOW SHOWING: *ANGRY INUK*

Angry Inuk, directed by the Inuit filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, is a documentary about the contemporary local/global politics of seal hunting. It is an example of indigenous media, which has a long history in the Canadian arctic. The film was released in 2016.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and 'Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)'" by Michelle H. Raheja (2007)

Consider watching:

Qaggiq, directed by Zacharias Kunuk (1988)

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner, directed by Zacharias Kunuk (2001)

IsumaTV (<http://www.isuma.tv/>)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain how and why *Angry Inuk* avoids the problems of *Nanook of the North*, *The Eagle Huntress*, and other documentary films made about indigenous people by non-indigenous filmmakers.

SECTION 2: INTERSECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces concepts that are best understood as intersectional: they are constituted by the intersection of multiple axes of power. The concepts in this section include: gender; race, nation, and capitalism; class, colonialism, and the world system; and zones of refuge.

Chapter 6: Gender

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the anthropology of gender and the key concept that gender is "decisively shaped" by culture rather than biology (Gottlieb 2002: 168). The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Gender and Sexuality" by Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, Tami Blumenfield, and Susan Harper (2020). The film is *I, Tonya*.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, San Jose State University
carol.mukhopadhyay@sjsu.edu
<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay>

Tami Blumenfield, Yunnan University
tami.blumenfield@gmail.com

with Susan Harper, Texas Woman's University, susanharperteaches@gmail.com, and Abby Gondek, abbygondek@outlook.com

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.
- Evaluate cultural "origin" stories that are not supported by anthropological data.

INTRODUCTION: SEX AND GENDER ACCORDING TO ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Anthropologists¹ 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. For an activity related to this section, see Activity 1 in the Teaching Resources of the *Perspectives* website.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF GENDER

Gender Ideologies, Biology, and Culture

Gender vs. Sex

Words can reveal cultural beliefs. A good example is the term “sex.” In the past, sex referred both to sexuality and to someone’s biologic sex: male or female. Today, although sex still refers to sexuality, “gender” now means the categories male, female, or increasingly, other gender possibilities. Why has this occurred?

The change in terminology reflects profound alterations in gender ideology in the United States (and elsewhere). 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**. According to this theory, males and females were supposedly born fundamentally different reproductively and in other major capacities and preferences and were “naturally” (biologically) sexually attracted to each other, although women’s sexual “drive” was not very well developed relative to men’s and was reproductively oriented.

Rejecting Biological Determinism

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 masculinist U.S. stereotypes (see [examples](#) and Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Hindu deities: Vishnu and his many “avatars” or forms (all male).



Figure 2. Hindu Deities: Vishnu and Goddess Shiva plus avatars.

Women can be thought of as stronger (“tougher,” more “rational”) than men. Phyllis Kaberry, an anthropologist who studied the [Nsaw of Cameroon](#) in the 1940s, said males in that culture argued that land preparation for the rizga crop was “a woman’s job, which is too strenuous for the men” and that “women could carry heavy loads because they had stronger foreheads.”⁷ Among the Aka who live in the present-day Central African Republic, fathers have close, intimate, relationships with infants, play major roles in all aspects of infant-care, and can sometimes produce breast milk.⁸ As for sexual desires,

research on the human sexual response by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson established that men and women have equal biological capacities for sexual pleasure and orgasm and that, because males generally ejaculate simultaneously with orgasm, it is easier for women than men to have multiple orgasms.⁹

Gender: A Cultural Invention and a Social Role

One's **biologic sex** is a different phenomenon than one's **gender**, which is socially and historically constructed.¹⁰ Gender is a set of culturally invented expectations and therefore constitutes a role one assumes, learns, and performs, more or less consciously. It is an "identity" one can in theory choose, at least in some societies, although there is tremendous pressure, as in the United States, to conform to the gender role and identity linked to your biologic sex.

This is a profound transformation in how we think about both gender and sexuality. The reality of human biology is that males and females are shockingly similar.¹¹ There is arguably more variability *within* than *between* each gender, especially taking into account the enormous variability in human physical traits among human populations globally.¹² Notice, for example, the variability in height in the two photos of U.S. college students shown in Figures 3 and 4. Which gender is "taller"? Much of what has been defined as "biological" is actually cultural, so the possibilities for transformation and change are nearly endless! That can be liberating, especially when we are young and want to create identities that fit our particular configuration of abilities and preferences. It can also be upsetting to people who have deeply internalized and who want to maintain the old gender ideology.



Figure 3: Gender variability: students in a Human Sexuality Class at San Jose State University with Dr. Carol Mukhopadhyay, 2010.



Figure 4: Gender variability: students in Kalamazoo at Michigan State University, with Dr. Carol Mukhopadhyay, 2010.

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 **binary** or dualistic 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 for example, 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 are acceptable, publicly recognized, and sometimes venerated.¹³

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

Research has shown that individuals with ambiguous genitals, sometimes called “intersex,” are surprisingly common. Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein estimate that such intersex individuals consti-

tute 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

Gender Relations: Separate and Unequal

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.

Ambivalence and even fear of female sexuality, or negative associations with female bodily fluids,

such as menstrual blood, are widespread in the world's major religions. Orthodox Jewish women are not supposed to sleep in the same bed as their husbands when menstruating. In Kypseli, Greece, people believe that menstruating women can cause wine to go bad.²² In some Catholic Portuguese villages, menstruating women are restricted from preparing fresh pork sausages and from being in the room where the sausages are made as their presence is believed to cause the pork to spoil. Contact with these women also supposedly wilts plants and causes inexplicable movements of objects.²³ Orthodox forms of Hinduism prohibit menstruating women from activities such as cooking and attending temple.

These traditions are being challenged. A 2016 British Broadcasting Company (BBC) television program, for example, described "Happy to Bleed," a movement in India to change negative attitudes about menstruation and eliminate the ban on menstruating-age women entering the famous Sabriamala Temple in Kerala.²⁴

Emergence of Public (Male) vs. Domestic (Female) Spheres

In large stratified and centralized societies—that is, the powerful empires (so-called "civilizations") that have dominated much of the world for the past several thousand years—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. 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

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 5).

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 6). 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 7). 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 (see Figure 6), 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 5: A women only train car in India. Photograph by Ajay Tallam, 2007.



Figure 6: All-girls school in Bangalore, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.



Figure 7: Management studies graduate students at CUSAT-Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kerala, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.

Sanctions, Sexuality, Honor, and Shame

Penalties for deviating from the rules of social separation vary across and within cultures. In small communities, neighbors and extended family kin can simply report inappropriate behavior, especially between unmarried young adults, to other family members. More severe and sometimes violent responses by family members can occur, especially if the family's "honor" is involved—that is, if the young adults, especially girls, engage in activities that would "shame" or dishonor the family. Honor and shame are complex concepts that are often linked to sexuality, especially female sexuality, and to behavior by family members that involves or hints at sexual impropriety. The Turkish film *Mustang*, nominated for the 2016 best foreign film Academy Award, offers a good illustration of how concepts of sexualized honor and shame operate.

We hear in the news of "honor killings" carried out by conservative Muslims in countries such as

Pakistan and powerfully portrayed in documentaries such as *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* (2015).³¹ But it is not just Islam. Some orthodox sectors of major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, may hold similar views about “honor” and “shame” and impose sometimes violent sanctions against those who violate sexuality-related codes. The brutal 2012 gang rape-murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi, though perpetrated by strangers, was rationalized by the men who committed the crime (and their defense attorney) as a legitimate response to the woman’s “shameful” behavior—traveling on a bus at night with a male friend, implying sexual impropriety.³²

Social separation, sex-segregated schools, and penalties for inappropriate sexual behavior have also existed in the United States and Europe, especially among upper-strata women for whom female “purity” was traditionally emphasized. Chastity belts in Europe, whether or not actually used, symbolized the idea that a woman’s sexuality belonged solely to her husband, thus precluding her from engaging not only in premarital and extra-marital sex but also in masturbation (Figure 8).³³ In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, set in mid-sixteenth century Massachusetts, Hester was forced to wear a scarlet A on her dress and to stand on a public scaffold for three hours a day, a relatively nonviolent but powerful form of shaming and punishment. Stoning women to death for sexually inappropriate behavior, especially adultery, and other violent sanctions may have occurred in some European Christian and Jewish communities.

Rape, so frequent in warfare past and present, also can bring shame to the victim and her family, particularly in sexually conservative societies. During the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence against Pakistan, East Bengali women who were raped by soldiers were ostracized by their families because of the “shame” their rape had brought. During the partition of India into India and Pakistan in 1947, some Sikh families reportedly forced daughters to jump into wells to drown rather than risk being raped by strangers.³⁴

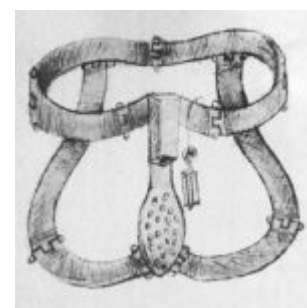


Figure 8: A sketch of a chastity belt, c. 1405.

Alternative Models of Gender: Complementary and Fluid

Not all binary cultures are gender-segregated; nor does gender hostility necessarily accompany gender separation. Nor are all binary cultures deeply concerned with, some might say obsessed with, regulating female sexuality and marriage. Premarital and extra-marital sex can even be common and acceptable, as among the !Kung San and Trobriand Islanders.³⁵ And men are not always clearly ranked over women as they typically are in stratified large-scale centralized societies with “patriarchal” systems. Instead, the two genders can be seen as complementary, equally valued and both recognized as necessary to society. Different need not mean unequal. The Lahu of southwest China and Thailand exemplify a complementary gender system in which men and women have distinct expected roles but a male-female pair is necessary to accomplish most daily tasks (Figure 9). A male-female pair historically took responsibility for local leadership. Male-female **dyads** completed daily household tasks in tandem and worked together in the fields. The title of anthropologist Shanshan Du’s book, *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs* (1999), encapsulates how complementary gender roles defined Lahu society. A single chopstick is not very useful; neither is a single person, man or woman, in a dual-focused society.³⁶



Figure 9: Lahu farmers in Chiangmai, Thailand.

Like the Lahu, the nearby Na believe men and women both play crucial roles in a family and household. Women are associated with birth and life while men take on tasks such as butchering animals and preparing for funerals (Figures 10 and 11). Every Na house has two large pillars in the central hearth room, one representing male identity and one representing female identity. Both are crucial, and the house might well topple symbolically without both pillars. As sociologist Zhou Huashan explained in his 2002 book about the Na, this is a society that “values women without diminishing men.”³⁷



Figure 10: A Na woman, Sigih Lamu, weeds rice seedlings outside her family's home in southwest China's Yunnan Province. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2002.



Figure 11: Na men carry a wooden structure to be used at a funeral. Photograph by Tami Blumenfeld, 2002.

Anthropologists have also encountered relatively androgynous gender-binary cultures. In these cultures, some gender differentiation exists but “gender bending” and role-crossing are frequent, accepted, and reflect circumstances and individual capacities and preferences. Examples are the !Kung San mentioned earlier, Native American Washoe in the United States, and some segments of European societies in countries such as Sweden and Finland and, increasingly, in the United States.³⁸ Contemporary twenty-first century gender ideologies tend to emphasize commonality, not difference: shared human traits, flexibility, fluidity, and individual expression.

Even cultures with fairly well-defined gender roles do not necessarily view them as fixed, biologically rooted, permanent, “essentialist,” or “naturalized” as occurred in the traditional gender ideology in the United States.³⁹ Gender may not even be an “identity” in a psychological sense but, rather, a social role one assumes in a particular social context just as one moves between being a student, a daughter, an employee, a wife or husband, president of the bicycle club, and a musician.

Cultures also change over time through internal and external forces such as trade, conquest, colonialism, globalization, immigration, mass media, and, especially, films. Within every culture, there is tremendous diversity in class, ethnicity, religion, region, education level, and generation, as well as diversity related to more-individual family circumstances, predilections, and experiences. Gender expectations also vary with one’s age and stage in life as well as one’s social role, even within the family (e.g., “wife” vs. “sister” vs. “mother” vs. “mother-in-law” and “father” vs. “son” vs. “brother” vs “father-in-law”). Finally, people can appear to conform to cultural norms but find ways of working around or ignoring them.

Even in highly male-dominated, sexually segregated societies, women find ways to pursue their own goals, to be actors, and to push the boundaries of the gender system. Among Egyptian Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin families, for example, women rarely socialized outside their home compounds or with unrelated men. But within their spheres, they freely interacted with other women, could influence their husbands, and wrote and sang poetic couplets as expressive outlets.⁴⁰ In some of the poorest and least-developed areas of central India, where **patriloc** extended-family male-controlled households reign,

activist Sampat Pal has organized local rural women to combat violence based on dishonor and gender.⁴¹ Her so-called “Gulabi Gang,” the subject of two films, illustrates both the possibilities of resistance and the difficulties of changing a deeply embedded system based on gender, caste, and class system (Figure 12).⁴² For a related activity, see Activity 2: Understanding Gender from a Martian Perspective.



Figure 12: Gulabi Gang in India.

Unraveling Our Gender Myths: Primate Roots, “Man the Hunter,” and Other “Origin Stories” of Gender and Male Dominance

Even unencumbered by pregnancy or infants, a female hunter would be less fleet, generally less strong, possibly more prone to changes in emotional *tonus* as a consequence of the estrus cycle, and less able to adapt to changes in temperature than males.⁴³

—U.S. anthropologist, 1969

Women don’t ride motorcycles because they can’t; they can’t because they are not strong enough to put their legs down to stop it.⁴⁴

—Five-year-old boy, Los Angeles, 1980

Men hunted because women were not allowed to come out of their houses and roam about in forests.⁴⁵

—Pre-college student in India, 1990

All cultures have “creation” stories. Many have elaborate gender-related creation stories that describe the origins of males and females, their gender-specific traits, their relationships and sexual proclivities, and, sometimes, how one gender came to “dominate” the other. Our culture is no different. The Judeo-Christian Bible, like the Koran and other religious texts, addresses origins and gender (think of Adam and Eve), and traditional folk tales, songs, dances, and epic stories, such as the Ramayana in Hinduism and Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, treat similar themes.

Science, too, has sought to understand gender differences. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of scientists, immersed in Darwinian theories, began to explore the evolutionary

roots of what they assumed to be universal: male dominance. Of course, scientists, like the rest of us, view the world partially through their own cultural lenses and through a gendered version. Prior to the 1970s, women and gender relations were largely invisible in the research literature and most researchers were male so it is not surprising that 1960s theories reflected prevailing male-oriented folk beliefs about gender.⁴⁶

The Hunting Way of Life “Molds Man” (and Woman)

The most popular and persistent theories argued that male dominance is universal, rooted in species-wide gendered biological traits that we acquired, first as part of our primate heritage, and further developed as we evolved from apes into humans. Emergence of “the hunting way of life” plays a major role in this story. Crucial

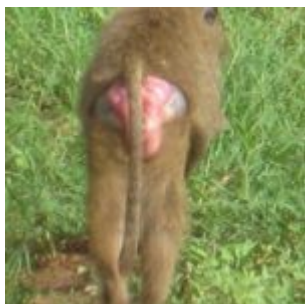


Figure 13: Female baboon in estrus.

components include: a diet consisting primarily of meat, obtained through planned, cooperative hunts, by all-male groups, that lasted several days and covered a wide territory. Such hunts would require persistence, skill, and physical stamina; tool kits to kill, butcher, transport, preserve, and share the meat; and a social organization consisting of a stable home base and a monogamous nuclear family. Several biological changes were attributed to adopting this way of life: a larger and more complex brain, human language, an upright posture (and humans’ unique foot and stride), loss of body hair, a long period of infant dependency, and the absence of

“estrus” (ovulation-related female sexual arousal) (Figure 13), which made females sexually “receptive” throughout the monthly cycle. Other human characteristics purportedly made sex more enjoyable: frontal sex and fleshier breasts, buttocks, and genitals, especially the human penis. Making sex “sexier,” some speculated, cemented the pair-bond, helping to keep the man “around” and the family unit stable.⁴⁷

Hunting was also linked to a “world view” in which the flight of animals from humans seemed natural and (male) aggression became normal, frequent, easy to learn, rewarded, and enjoyable. War, some have suggested, might psychologically be simply a form of hunting and pleasurable for male participants.⁴⁸ The Hunting Way of Life, in short, “molded man,” giving our species its distinctive characteristics. And as a result, we contemporary humans cannot erase the effects of our hunting past even though we live in cities, stalk nothing but a parking place, and can omit meat from our diets.

The biology, psychology, and customs that separate us from the apes—all these we owe to the hunters of time past. And, although the record is incomplete and speculation looms larger than fact, for those who would understand the origin and nature of human behavior there is no choice but to try to understand “Man the Hunter.”

—Washburn and Lancaster (1974)⁴⁹

Gender roles and male dominance were supposed to be part of our evolutionary heritage. Males evolved to be food-providers—stronger, more aggressive, more effective leaders with cooperative and bonding capacities, planning skills, and technological inventiveness (tool-making). In this creation story, females never acquired those capacities because they were burdened by their reproductive



Figure 14: Baboon pair in tree: male-female voluntary relations.

roles—pregnancy, giving birth, lactation, and child care—and thus became dependent on males for food and protection. The gender gap widened over time. As males initiated, explored, invented, women stayed at home, nurtured, immersed themselves in domestic life. The result: men are active, women are passive; men are leaders, women are followers; men are dominant, women are subordinate.

Many of us have heard pieces of this Hunting Way of Life story. Some of the men Mukhopadhyay interviewed in Los Angeles in the late 1970s invoked “our hunting past” to explain why they—and men generally—operated barbeques rather than their wives. Women’s qualifications to be president were questioned on biological grounds such as “stamina” and “toughness.” Her women informants, all hospital nurses, doubted their navigational abilities, courage, and strength despite working in intensive care and regularly lifting heavy male patients. Mukhopadhyay encountered serious scholars who cited women’s menstrual cycle and “emotional instability” during ovulation to explain why women “can’t” hunt.

Similar stories are invoked today for everything from some men’s love of hunting to why men dominate “technical” fields, accumulate tools, have extra-marital affairs or commit the vast majority of homicides. Strength and toughness remain defining characteristics of masculinity in the United States, and these themes often permeate national political debates.⁵⁰ One element in the complex debate over gun control is the male-masculine strength-through-guns and man-the-hunter association, and it is still difficult for some males in the United States to feel comfortable with their soft, nurturant, emotional, and artistic sides.⁵¹

What is most striking about man-the-hunter scenarios is how closely they resemble 1950s U.S. models of family and gender, which were rooted in the late nineteenth century “cult of domesticity” and “true womanhood.” Father is “head” of the family and the final authority, whether in household decisions or in disciplining children. As “provider,” Father goes “outside” into the cold, cruel world, hunting for work. Mother, as “chief mom,” remains “inside” at the home base, creating a domestic refuge against the “survival of the fittest” “jungle.” American anthropologists seemed to have subconsciously projected their own folk models onto our early human ancestors.

Altering this supposedly “fundamental” gender system, according to widely read authors in the 1970s, would go against our basic “human nature.” This belief was applied to the political arena, then a virtually all-male domain, especially at state and national levels. The following quote from 1971 is particularly relevant and worthy of critical evaluation since, for the first time, a major U.S. political party selected a woman as its 2016 presidential candidate (See Text Box 3, Gender and the Presidential Election).

To make women equal participants in the political process, we will have to change the very process itself, which means changing a pattern bred into our behavior over the millennia.
—Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox⁵²

Replacing Stories with Reality

Decades of research, much of it by a new generation of women scholars, have altered our view of the hunting way of life in our evolutionary past.⁵³ For example, the old stereotype of primates as living in male-centered, male-dominated groups does not accurately describe our closest primate relatives, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos. The stereotypes came from 1960s research on savannah, ground-dwelling baboons that suggested they were organized socially by a stable male-dominance hierarchy, the “core” of the group, that was established through force, regulated sexual access to females, and provided internal and external defense of the “troop” in a supposedly hostile savannah environment.⁵⁴ Females lacked hierarchies or coalitions, were passive, and were part of dominant male “harems.”



Figure 15: Rhesus monkeys at the Periyar Reserve in Kerala, India.

Critics first argued that baboons, as monkeys rather than apes, were too far removed from humans evolutionarily to tell us much about early human social organization. Then, further research on baboons living in other environments by primatologists such as Thelma Rowell discovered that those baboons were neither male-focused nor male-dominated. Instead, the stable group core was **matrifocal**—a mother and her offspring constituted the central and enduring ties. Nor did males control female sexuality. Quite the contrary in fact. Females mated freely and frequently, choosing males of all ages, sometimes establishing special relationships—“friends with favors.” Dominance, while infrequent, was not based simply on size or strength; it was learned, situational, and often stress-induced. And like other primates, both male and female baboons used sophisticated strategies, dubbed “primate politics,” to predict and manipulate the intricate social networks in which they lived.⁵⁵

Rowell also restudied the savannah baboons. Even they did not fit the baboon “stereotype.” She found that their groups were loosely structured with no specialized stable male-leadership coalitions and were sociable, matrifocal, and infant-centered much like the Rhesus monkeys pictured below (see Figure 15). Females actively initiated sexual encounters with a variety of male partners. When attacked by predators or frightened by some other major threat, males, rather than “defending the troop,” typically would flee, running away first and leaving the females carrying infants to follow behind (Figures 16).⁵⁶



Figure 16: Baboon group with infants being carried by male.

Man the Hunter, the Meat-Eater?

The second, more important challenge was to key assumptions about the hunting way of life. Archaeological and paleontological fossil evidence and ethnographic data from contemporary foragers revealed that hunting and meat it provided were not the primary subsistence mode. Instead, gathered foods such as plants, nuts, fruits, roots and small fish found in rivers and ponds constituted the bulk of such diets and provided the most stable food source in all but a few settings (northerly climates, herd migration routes, and specific geographical and historical settings). When meat was important, it was more often “scavenged” or “caught” than hunted.

A major symposium on human evolution concluded that “opportunistic” “scavenging” was probably the best description of early human hunting activities. Often, tools found in pre-modern human sites such as caves would have been more appropriate for “smashing” scavenged bones than hunting live animals.⁵⁷ Hunting, when carried out, generally did not involve large-scale, all-male, cooperative expeditions involving extensive planning and lengthy expeditions over a wide territorial range. Instead, as among the Hadza of Tanzania, hunting was likely typically conducted by a single male, or perhaps two males, for a couple of hours, often without success. When hunting collectively, as occurs among the Mbuti in the Central African rainforest, groups of families likely participated with women and men driving animals into nets. Among the Agta of the Philippines, women rather than men hunt collectively

using dogs to herd animals to a place where they can be killed.⁵⁸ And !Kung San men, despite what was shown in the 1957 ethnographic film *The Hunters*, do not normally hunt giraffe; they usually pursue small animals such as hares, rats, and gophers.

Discrediting the Hunting Hypothesis

Once the “hunting-meat” hypothesis was discredited, other parts of the theory began to unravel, especially the link between male dominance and female economic dependency. We now know that for most of human history—99 percent of it prior to the invention of agriculture some 10,000 or so years ago—women have “worked,” often providing the stable sources of food for their family. Richard Lee, Marjorie Shostak, and others have detailed, with caloric counts and time-work estimates, the significance of women’s gathering contributions even in societies such as the !Kung San, in which hunting occurs regularly.⁵⁹ In foraging societies that rely primarily on fish, women also play a major role, “collecting” fish from rivers, lakes, and ponds. The exceptions are atypical environments such as the Arctic.



Figure 17: Collecting firewood in Bansankusu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Of course, “meat-getting” is a narrow definition of “food getting” or “subsistence” work. Many food processing activities are time-consuming. Collecting water and firewood is crucial, heavy work and is often done by women (Figure 17). Making and maintaining clothing, housing, and tools also occupy a significant amount of time. Early humans, both male and female, invented an array of items for carrying things (babies, wood, water), dug tubers, processed nuts, and cooked food. The invention of string some 24,000 years ago, a discovery so essential that it produced what some have called the “String Revolution,” is attributed to women.⁶⁰ There is the “work of kinship,” of “healing,” of “ritual,” of “teaching” the next generation, and emotional “work. All are part of the work of

living and of the “invisible” work that women do.

Nor is it just hunting that requires intelligence, planning, cooperation, and detailed knowledge. Foragers have lived in a wide variety of environments across the globe, some more challenging than others (such as Alaska). In all of these groups, both males and females have needed and have developed intensive detailed knowledge of local flora and fauna and strategies for using those resources. Human social interactions also require sophisticated mental and communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal. In short, humans’ complex brains and other modern traits developed as an adaptation to complex social life, a lengthy period of child-dependency and child-rearing that required cooperative nurturing, and many different kinds of “work” that even the simplest human societies performed.

Refuting Pregnancy and Motherhood as Debilitating

Finally, cross-cultural data refutes another central man-the-hunter stereotype: the “burden” of pregnancy and child care. Women’s reproductive roles do not generally prevent them from food-getting, including hunting; among the Agta, women hunt when pregnant. Foraging societies accommodate the work-reproduction “conflict” by spacing out their pregnancies using indigenous methods of “family

planning” such as prolonged breast feeding, long post-pregnancy periods of sexual inactivity, and native herbs and medicinal plants. Child care, even for infants, is rarely solely the responsibility of the birth mother. Instead, multiple caretakers are the norm: spouses, children, other relatives, and neighbors.⁶¹ Reciprocity is the key to human social life and to survival in small-scale societies, and reciprocal child care is but one example of such reciprocity. Children and infants accompany their mothers (or fathers) on gathering trips, as among the !Kung San, and on Aka collective net-hunting expeditions. Agta women carry nursing infants with them when gathering-hunting, leaving older children at home in the care of spouses or other relatives.⁶²

In pre-industrial horticultural and agricultural societies, having children and “working” are not incompatible—quite the opposite! Anthropologists long ago identified “female farming systems,” especially in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, in which farming is predominantly a woman’s job and men “help out” as needed.⁶³

In most agricultural societies, women who do not come from high-status or wealthy families perform a significant amount of agricultural labor, though it often goes unrecognized in the dominant gender ideology. Wet-rice agriculture, common in south and southeast Asia, is labor-intensive, particularly weeding and transplanting rice seedlings, which are often done by women (Figure 10). Harvesting rice, wheat, and other grains also entails essential input by women. Yet the Indian Census traditionally records only male family members as “farmers.” In the United States, women’s work on family-owned farms is often invisible.⁶⁴

Women may accommodate their reproductive and child-rearing roles by engaging in work that is more compatible with child care, such as cooking, and in activities that occur closer to home and are interruptible and perhaps less dangerous, though cooking fires, stoves, and implements such as knives certainly can cause harm!⁶⁵ More often, women adjust their food-getting “work” in response to the demands of pregnancy, breast-feeding, and other child care activities. They gather or process nuts while their children are napping; they take their children with them to the fields to weed or harvest and, in more recent times, to urban construction sites in places such as India, where women often do the heaviest (and lowest-paid) work.

In the United States, despite a long-standing cultural model of the stay-at-home mom, some mothers have always worked outside the home, mainly out of economic necessity. This shifting group includes single-divorced-widowed mothers and married African-Americans (pre- and post-slavery), immigrants, and Euro-American women with limited financial resources. But workplace policies (except during World War II) have historically made it harder rather than easier for women (and men) to carry out family responsibilities, including requiring married women and pregnant women to quit their jobs.⁶⁶ Circumstances have not improved much. While pregnant women in the United States are no longer automatically dismissed from their jobs—at least not legally—the United States lags far behind most European countries in providing affordable [child care](#) and [paid parental leave](#).

Family and Marriage: A Cultural Construct and a Social Invention

Unraveling the theory of the hunting-way-of-life scenario, especially female dependence on males, undermines the “naturalness” of the nuclear family with its male-provider-protector and female-domestic-child-care division of labor. More than one hundred years of cross-cultural research has revealed the varied forms humans have invented for “partnering”—living in households, raising children, establishing long-term relationships, transmitting valuables to offspring, and other social behaviors associated with “family.” Once again, the universality and evolutionary origins of the U.S. form of

the human family is more fiction than fact, a projection of our cultural model of family and gender roles onto the past and onto the entire human species.

Family: Biology and Culture

What **is** natural about the family? Like gender and sexuality, there is a biological component. There is a biological mother and a biological father, although the mother plays a significantly larger and longer role from the time of conception through the end of infant's dependence. In the past, conception usually required sexual intercourse, but that is no longer the case thanks to sperm banks, which have made the embodied male potentially obsolete, biologically speaking. There is also a biological relationship between parents and offspring—again, more obvious in the case of the mother since the baby develops in and emerges from her body. Nevertheless, DNA and genes are real and influence the traits and potentialities of the next generation.

Beyond those biological “realities,” culture and society seem to take over, building on—or ignoring—biology. We all know there are biological fathers who may be unaware of or not concerned about their biological offspring and not involved in their care and biological mothers who, after giving birth, give up their children through adoption or to other family members. In recent decades, technology has allowed women to act as “surrogate mothers,” using their bodies as carriers for implanted fertilized eggs of couples who wish to have a child. On the other hand, we all probably know of excellent parents who are not the children's biological mothers and fathers, and “legal” parenthood through adoption can have more-profound parenting consequences for children than biological parenthood.

When we think of good (or bad) parents, or of someone as a really “good mother,” as an “excellent father,” as two “wonderful mothers,” we are not talking biology. We usually are thinking of a set of cultural and behavioral expectations, and being an adoptive rather than a biological parent isn't really the issue. Clearly, then, parenthood, mother-father relationships, and other kinship relationships (with siblings, grandparents, and uncles-aunts) are not simply rooted in biology but are also social roles, legal relationships, meanings and expectations constructed by human cultures in specific social and historical contexts. This is not to deny the importance of kinship; it is fundamental, especially in small-scale pre-industrial societies. But kinship is as much about culture as it is about biology. Biology, in a sense, is only the beginning—and may not be necessary.

Marriage also is not “natural.” It is a cultural invention that involves various meanings and functions in different cultural contexts. We all know that it is not necessary to be married to have sex or to have children. Indeed, in the United States, a growing number of women who give birth are not married, and the percent of unmarried women giving birth is higher in many northwestern European countries such as Sweden.⁶⁷ Cross-culturally, marriage seems to be primarily about **societal regulation of relationships**—a social contract between two individuals and, often, their families, that specifies rights and obligations of married individuals and of the offspring that married women produce. Some anthropologists have argued that marriage IS primarily about children and “descent”—who will “own” children.⁶⁸ To whom will they belong? With what rights, obligations, social statuses, access to resources, group identities, and all the other assets—and liabilities—that exist within a society? Children have historically been essential for family survival—for literal reproduction and for social reproduction.

Think, for a moment, about our taken-for-granted assumptions about to whom children belong.⁶⁹ Clearly, children emerge from a woman's body and, indeed, after approximately nine months, it is her body that has nurtured and “grown” this child. But who “owns” that child legally—to whom it “belongs” and the beliefs associated with how it was conceived and about who played a role in its conception—is not a biological given. Not in human societies. One fascinating puzzle in human evolution is how

females lost control over their sexuality and their offspring! Why do so many, though not all, cultural theories of procreation consider women's role as minor, if not irrelevant—not as the “seed,” for example, but merely as a “carrier” of the male seed she will eventually “deliver” to its “owner”? Thus, having a child biologically is not equivalent to social “ownership.” Marriage, cross-culturally, deals with social ownership of offspring. What conditions must be met? What exchanges must occur, particularly between families or kinship groups, for that offspring to be theirs, his, hers—for it to be a legitimate “heir”?

Marriage is, then, a “contract,” usually between families, even if unwritten. Throughout most of human history, kinship groups and, later, religious institutions have regulated marriage. Most major religions today have formal laws and marriage “contracts,” even in societies with “civil” marriage codes. In some countries, like India, there is a separate marriage code for each major religion in addition to a secular, civil marriage code. Who children “belong to” is rarely solely about biology, and when biology is involved, it is biology shaped by society and culture. The notion of an “illegitimate” child in the United States has not been about biology but about “legitimacy,” that is, whether the child was the result of a legally recognized relationship that entitled offspring to certain rights, including inheritance.

From this perspective, what we think of as a “normal” or “natural” family in the United States is actually a culturally and historically specific, legally codified set of relationships between two individuals and, to some extent, their families. Cross-culturally, the U.S. (and “traditional” British-Euro-American) nuclear family is quite unusual and atypical. Married couples in the United States “ideally” establish a separate household, a nuclear-family-based household, rather than living with one spouse's parents and forming a larger multi-generational household, often referred to as an “extended” family, which is the most common form of family structure. In addition, U.S. marriages are monogamous—legally, one may have only one husband or wife at a time. But a majority of societies that have been studied by anthropologists have allowed polygamy (multiple spouses). Polygyny (one husband, multiple wives) is most common but polyandry (one wife, multiple husbands) also occurs; occasionally marriages involve multiple husbands and multiple wives. Separate spouses, particularly wives, often have their own dwelling space, commonly shared with their children, but usually live in one compound, with their husbands' parents and his relatives. Across cultures, then, most households tend to be versions of extended-family-based groups.

These two contrasts alone lead to families in the United States that are smaller and focused more on the husband-wife (or spousal) and parent-child relationships; other relatives are more distant, literally and often conceptually. They are also more “independent”—or, some would say, more dependent on a smaller set of relationships to fulfill family responsibilities for work, child care, finances, emotional companionship, and even sexual obligations. Other things being equal, the death or loss of a spouse in a “traditional” U.S. family has a bigger impact than such a loss in an extended family household (see Text Box 1). On the other hand, nuclear families own and control their incomes and other assets, unlike many extended families in which those are jointly held. This ownership and control of resources can give couples and wives in nuclear families greater freedom.

There are other cross-cultural variations in family, marriage and kinship: in expectations for spouses and children, exchanges between families, inheritance rules, marriage rituals, ideal ages and characteristics of spouses, conditions for dissolving a marriage and remarriage after a spouse's death, attitudes about premarital, extra-marital, and marital sexuality, and so forth. How “descent” is calculated is a social-cultural process that carves out a smaller “group” of “kin” from all of the potential relatives in which individuals have rights (e.g., to property, assistance, political representation) and obligations (economic, social). Often there are explicit norms about who one should and should not marry, including which relatives. Marriage between people we call “cousins” is common cross-culturally. These varia-

tions in the definition of marriage and family reflect what human cultures do with the biological “facts of life,” creating many different kinds of marriage, family, and kinship systems.

Another major contrast between the U.S. and many other cultures is that our husband-wife relationship is based on free choice and “romantic love.” Marriages are arranged by the couple and reflect their desires rather than the desires of larger societal groups. Of course, even in the United States, that has never been entirely the case. Informal prohibitions, often imposed by families, have shaped (and continue to shape) individual choices, such as marrying outside one’s religion, racial/ethnic group, and socio-economic class or within one’s gender. Some religions explicitly forbid marrying someone from another religion. But U.S. formal government prohibitions have also existed, such as laws against inter-racial marriage, which were only declared unconstitutional in 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*).

These so-called anti-miscegenation laws, directed mainly at European-American and African-Americans, were designed to preserve the race-based system of social stratification in the United States.⁷⁰ They did not affect both genders equally but reflected the intersection of gender with class and racial inequality. During slavery, most inter-racial sexual activity was initiated by Euro-American males. It was not uncommon for male slave owners to have illicit, often forced sexual relations with female slaves. The laws were created so that children of slave women inherited their mother’s racial and slave status, thereby also adding to the slave property of the “father.”

Euro-American women’s relationships with African-American men, though far less frequent and usually voluntary, posed special problems. Offspring would inherit the mother’s “free” status and increase the free African-American population or possibly end up “passing” as “White.” Social and legal weapons were used to prevent such relationships. Euro-American women, especially poorer women, who were involved sexually with African-American men were stereotyped as prostitutes, sexually depraved, and outcasts. Laws were passed that fined them for such behavior or required them to work as indentured servants for the child’s father’s slave owner; other laws prohibited cohabitation between a “White” and someone of African descent.

Post-slavery anti-miscegenation laws tried to preserve the “color line” biologically by outlawing mating and to maintain the legal “purity” and status of Euro-American lineages by outlawing inter-racial marriage. In reality, of course, inter-racial mating continued, but inter-racial offspring did not have the rights of “legitimate” children. By the 1920s, some states, like Virginia, had outlawed “Whites” from marrying anyone who had a “single drop” of African blood. By 1924, 38 states had outlawed Black-White marriages, and as late as the 1950s, inter-racial marriage bans existed in almost half of the states and had been extended to Native Americans, Mexicans, “East Indians,” Malays, and other groups designated “not White.”⁷¹

Overall, stratified inegalitarian societies tend to have the strictest controls over marriage. Such control is especially common when some groups are considered inherently superior to others, be it racially, castes, or “royal” blood. Patriarchal societies closely regulate and restrict premarital sexual contacts of women, especially higher-status women. One function of marriage in these societies is to reproduce the existing social structure, partially by insuring that marriages and any offspring resulting from them will maintain and potentially increase the social standing of the families involved. Elite, dominant groups have the most to lose in terms of status and wealth, including inheritances. “Royalty” in Britain, for example, traditionally are not supposed to marry “commoners” so as to ensure that the royal “blood,” titles, and other privileges remain in the “royal” family.

Cross-culturally, even in small-scale societies that are relatively egalitarian such as the San and the Trobriand Islanders studied by Annette Weiner, marriage is rarely a purely individual choice left to the wishes—and whims of, or “electricity” between—the two spouses.⁷² This is not to say that spouses never have input or prior contact; they may know each other and even have grown up together. In most soci-

eties, however, a marriage usually has profound social consequences and is far too important to be “simply” an individual choice. Since marriages affect families and kin economically, socially, and politically, family members (especially elders) play a major role in arranging marriages along lines consistent with their own goals and using their own criteria. Families sometimes arrange their children’s marriages when the children are quite young. In Nuosu communities of southwest China, some families held formal engagement ceremonies for babies to, ideally, cement a good cross-cousin partnership, though no marital relationship would occur until much later.⁷³ There also can be conventional categories of relatives who are supposed to marry each other so young girls might know that their future husbands will be particular cousins, and the girls might play or interact with them at family functions as children.⁷⁴

This does not mean that romantic love is purely a recent or U.S. and European phenomenon. Romantic love is widespread even in cultures that have strong views on arranging marriages. Traditional cultures in India, both Hindu and Muslim, are filled with “love stories” expressed in songs, paintings, and famous temple sculptures. One of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the Taj Mahal, is a monument to Shah Jahan’s love for his wife. Where young girls’ marriages are arranged, often to older men (as among the Maasai), we know that those girls, once married, sometimes take “lovers” about whom they sing “love songs” and with whom they engage in sexual relations.⁷⁵ Truly, romantic love, sex, and marriage can exist independently.

Nevertheless, cross-culturally and historically, marriages based on free choice and romantic love are relatively unusual and recent. Clearly, young people all over the world are attracted to the idea, which is “romanticized” in Bollywood films, popular music, poetry, and other forms of contemporary popular culture. No wonder so many families—and conservative social and religious groups—are concerned, if not terrified, of losing control over young people’s mating and marriage behavior (see, for example, the excellent PBS documentary *The World before Her*).⁷⁶ A social revolution is truly underway and we haven’t even gotten to same-sex sex and same-sex marriage.

Text Box 1: What Can We Learn from the Na? Shattering Ideas about Family and Relationships

By Tami Blumenfield

We have certain expectations about the trajectories of relationships and family life in the United States—young people meet, fall in love, purchase a diamond, and then marry. To some extent, this specific view of family is changing as same-sex relationships and no-longer-new reproductive technologies expand our views of what family can and cannot be. Still, quite often, we think about family in a rigid, heteronormative context, assuming that everyone wants the same thing. What if we think about family in an entirely different way? In fact, many people already do. In 2014, 10 percent of American adults lived in cohabitating relationships. Meanwhile, 51 percent were married in state-endorsed relationships, and that percentage has been dropping fast.⁷⁷ Those numbers may sound familiar as part of politicians’ “focus on the family,” decrying the number of children born to unmarried parents and bemoaning the weakening of an institution they hold dear (even though their colleagues are frequently exposed in the news for sexual indiscretions). It is true that adults with limited resources face challenges raising children when they have limited access to affordable, high-quality child care. They struggle when living wage jobs migrate to other countries or other states where workers earn less. In an economic system that encourages concentration of resources in a tiny fraction of the population, it is no wonder that they struggle. But is the institution of marriage really to blame? The number of cohabitating unmarried individuals is high in many parts of Europe as well, but with better support structures in place, parents fare much better. They enjoy parental leave policies that mandate their jobs be held for them upon return from leave. They also benefit from strong educational systems and state-subsidized child care, and their children enjoy better outcomes than ours. Critics see the “focus on the family” by U.S. politicians as a convenient political trick that turns attention away from crucial policy issues and refocuses it on the plight of the institution of marriage and the fate of the nation’s children. Few people can easily dismiss these concerns, even if they do not reflect their own lived realities. And besides, the family model trumpeted by politicians as lost is but one form of family that is not universal even in the United States, much less among all human groups, as sociologist Stephanie Coontz convincingly argued in books including *The Way We Never Were* (1992) and *The Way We Really Are* (1997).

In fact, the “focus on family” ignores the diverse ways peoples on this continent have organized their relationships. For Hopi, a Native American group living in what is today the southwestern United States, for example, it is their mother’s kin rather than their husbands’ from whom

they draw support. The Navajo, Kiowa, and Iroquois Native American cultures all organize their family units and arrange their relationships differently. Na people living in the foothills of the Himalayas have many ways to structure family relationships. One relationship structure looks like what we might expect in a place where people make their living from the land and raise livestock to sustain themselves. Young adults marry, and brides sometimes move into the husband's childhood home and live with his parents. They have children, who live with them, and they work together. A second Na family structure looks much less familiar: young adults live in large, extended family households with several generations and form romantic relationships with someone from another household. When they are ready, the young man seeks permission to spend the night in the young woman's room. If both parties desire, their relationship can evolve into a long-term one, but they do not marry and do not live together in the same household. When a child is conceived, or before if the couple chooses, their relationship moves from a secretive one to one about which others know. Even so, the young man rarely spends daylight hours with his partner. Instead, he returns to his own family's home to help with farming and other work there. The state is not involved in their relationship, and their money is not pooled either, though presents change hands. If either partner becomes disenchanted with the other, the relationship need not persist. Their children remain in the mother's home, nurtured by adults who love them deeply—not just by their mothers but also by their grandmothers, maternal aunts, maternal uncles, and often older cousins as well. They enjoy everyday life with an extended family (Figure 18). The third Na family structure mixes the preceding two systems. Someone joins a larger household as a spouse. Perhaps the family lacked enough women or men to manage the household and farming tasks adequately or the couple faced pressure from the government to marry.



Figure 18: Na grandmother with her maternal grandchildren. They live in the same household, along with the grandmother's adult sons and her daughter, the children's mother. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2002.

As an anthropologist who has done fieldwork in Na communities since 2001, I can attest to the loving and nurturing families their system encourages. It protects adults as well as children. Women who are suffering in a relationship can end it with limited consequences for their children, who do not need to relocate to a new house and adjust to a new lifestyle. Lawyers need not get involved, as they often must in divorce cases elsewhere in the world. A man who cannot afford to build a new house for his family—a significant pressure for people in many areas of China that prevents young men from marrying or delays their marriages—can still enjoy a relationship or can choose, instead, to devote himself to his role as an uncle. Women and men who do not feel the urge to pursue romantic lives are protected in this system as well; they can contribute to their natal families without having to worry that no one will look out for them as they age.

Like any system composed of real people, Na systems are not perfect, and neither are the people who represent them. In the last few decades, people have flocked to Lugu Lake hoping to catch a glimpse of this unusual society, and many tourists and tour guides have mistakenly taken Na flexibility in relationships as signifying a land of casual sex with no recognition of paternity. These are highly problematic assumptions that offend my Na acquaintances deeply. Na people have fathers and know who they are, and they often enjoy close relationships despite living apart. In fact, fathers are deeply involved in children's lives and often participate in everyday child-rearing activities. Of course, as in other parts of the world, some fathers participate more than others. Fathers and their birth families also take responsibility for contributing to school expenses and make other financial contributions as circumstances permit. Clearly, this is not a community in which men do not fulfill

responsibilities as fathers. It is one in which the responsibilities and how they are fulfilled varies markedly from those of fathers living in other places and cultures.

Though problems exist in Na communities and their relationship patterns are already changing and transforming them, it is encouraging that so many people can live satisfied lives in this flexible system. The Na shatter our expectations about how families and relationships should be organized. They also inspire us to ask whether we can, and should, adapt part of their ethos into our own society.⁷⁸

For more information, see the [TEDx FurmanU presentation](#) by Tami Blumenfiel

Male Dominance: Universal and Biologically Rooted?

Unraveling the myth of the hunting way of life and women's dependence on male hunting undermined the logic behind the argument for biologically rooted male dominance. Still, for feminist scholars, the question of male dominance remained important. Was it universal, "natural," inevitable, and unalterable? Were some societies gender-egalitarian? Was gender inequality a cultural phenomenon, a product of culturally and historically specific conditions?

Research in the 1970s and 1980s addressed these questions.⁷⁹ Some argued that "sexual asymmetry" was universal and resulted from complex cultural processes related to women's reproductive roles.⁸⁰ Others presented evidence of gender equality in small-scale societies (such as the !Kung San and Native American Iroquois) but argued that it had disappeared with the rise of private property and "the state."⁸¹ Still others focused on evaluating the "status of women" using multiple "variables" or identifying "key determinants" (e.g., economic, political, ecological, social, and cultural) of women's status.⁸² By the late 1980s, scholars realized how difficult it was to define, much less measure, male dominance across cultures and even the "status of women" in one culture.

Think of our own society or the area in which you live. How would you go about assessing the "status of women" to determine whether it is male-dominated? What would you examine? What information would you gather and from whom? What difficulties might you encounter when making a judgment? Might men and women have different views? Then imagine trying to compare the status of women in your region to the status of women in, let's say, the Philippines, Japan, or China or in a kin-based, small society like that of the Minangkabau living in Indonesia and the !Kung San in Botswana. Next, how might Martians, upon arriving in your city, decide whether you live in a "male dominated" culture? What would they notice? What would they have difficulty deciphering? This experiment gives you an idea of what anthropologists confronted—except they were trying to include all societies that ever existed. Many were accessible only through archaeological and paleontological evidence or through historical records, often made by travelers, sailors, or missionaries. Surviving small-scale cultures were surrounded by more-powerful societies that often imposed their cultures and gender ideologies on those under their control.

For example, the !Kung San of Southern Africa when studied by anthropologists, had already been pushed by European colonial rulers into marginal areas. Most were living on "reserves" similar to Indian reservations in the United States. Others lived in market towns and were sometimes involved in the tourist industry and in films such as the ethnographically flawed and ethnocentric film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980). !Kung San women at the time were learning European Christian ideas about sexuality, clothing, and covering their breasts, and children were attending missionary-established schools, which taught the church's and European views of gender and spousal roles along with the Bible, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. During the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the South African military tried to recruit San to fight against the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), taunt-

ing reluctant !Kung San men by calling them “chicken” and assuming, erroneously, that the !Kung San shared their “tough guys / tough guise” version of masculinity.⁸³

Given the complexity of evaluating “universal male dominance,” scholars abandoned the search for simple “global” answers, for key “determinants” of women’s status that would apply to all societies. A 1988 *Annual Review of Anthropology* article by Mukhopadhyay and Higgins concluded that “One of the profound realizations of the past ten years is that the original questions, still unanswerable, may be both naive and inappropriate.”⁸⁴ Among other things, the concept of “status” contains at least five separate, potentially independent components: economics, power/authority, prestige, autonomy, and gender ideologies/beliefs. One’s life-cycle stage, kinship role, class, and other socio-economic and social-identity variables affect one’s gender status. Thus, even within a single culture, women’s lives are not uniform.⁸⁵

New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender

More-recent research has been focused on improving the ethnographic and archaeological record and re-examining old material. Some have turned from cause-effect relations 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 and 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 anti-choice 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.

On the other hand, we have yet to find any “matriarchies,” that is, female-dominated societies in which the extent and range of women's power, authority, status, and privilege parallels 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 (See Text Box 1, What Can We Learn from the Na?). 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 Text Boxes 1 and 2 provide examples of such systems.

Text Box 2: Does Black Matriarchy Exist in Brazil? Histories of Slavery and African Cultural Survivals in Afro-Brazilian Religion

By Abby Gondek

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian spirit possession religion in which Yoruba (West African) deities called *orixás* are honored at religious sites called *terreiros* where the Candomblé priestesses (*mães do santo*) and their "daughters" (*filhas do santo*) live. One of the central "hubs" of Candomblé worship in Brazil is the northeastern state of Bahia, where Afro-Brazilians make up more than 80 percent of the population in the capital city, Salvador. Brazil's geography is perceived through the lenses of race and class since Bahia, a majority Afro-Brazilian state, is viewed as underdeveloped, backward, and poor relative to the whiter and wealthier Southern region.¹⁰⁴ In the 1930s, a

Jewish female anthropologist Ruth Landes provided a different perspective about Bahia, one that emphasized black women's communal power. During the time in which Landes conducted her research, the Brazilian police persecuted Candomblé communities for "harboring communists." The Brazilian government was linked with Nazism, torture, rape, and racism, and Afro-Brazilians resisted this oppression.¹⁰⁵ Also during this period, debate began among social scientists about whether Candomblé was a matriarchal religion in which women were the primary spiritual leaders. The debate was rooted in the question of where "black matriarchy" came from. Was it a result of the history of slavery or was it an African "cultural survival"? The debate was simultaneously about the power and importance of Afro-Brazilian women in spiritual and cultural life.

On one side of the debate was E. Franklin Frazier, an African-American sociologist trained at University of Chicago, who maintained that Candomblé and the lack of legal marriage gave women their important position in Bahia. He believed that black women had been matriarchal authorities since the slavery period and described them as defiant and self-reliant. On the other side of the debate was Jewish anthropologist Melville Herskovits, who was trained by German immigrant Franz Boas at Columbia University. Herskovits believed that black women's economic roles demonstrated African cultural survivals, but downplayed the priestesses' importance in Candomblé.¹⁰⁶ Herskovits portrayed patriarchy rather than matriarchy as the central organizing principle in Bahia. He argued that African cultural survivals in Brazil came from the patrilineal practices of Dahomey and Yoruba in West Africa and portrayed Bahian communities as male-centered with wives and "concubines" catering to men and battling each other for male attention.

Ruth Landes and her work triggered the debate about "black matriarchy" in Bahia. Landes had studied with anthropologists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia University. She began her studies of Candomblé in 1938 in Salvador, Bahia, working with her research partner, guide, and significant other, Edison Carneiro, a scholar of Afro-Brazilian studies and journalist, resulting in publication in 1947 of *The City of Women*.¹⁰⁷ Landes contended that Afro-Brazilian women were the powerful matriarchal leaders of *terreiros* de Candomblé. She called them matriarchal because she argued that their leadership was "made up almost exclusively of women and, in any case controlled by women."¹⁰⁸ Landes claimed that the women provided spiritual advice and sexual relationships in exchange for financial support from male patrons of the *terreiros*. She also explained that newer *caboclo* houses (in which indigenous spirits were worshipped in addition to Yoruba spirits) had less-stringent guidelines and allowed men to become priests and dance for the gods, actions considered taboo in the Yoruba tradition. Landes elaborated that these men were primarily "passive" homosexuals. She looked down on this "modern" development, which she viewed as detracting from the supposedly "pure" woman-centered Yoruba (West African) practices.¹⁰⁹ Even Landes' (controversial) argument about homosexuality was part of her claim about matriarchy; she contended that the homosexual men who became *pais do santo* ("fathers of the saint," or Candomblé priests) had previously been "outcasts"—prostitutes and vagrants who were hounded by the police. By becoming like the "mothers" and acting as women, they could gain status and respect. Landes was strongly influenced by both Edison Carneiro's opinion and the convictions of Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim (a revered *babalaô* or "father of the secrets") and the women priestesses of the traditional houses (*Gantois*, *Casa Branca*, and *Ilê Axé Opô Afonjã*) with whom she spent the majority of her time.

Thus, her writings likely represent the views of her primary informants, making her work unique; at that time, anthropologists (ethnocentri-

cally) considered themselves more knowledgeable about the cultures they studied than the people in those cultures. Landes incorporated ideas from the pre-Brazil research of E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits to contend that the existence of the matriarchy in Bahia rested on women's economic positions, sexuality, and capacities, which were influenced by (1) white slave owners' preference for black women as heads of families and the inculcation of leadership traits in black women and not black men and (2) the history of women's roles as property owners, market sellers, priestesses, and warriors in West Africa.¹¹⁰ Landes' findings continue to be critiqued in contemporary academic contexts because some scholars disagree with her matriarchy thesis and her views about homosexual *pais* and *filhos do santo*. J. Lorand Matory, director of African and African-American research at Duke University, has taken one of the strongest positions against Landes, arguing that she altered the evidence to argue for the existence of the "*cult matriarchate*." Matory believes that her division between "new" and "traditional" houses is a false one and that men traditionally were the leaders in Candomblé. In fact, Matory contends that, at the time of Landes' research, more men than women were acting as priests.¹¹¹ In contrast, Cheryl Sterling sees Landes' *The City of Women* as "still relevant today as the first feminist account of Candomblé" and maintains that Candomblé is a space in which Afro-Brazilian women are the "supreme authority" and that the *terreiro* is an enclave of "female power." The Brazilian state stereotypes black women as socially pathological with "unstable" family structures, making them "sub-citizens," but Sterling argues that Candomblé is a space in which female blackness prevails.¹¹²

Has Civilization "Advanced" Women's Position?

Ironically, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers and social scientists, such as Herbert Spencer, have argued that women's positions "advanced" with civilization, especially under European influence, at least relative to so-called "primitive" societies. The picture is complicated, but the opposite may actually be true. Most anthropological studies have suggested that "civilization," "colonialism," "development," and "globalization" have been mixed blessings for women.¹¹³ Their traditional workloads tend to increase while they are simultaneously excluded from new opportunities in agricultural cash crops, trading, and technology. Sometimes they lose traditional rights (e.g., to property) within extended family kinship groups or experience increased pressure from men to be the upholders of cultural traditions, whether in clothing or marriage practices. On the other hand, new political, economic, and educational opportunities can open up for women, allowing them not only to contribute to their families but to delay marriage, pursue alternatives to marriage, and, if they marry, to have a more powerful voice in their marriages.¹¹⁴

Deeply embedded cultural-origin stories are extremely powerful, difficult to unravel, and can persist despite contradictory evidence, in part because of their familiarity. They resemble what people have seen and experienced throughout their lifetimes, even in the twenty-first century, despite all the changes. Yet, nineteenth and twentieth century cultural models are also continuously reinforced and reproduced in every generation through powerful devices: children's stories; rituals like Valentine's Day; fashion, advertisements, music, video games, and popular culture generally; and in financial, political, legal, and military institutions and leaders. But profound transformations can produce a "backlash," as in U.S. movements to restore "traditional" family forms, "traditional" male and female roles, sexual abstinence-virginity, and the "sanctity" of heterosexual marriage.¹¹⁵ Some would argue that backlash elements were at work in the 2016 Presidential and Congressional elections (see Text Box 3).

Cultural origin stories also persist because they are **legitimizing ideologies**—complex belief systems often developed by those in power to rationalize, explain, and perpetuate systems of inequality. The hunting-way-of-life theory of human evolution, for example, both naturalizes and essentializes male dominance and other gender-related traits and provides an origin story and a legitimizing ideology for the "traditional" U.S. nuclear family as "fundamental to human social organization and life." It also can be used to justify "spousal rape" and domestic violence, treating both as private family matters and, in the past, as male "rights." Not surprisingly, elements of the traditional nuclear family model appear in the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage, especially in the [dissenting views](#). And cultural models of gender and family played a role in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. For a related activity, see Activity 3 below.

Text Box 3: Gender and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

By Carol C. Mukhopadhyay

The 2016 presidential election was gender precedent-setting in ways that will take decades to analyze (see for example [Gail Collins](#)). For the first time, a major U.S. political party chose a woman as its presidential candidate. And while Hillary Rodham Clinton did not win the electoral college, she won the popular vote, the first woman to do so, and by nearly three million votes. As a cultural anthropologist who has long studied women and politics, I offer a few preliminary observations on the role of gender in the 2016 presidential election.¹¹⁶

Women on the Political Leadership Stage

From a positive perspective, for the first time, two women (Republican Carly Fiorina and Democrat Hillary Clinton) participated in televised presidential primary debates and one went on to the “finals.” Millions of people, including children, saw articulate, accomplished, powerful women competing with men to be “Commander-in-Chief.” During the 2016 [Democratic National Convention](#), the country watched a major political party and key male leaders celebrate the life and professional and leadership-relevant achievements of a woman, its presidential nominee. The role-modeling impacts are enormous—and, one hopes, long-lasting.

The Gendered White House Family

The 2016 presidential campaign challenged, at least momentarily, the traditional, taken-for-granted, gendered institution of the White House first “family.” What if the president’s spouse were male? This would wreck havoc with the conventional “first lady” role! Traditionally, the spouse, even if highly educated, becomes the “help mate” and “listener,” handles “domestic affairs,” organizes and attends important social occasions, and works on gender-appropriate projects such as children’s health. Hillary Clinton was roundly criticized, as first lady, for venturing beyond the “domestic sphere” and pursuing health care reform in Bill Clinton’s administration even though she had indisputably relevant professional expertise. Michelle Obama, with her Harvard law degree and prior career as a lawyer, became best known as “First Mom” and a “fashion-setter” whose clothing was discussed and emulated. While she was a very positive role model, especially for African-Americans, and developed major initiatives to combat childhood obesity and promote fresh food, she did not challenge [gender conventions](#). How many girls remember her professional credentials and achievements?

Had Hillary Clinton won, the need to confront gendered elements of the conventional White House family would have come to the forefront as the “first gentleman” role gradually evolved. Certainly, no one would have expected Bill Clinton to choose china patterns, redecorate the living quarters, or become a “fashion trend-setter.”

Consensual Sexual Interactions: Which Century Are We In?

The 2016 presidential campaign stimulated discussion of other often-ignored gender-related topics. Despite some progress, sexual harassment and sexual assault, including rape, remain widespread in the workplace and on college campuses (cf. [Stanford case](#), [The Hunting Ground](#)). Yet there has been enormous pressure on women—and institutions—to remain silent.

In October 2016, after a video was released of Donald Trump bragging about his ability to sexually grope women he did not know, the presidential candidate said it was only “locker room talk”...not anything he had ever done. Hearing these denials, several women, some well-known, came forth with convincing claims that Trump had groped them or in other ways engaged in inappropriate, non-consensual sexual behavior. Trump responded by denying the charges, insulting the accusers, and threatening lawsuits against the claimants and news media organizations that published the reports.¹¹⁷ For many women, the video aroused memories of their own recurring experiences with sexual harassment and assault. After the video was released, Kelly Oxford started a tidal wave of women unburdening long-kept secrets with her tweet: “[Women: tweet me your first assaults](#).” Others went on record denouncing Trump’s talk and behavior, and the hashtag #NotOkay surged on Twitter.

In a normal U.S. presidential election, the video and repeated accusations of sexual assault would have forced the candidate to withdraw (as happened with [Gary Hart](#) in a previous election). Instead, accusers experienced a backlash not only from Trump but from some media organizations and Trump supporters, illustrating why women are reluctant to come forth or press sexual charges, especially against powerful men (see the 1991 [Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas case](#)). These voters’ reactions and the continued willingness of so many others to vote for the candidate suggest that “locker room banter” and unwanted sexual advances are still considered normal and acceptable among significant segments of our population. After all, “boys will be boys,” at least in the old (false) baboon stereotype of male behavior! Clearly, we need more public conversations about what constitutes appropriate and consensual sexually related behavior.

Sexism: Alive and Well

The 2016 presidential campaign revealed that sexism is alive and well, though not always [recognized](#), explicit, or acknowledged even when obvious (see article by [Lynn Sherr](#)). The media, both before and after the election, generally underplayed the impact of sexism despite research showing that sexist attitudes, not political party, were more likely to predict voters preference for Donald Trump over [Hillary Clinton](#).¹¹⁸

The campaign also reflected a persistent double standard. Despite widespread agreement that Hillary Clinton was highly qualified to be president, her judgment, competence, “stamina,” and even her proven accomplishments were subjected to scrutiny and criticism not normally

applied to similarly experienced male candidates. Additional gender-specific criteria were imposed: “likeability,” “smiling enough,” “warmth,” and appearance. She did not “look” “presidential”—an image of leadership that evoked the stereotype baboon model! But being six feet tall with large biceps and acting “tough” and “aggressive” probably would have disqualified her, as a woman, from the start! Other traits that are acceptable in men—ambitious, goal-focused, strategic, “wanting” the presidency—were treated as liabilities in Clinton, part of a “power-hungry” critique, as though women are not legitimately supposed to pursue or hold power.

Patriarchal Stereotypes of Women

Hillary Clinton’s candidacy seems to have activated long-standing patriarchal stereotypes and images of women. One is the “good vs. bad” woman opposition. The “good” woman is chaste, obedient, nurturing, self-sacrificing, gentle—the Virgin Mary/Mother figure. The “bad” woman is greedy, selfish, independent, aggressive, and often, sexually active—importantly, she lies, deceives, is totally untrustworthy. Bad (“nasty”) women in myths and reality must be punished for their transgressions; they are dangerous to men and threaten the social order.

As a researcher and someone who had many conversations with voters during this election, I was shocked by the intensity and level of animosity directed at Hillary Clinton. It was palpable, and it went far beyond a normal critique of a normal candidate. At Republican rallies, mass shouts of “lock her up” and T-shirts and bumper stickers bearing slogans like “[Trump that Bitch](#)” ([and worse](#)) bore a frightening resemblance to violence-inciting hate-speech historically directed at African-Americans and at Jews, gays, and socialists in Nazi Germany, as well as to hate-filled speech that fueled Medieval European witch-burnings in which thousands (if not millions), mainly women, were burned at the stake [“burn the witch”].¹¹⁹ Clinton was indeed challenging “traditional” gender roles in U.S. [politics](#), the workplace, and at home. Patriarchy was being threatened, and many, though not all, voters found that profoundly disturbing even though they did not necessarily recognize it or admit it.¹²⁰

Beyond that, there is a long tradition of blaming women for personal and societal disasters—for convincing Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, for the breakup of joint family households in places like India. Women often become the repository for people’s frustrations when things “go wrong” (Remember the spoiled sausage in Portuguese culture discussed earlier in this chapter?). Women—like minorities, immigrants, and “evil empires”—are culturally familiar, available targets to which one can legitimately assign blame, frustration, and even rage, as we saw in the [2016 election](#).¹²¹

Hillary Clinton as a Symbol of Change

Ironically, Hillary Clinton was depicted and criticized during the campaign as a symbol of the “establishment” while her key opponents stood for “change.” I think it is just the opposite. Hillary Clinton and her campaign and coalition symbolized (and embraced) the major transformations—indeed, upheavals—that have occurred in the United States since the 1960s. It is not just feminism and a new definition of masculinity that rejects the old baboon male-dominance tough-guy model, although that is one change.¹²² While economic anxiety and “white nationalism” both played roles, the election was also about an “America” that is changing demographically, socially, religiously, sexually, linguistically, technologically, and ideologically—changing what constitutes “truth” and reality. For many in rural areas, outside forces—especially the government, run by liberal, urban elites—are seen as trying to control one’s way of life with gun control, environmental regulations, ending coal mining, banning school (Christian) prayer, requiring schools to teach evolution and comprehensive sex education (vs. abstinence only). Hillary Clinton, her coalition, and her alignment with the Obama White House, not just with its policies but with an African-American “first family,” symbolized the intersection of all these social, demographic, and cultural transformations. She truly represented “change.”

Ironically, Clinton’s opponents, even in the Democratic Party, were more “establishment” candidates culturally, demographically, and in their gender relationships. Bernie Sanders attracted an enormous, enthusiastic following and came close to winning the Democratic presidential primary. Yet his rhetoric and policy proposals, while unusual in twenty-first century mainstream politics, resembled the economic inequality, anti-Wall Street, “it’s only about economics” focus of early twentieth century democratic socialists such as Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas and of progressive Henry Wallace. And, not surprisingly, Sanders appealed largely to Euro-American demographic groups rather than to the broader spectrum of twenty-first century voters.

In short, the election and the candidacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton symbolized more than half a century of enormous change—and a choice between continuing that change or selecting a candidate who symbolized what was traditional, familiar, and, to many, more comfortable. Whether the transformations of the past fifty years will be reversed remains to be seen.¹²³

Discussion

From a global perspective, the United States lags behind many countries in women’s political leadership and representation. For national legislative bodies, U.S. women constitute only 19 percent of Congress, **below** the world average of 23 percent, below the average in the Americas, 28 percent, and far below Nordic countries, 41 percent. The U.S. ranks 104th of 193 countries in the world (see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>). When it comes to political leadership, over 65 nations have elected at least one woman as their head of state, including countries with predominantly Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and/or Buddhist populations. (see <https://www.theglobalist.com/women-on-top-of-the-political-world/>.) Yet the U.S. still has never elected a woman President (or even Vice-President). Are you surprised by these data or by some of the countries that rank higher than the United States? Why? What do you think are some of the reasons the US lags behind so many other countries?

Additional Resources and Links

[Center for American Women and Politics](#)

[Presidential Gender Watch](#)
[Institute for Women's Policy Research](#)
[Pew Research Institute](#) (U.S. and international data)
[United Nations, UN Women](#)

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.

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

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 Sinclair 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 LGBTQIA 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.

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. See Activity 4: Bathroom Transgression.

Text Box 4: Moving Toward Marriage Equality in Minnesota: Sarah's Letter

In 2013, the Minnesota state legislature voted on whether to approve same-sex marriage. Before the vote, a woman named Sarah made the difficult decision to advocate publicly for the bill's approval. In the process, she wrote the following letter.

Dear Minnesota Senator,

This is an open letter to you in support of the marriage equality bill. I may not be your constituent, and you may already know how you are planning to vote, but I ask you to read this letter with an open mind and heart nonetheless.

I want same-sex marriage for the same reasons as many others. My partner Abby and I met in the first days of 2004 and have created a loving home together with our three kids and two cats. We had a commitment ceremony in 2007 in Minneapolis and were legally married in Vancouver during our "honeymoon." We want our marriage to be recognized because our kids deserve to have married parents, and because we constantly face increased stress as a result of having our relationship not recognized. But that's not why I'm writing. I'm writing because there is one conversation I have over and over again with my son that puts a pit in my stomach each time, and I'm ready for that pit to go away.

Abby and I both wear wedding bands. We designed them prior to our ceremony and spent more time on that decision than we did on the flowers, dresses, and music combined. Our son is now three and a half and, like other kids his age, he asks about everything. All the time. When I get him dressed, change his diaper (please let him be potty-trained soon), or wipe his nose, he sees my ring. And he always asks:

"Mama, what's that ring on your finger?"

"It's my wedding band."

"Why you wear a wedding band?"

"Because when Ima and I got married, we picked out wedding bands and now we wear them every day. It shows that we love each other."

"I want wear wedding band."

"Someday when you're all grown up, you'll fall in love and get married. And you'll get to wear a wedding band, too."

"I'll grow up and get married? And then I get a wedding band?"

"Yep."

"Okay."

And then he goes about his day. This conversation may seem silly and harmless to you, but read it again. Look at how many times the issue of marriage comes up. We call it a wedding band, but every time we say that, we know it's not completely true because we were not legally wed in Minnesota. When I tell my son about our marriage or our wedding, I know I'm hiding a secret from him, but am I really supposed to explain that it was a "commitment ceremony" and we are "committed, but not "married"? He's too young to be saddled with the pain that comes from being left out. He looks at our pictures and sees that his parents made a commitment to each other because of love. He doesn't understand his grandfather's speech recognizing how bittersweet the day was because the state we call home refused to bless our union as it blesses the unions of our friends. And he doesn't understand that, when I tell him he will grow up and get married, his marriage will (most likely) be part of a tradition from which his parents are excluded.

I am grateful that he is blissfully unaware right now. Imagine having the conversation with your children. Imagine the pain you would feel if innocent conversations with your child reminded you constantly that your love is not valued by your community. Don't get me wrong; our friends and family treated our ceremony as they would a legal wedding. We had a phenomenal time with good food, music, laughter, and joy. If our ceremony in Minneapolis had been enough, though, we wouldn't have bothered to get legally married in Vancouver. There is something so powerful and intangible about walking into a government office and walking out with a marriage license. We are grateful we had the opportunity there, and simply wish our state would recognize our commitment as the marriage that it is.

Take a look at the picture of my family. It's outdated, primarily because we can't get our kids to sit still long enough for a photo. I'm on the right, Abby on the left. Our son is now 3.5 and our girls (twins) are almost 2. We can appreciate that this is a difficult vote for many of you and we would be honored if you think of our family and the impact this vote will have on us. We know many people outside of the Twin Cities never have a chance to meet families like ours. Tell them about us, if it helps. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,

Sarah

Minneapolis, Minnesota

April 2013

Note: Minnesota legalized same-sex marriage in 2013.



Figure 19: Sarah's family photo.

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.

Anthropology of the Body

Another important topic for anthropologists interested in gender and sexuality is the anthropology of the body, sometimes referred to as embodied anthropology. Viewing the human body as an analytic category offers exciting new theoretical possibilities.¹⁴⁵ Topics that have attracted particular attention include popular and scientific representations of the body; (dis)ability; the anthropology of obesity; the politics of reproduction; coercion; complex issues associated with genital modifications such as female circumcision; and the relationship between bodies and borders.¹⁴⁶ Who can cross which lines physically (think about national borders), emotionally, psychologically, and socially? Embodied anthropology foregrounds these questions.

Anthropologists increasingly write about their own experiences using an auto-ethnographic mode. For example, Pamela Runestad examined how her time as a patient in a Japanese maternity ward influenced her understanding of the importance of carefully crafted meals and nutrition for HIV/AIDS patients.¹⁴⁷ In subsequent research on HIV/AIDS in Japan, she probed more deeply into how patients' nourishment inside and outside clinical settings affected their perceptions of health.

Anthropology of the body overlaps with work on gender and sexuality, including the discourse surrounding women's bodies and reproductive functions. Emily Martin's pioneering book, *The Woman in the Body*, critically examined lay women and medical descriptions of menstruation, child-bearing, and menopause in the United States. She identified a scientific ideology of reproduction that is infused with traditional U.S. binary gender stereotypes similar to those in man-the-hunter origin stories. In her classic essay about what she calls a “scientific fairy tale,” Martin describes how U.S. biology texts repre-

sented the egg and sperm as romantic partners whose actions are described with passive or active verbs according to gendered assumptions.¹⁴⁸

I realized that the picture of egg and sperm drawn in popular as well as scientific accounts of reproductive biology relies on stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and female. The stereotypes imply not only that female biological processes are less worthy than their male counterparts but also that women are less worthy than men. Part of my goal in writing this article is to shine a bright light on the gender stereotypes hidden within the scientific language of biology.¹⁴⁹

Subsequent work has challenged the “sperm penetrates egg” model of fertilization, noting that it is medically inaccurate and reinforces male-active-dominant, female-passive (penetrated) gender models. In reality, the egg and sperm fuse, but the egg activates the sperm by releasing molecules that are crucial for it to find and adhere to the egg.¹⁵⁰ Old videos like *The Miracle of Life* offer, in their narration and background music, striking examples of the cultural ideology of reproduction in the United States that Martin and others have described.¹⁵¹

In another classic essay, Corinne Hayden explored interactions between biology, family, and gender among lesbian couples. Even though both members of the lesbian couples she studied did not necessarily contribute biologically to their offspring, the women and their families found ways to embrace these biological differences and develop a new formulation of family that involved biological connection but was not limited to it.¹⁵²

Some research analyzes the body, especially the female body, as a site of coercion and expression of power relations by individuals (e.g., partner rape and domestic violence), but state-sanctioned collective acts also occur, such as using women as “sex slaves” (Japan’s so-called “Comfort Women” during World War II) and using civilian rape as a form of psychological warfare. Anthropologists document other ways in which states exert power over bodies—through family planning policies (China’s planned birth policy), legislation that bans (or permits) artificial forms of contraception and abortion, and government programs to promote fertility, including subsidized infertility treatments.¹⁵³ For example, Turkish anthropologists have described how state policies in Turkey have appropriated, for state purposes, sexual issues of concern to Turkish families, such as assisted reproduction for disabled war veterans and treatment of vaginismus, a condition that prevents women from engaging in sexual intercourse. Power relationships are also associated with new reproductive technologies. For example, the availability of amniocentesis often contributes to shifts in the ratio of male and female babies born. Unequal power relations are also in play between surrogate mothers (often poor women) and wealthier surrogate families desiring children.¹⁵⁴

Women in Anthropology

As seen earlier in this chapter, female anthropologists have always played a key role in anthropology. In sex-segregated societies, they have had unique access to women’s worlds. Recently, they have analyzed how gender might affect styles of authorship and authority in ethnographies. Social characteristics, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion, also influence how an anthropologist engages in fieldwork and how she and her colleagues relate to one another.¹⁵⁵ Sometimes the identity of an anthropologist creates new opportunities for deeper understanding and connection, but at other times one’s personal identity can create professional challenges.

Fieldwork

Women face particular challenges when conducting fieldwork regardless of the culture but particularly in sex-segregated and patriarchal societies. Sometimes women are perceived as more vulnerable

than men to sexual harassment, and their romantic choices in fieldwork situations are subject to greater scrutiny than choices made by men in similar situations.¹⁵⁶ Women may be more likely to juggle family responsibilities and professional projects and bring children with them for fieldwork. At first glance, this practice may raise eyebrows because of the risks it brings to accompanying children and because of potential negative impacts on the anthropologist's planned work, but many female anthropologists have found fieldwork undertaken with their families to be a transformative experience both professionally and personally. Whereas appearing as a decontextualized single fieldworker can arouse suspicion, arriving at a field site with the recognizable identities of parent, daughter, or spouse can help people conceptualize the anthropologist as someone with a role beyond camera-toting interviewer and observer. At the same time, arriving as a multi-person group also complicates what Jocelyn Linnekin called "impression management." One's child is often less aware of delicate matters and less sensitive in communicating preferences to hosts, causing potentially embarrassing situations but also creating levity that might otherwise be slow to develop. Fieldwork as a family unit also allows for a different rhythm to the elusive work-life balance; many families have reported cherishing time spent together during fieldwork since they rarely had so much time together in their activity-filled home settings.¹⁵⁷

More anthropologists now conduct fieldwork in their home communities. Some wish to explore theoretical and empirical questions best examined in local field sites. Others are reluctant or unable to relocate their families or partners temporarily. Conducting fieldwork close to home can also be a less expensive option than going abroad! But the boundaries of field and home can become quite porous. In their writings, women anthropologists reveal how the realms of public and private and political and personal are connected in the field/home. Innovative, activist, and self-reflective studies address intersections that other scholars treat separately.¹⁵⁸

Academic Anthropology in the United States

Though the representation of women in U.S. academic anthropology is now proportional to their numbers in the Ph.D. pool, discrepancies remain between male and female anthropology professors in rank and publication rates. A 2008 report on the status of women in anthropology, for example, found evidence of continuity of the "old boys' network"—the tendency for men in positions of power to develop relationships with other men, which creates pooled resources, positive performance evaluations, and promotions for those men but not for women. Furthermore, since women in the United States are usually socialized to avoid making demands, they often accept lower salary offers than could have been negotiated, which can have significant long-term financial consequences.¹⁵⁹

Women are also over-represented among non-tenure-track anthropology faculty members who are often paid relatively small per-course stipends and whose teaching leaves little time for research and publishing. Some married women prioritize their partners' careers, limiting their own geographic flexibility and job (and fieldwork) opportunities. Left with few academic job options in a given area, they may leave academia altogether.¹⁶⁰

On a positive note, women have an increasingly prominent place in the highest ranks of anthropology, including as president of the American Anthropological Association. Nonetheless, systemic gender inequality continues to affect the careers of female anthropologists. Given what we know about gender systems, we should not be surprised.

Masculinity Studies

Students in gender studies and anthropology courses on gender are often surprised to find that they will be learning about men as well as women. Early women's studies initially employed what has been

called an “add women and stir” approach, which led to examinations of gender as a social construct and of women’s issues in contemporary society. In the 1990s, women’s studies expanded to become gender studies, incorporating the study of other genders, sexuality, and issues of gender and social justice.¹⁶¹ Gender was recognized as being fundamentally relational: femaleness is linked to maleness, femininity to masculinity. One outgrowth of that work is the field of “masculinity studies.”¹⁶²

Masculinity studies goes beyond men and their roles to explore the relational aspects of gender. One focus is the enculturation processes through which boys learn about and learn to perform “manhood.” Many U.S. studies (and several excellent videos, such as *Tough Guise* by Jackson Katz), have examined the role of popular culture in teaching boys our culture’s key concepts of masculinity, such as being “tough” and “strong,” and shown how this “tough guise” stance affects men’s relationships with women, with other men, and with societal institutions, reinforcing a culture of violent masculinity. Sociologist Michael Kimmel has further suggested that boys are taught that they live in a “perilous world” he terms “Guyland.”¹⁶³

Anthropologists began exploring concepts of masculinity cross-culturally as early as the 1970s, resulting in several key publications in 1981, including Herdt’s first book on the Sambia of New Guinea and Ortner and Whitehead’s volume, *Sexual Meanings*. In 1990, Gilmore analyzed cross-cultural ethnographic data in his *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts in Masculinity*.¹⁶⁴ Other work followed, including a provocative video on the Sambia, *Guardians of the Flutes*. But the growth of studies of men and masculinity in the United States also stimulated new research approaches, such as “performative” aspects of masculinity and how gender functions in wealthier, post-industrial societies and communities with access to new technologies and mass media.¹⁶⁵

Anthropologists sometimes turn to unconventional information sources as they explore gendered culture, including popular television commercials. Interestingly, the 2015 Super Bowl commercials produced for the Always feminine product brand also focused on gender themes in its [#Likeagirl campaign](#), which probed the damaging connotations of the phrases “throw like a girl” and “run like a girl” by first asking boys and girls to act out running and throwing, and then asking them to act out a girl running and throwing. A [companion clip](#) further explored the negative impacts of anti-girl messages, provoking dialogue among Super Bowl viewers and in social media spaces (though, ironically, that dialogue was intended to promote consumption of feminine products). As the clips remind us, while boys and men play major roles in perceptions related to gender, so do the women who raise them, often reinforcing gendered expectations for play and aspiration. Of course, women, like men, are enculturated into their culture’s gender ideology.¹⁶⁶ Both girls and boys—and adults—are profoundly influenced by popular culture.

Though scholars from many disciplines publish important work on masculinity, anthropologists, with their cross-cultural research and perspectives, have significantly deepened and enriched interdisciplinary understandings. Anthropologists have made strong contributions not only by providing nuanced portrayals (of, for example, men in prison, heroin users, migrant laborers, college students, and athletes in the United States) but also through offering vivid accounts of expectations of men in other societies, including the relationship between those expectations and warfare. This can include differences in expectations based on a person’s age, other role-based variations, and transformation of traditional roles as a result of globalization.¹⁶⁷

Not all societies expect men to be “tough guys/guise,” and those that do go about it in different ways and result in different impacts on men and women.¹⁶⁸ For example, in Sichuan Province in China, young Nuosu men must prove their maturity through risky behavior such as theft. In recent years, theft has been supplanted for many by heroin use, particularly as young men have left their home communities for urban areas (where they are often feared by city residents and attract suspicion).¹⁶⁹ Mean-

while, in the Middle East, technologies such as assisted reproduction are challenging and reshaping ideas about masculinity among some Arab men, particularly men who acknowledge and struggle with infertility. There and elsewhere, conceptions of fatherhood are considered crucial components of masculinity. In Japan, for example, a man who has not fathered a child is not considered to be fully adult.¹⁷⁰

Elsewhere, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, men are expected to be gentle nurturers of young children and to behave in ways that do not fit typical U.S. stereotypes. In Na communities, men dote on babies and small children, often rushing to pick them up when they enter a room. In South Korea, men in wildly popular singing groups wear eyeliner and elaborate clothing that would be unusual for U.S. groups, and throughout China and India, as in many other parts of the world, heterosexual men walk down the street holding hands or arm-in-arm without causing raised eyebrows. Physical contact between men, especially in sex-segregated societies, is probably far more common than contact between men and women! Touch is a human form of intimacy that need not have sexual implications. So if male-male relations are the most intimate in a society, physical expressions of those relations are “normal” overall unless there is a cultural fear of male physical intimacy. There is much more nuance in actual behavior than initial appearances lead people to believe.

Anthropologists are also applying approaches taken in American studies to other cultures. They are engaging in more-intimate discussions of males’ self-perceptions, dilemmas, and challenges and have not hesitated to intercede, carefully, in the communities in which they work. Visual anthropologist Harjant Gill, conducting research in the Punjab region of India, began asking men about pressures they faced and found that the conversations prompted unexpected reflection. Gill titled his film *Mardistan* (*Macholand*) and shepherded the film through television broadcasts and smaller-scale viewings to encourage wide discussion in India of the issues he explored.¹⁷¹ For a related activity, see Activity 5: Analyzing Gendered Stereotypes and Masculinity in Music Videos.

CONCLUSION

In 1968, a cigarette company in the United States decided to target women as tobacco consumers and used a clever marketing campaign to entice them to take up [smoking](#). “You’ve come a long way, baby!” billboards proclaimed. Women, according to the carefully constructed rhetoric, had moved away from their historic oppressed status and could—and should—now enjoy the full complement of twentieth-century consumer pleasures. Like men, they deserved to enjoy themselves and relax with a cigarette. The campaigns were extremely successful; within several years, smoking rates among women had increased dramatically. But had women really come a long way? We now know that tobacco (including in vaporized form) is a highly addictive substance and that its use is correlated with a host of serious health conditions. In responding to the marketing rhetoric, women moved into a new sphere of bodily pleasure and possibly enjoyed increased independence, but they did so at a huge cost to their health. They also succumbed to a long-term financial relationship with tobacco companies who relied on addicting individuals in order to profit. Knowing about the structures at work behind the scenes and the risks they took, few people today would agree that women’s embrace of tobacco represented a huge step forward.

Perhaps saying “You’ve come a long way, baby!” with the cynical interpretation with which we read it today can serve as an analogy for our contemporary explorations of gender and culture. Certainly, many women in the United States today enjoy heightened freedoms. We can travel to previously forbidden spaces, study disciplines long considered the domain of men, shape our families to meet our own needs, work in whatever field we choose, and, we believe, live according to our own wishes. But we would be naive to ignore how gender continues to shape, constrain, and inform our lives. The research

and methods of anthropology can help us become more aware of the ongoing consequences of our gendered heritage and the ways in which we are all complicit in maintaining gender ideologies that limit and restrict people's possibilities.

By committing to speak out against subtle, gender-based discrimination and to support those struggling along difficult paths, today's anthropologists can emulate pioneers such as Franz Boas and Margaret Mead, who sought to fuse research and action. May we all be kinder to those who differ from the norm, whatever that norm may be. Only then will we all—women, men and those who identify with neither category—have truly come a long way. (But we will leave the infantilizing “baby” to those tobacco companies!)

Discussion Questions

1. What is “natural” about how you experience gender and human sexuality? What aspects are at least partially shaped by culture? How do other cultures' beliefs and practices regarding gender and sexuality differ from those commonly found in the United States? Are there any parallels? Does it depend on which U.S. community we are talking about? What about your own beliefs and practices?
2. Reflect on the various ways you have “learned” about gender and sexuality throughout your life. Which influences do you think had the biggest impact?
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. In what ways have your school settings been shaped by and around gender norms?
6. How are anthropologists influenced by gender norms? How has this affected the discipline of anthropology?

GLOSSARY

Androgyny: cultural definitions of gender that recognize some gender differentiation, but also accept “gender bending” and role-crossing according to individual capacities and preferences.

Binary model of gender: cultural definitions of gender that include only two identities—male and female.

Biologic sex: refers to male and female identity based on internal and external sex organs and chromosomes. While male and female are the most common biologic sexes, a percentage of the human population is intersex with ambiguous or mixed biological sex characteristics.

Biological determinism: a theory that biological differences between males and females leads to fundamentally different capacities, preferences, and gendered behaviors. This scientifically unsupported view suggests that gender roles are rooted in biology, not culture.

Cisgender: a term used to describe those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth

Dyads: two people in a socially approved pairing. One example is a married couple.

Gender: the set of culturally and historically invented beliefs and expectations about gender that one learns and performs. Gender is an “identity” one can choose in some societies, but there is pressure in all societies to conform to expected gender roles and identities.

Gender ideology: a complex set of beliefs about gender and gendered capacities, propensities, prefer-

ences, 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.

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.

Legitimizing ideologies: a set of complex belief systems, often developed by those in power, to rationalize, explain, and perpetuate systems of inequality.

Matrifocal: groups of related females (e.g. mother-her sisters-their offspring) form the core of the family and constitute the family's most central and enduring social and emotional ties.

Matrilineal: societies where descent or kinship group membership is transmitted through women, from mothers to their children (male and female), and then through daughters, to their children, and so forth.

Matrilocal: a woman-centered kinship group where living arrangements after marriage often center around households containing related women.

Patriarchy: describes a society with a male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females in domestic and public spheres.

Patrifocal: groups of related males (e.g. a father-his brothers) and their male offspring form the core of the family and constitute the family's most central and enduring social and emotional ties.

Patrilineal: societies where descent or kinship group membership is transmitted through men, from men to their children (male and female), and then through sons, to their children, and so forth.

Patrilocal: a male-centered kinship group where living arrangements after marriage often center around households containing related men.

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 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.

Learning Activities and Additional Resources

There is a set of learning activities designed to complement the material in this chapter available in the Teaching Resources section of the [Perspectives website](#). You can also find a guide to additional resources for exploring the issues raised in this chapter.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



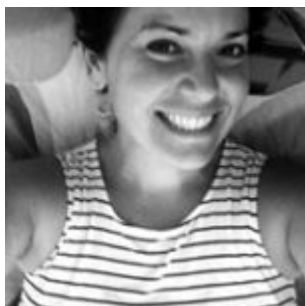
Dr. Mukhopadhyay specializes in gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and culture-cognition, with research in the USA and India on gendered families, politics, and science-engineering. In graduate school she co-created one of the earliest gender-culture courses. She has developed numerous gender classes 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).



Tami Blumenfield is a faculty member in the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Yunnan University and was a 2016 Fulbright Scholar affiliated with Yunnan University. Since 2001, she has been engaged in a long-term ethnographic fieldwork project in northwest Yunnan Province, studying changes in education, social life, and ecology in Na communities. Blumenfield is the co-editor of *Cultural Heritage Politics in China*, with Helaine Silverman (2013), and of *Doing Fieldwork in China...With Kids!* with Candice Cornet (2016). Blumenfield also produced *Some Na Ceremonies*, a Berkeley Media film by Onci Archei and Ruheng Duoji. Blumenfield holds a PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Washington.



Susan Harper, Ph.D., is an educator, activist, and advocate in Dallas, Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Southern Methodist University and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from Texas Woman's University. Her ethnographic research focuses on New Religious Movements, primarily NeoPaganism, in the American South; the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religious identity; and ses, sexuality, and sex education. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Bisexuality*. Susan is passionate about a variety of social justice causes, including domestic and intimate partner violence prevention and recovery, sexual assault prevention and recovery, LGBTQ equality and inclusion, and educational justice. She has given presentations on LGBTQ equality and inclusion to a variety of audiences, including the North Texas Society of Human Resource Managers, The Turning Point Rape Crisis Center, and various religious organizations. She teaches courses in anthropology, sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies at various universities and colleges in the DFW area. She also serves as Graduate Reader/Editor for Texas Woman's University. She is currently working on an autoethnography about burlesque and visual anthropology project exploring the use of Pinterest by practitioners of NeoPaganism.



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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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.
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 http://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.
7. Phyllis Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields. A Study of the Economic Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons* (Colonial Research publication 14. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952) The image comes from the cover of her book, which is also available online: http://www.era.anthropology.ac.uk/Kaberry/Kaberry_text/.
8. See Barry S. Hewlett, *Intimate Fathers: The Nature and Context of Aka Pygmy Paternal Infant Care* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); and personal communication with Mukhopadhyay.
9. W.H. Masters and V.E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966).
10. Some feminist scholars have also questioned the "naturalness" of the biological categories male and female. See for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]).
11. For genital similarities, see Janet S. Hyde and John D. DeLamater, *Understanding Human Sexuality* (McGraw Hill, 2014), 94-101. For more parallels, see Mukhopadhyay's online Human Sexuality course materials, at www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay.
12. For some idea of the enormous variability in human physical characteristics, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in C. Mukhopadhyay, R. Henze, and Y. Moses, *How Real is Race: Race, Culture and Biology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).
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).
22. Susannah M Hoffman, Richard A Cowan and Paul Aratow, *Kypseli: Men and Women Apart A Divided Reality* (Berkeley CA: Berkeley Media, 1976).
23. Denise Lawrence, Menstrual Politics: Women and Pigs in Rural Portugal, in *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*, ed. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, 117-136 (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1988.), 122-123.
24. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03k6k0h>. Some women are posing with photos of menstrual pads and hashtags #happytobleed: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indian-women-launch-happy-to-bleed-campaign-to-protest-against-sexist-religious-rule-a6748396.html>.
25. See the film by Michael Camerini and Rina Gill, *Dadi's Family* (Watertown, MA: DER, 1981).
26. Cynthia Nelson, "Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle Eastern World" *American Ethnologist* 1 no. 3 (1974): 551-56.
27. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, "Family Structure and Indian Women's Participation in Science and Engineering," in *Women, Education and Family Structure in India*, ed. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay and Susan Seymour, 103-133 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
28. Elizabeth Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik. an Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965).
29. Susan Seymour, *Cora Du Bois: Anthropologist, Diplomat, Agent* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).
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.
31. See for instance, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-powerful-documentary-about-pakistans-honor-killings> and <http://www.latimes.com/world/afghanistan-pakistan/la-fg-pakistan-oscar-20160229-story.html>.
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, https://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).
36. Shanshan Du, *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs: Gender Unity and Gender Equality Among the Lahu of Southwest China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
37. Zhou Huashan, *Zhong nu bu qingnan de muxi mosuo: Wufu de guodu?* [Matrilineal Mosuo, Valuing Women without Devaluing Men: A Society without Fathers or Husbands?] (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 2009 [2001]).

38. Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).
39. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, "Sati or Shakti: Women, Culture and Politics in India," in *Perspectives on Power: Women in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, ed. Jean O'Barr, 11-26 (Durham: Center for International Studies, Duke University 1982).
40. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
41. Mukhopadhyay and Seymour use the term "patrifocal" to describe households that consist of related males, usually brothers, and their sons, and the spouses and children of those males. See C. Mukhopadhyay and S. Seymour, "Introduction" in *Women, Family, and Education in India* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
42. For powerful documentaries see, the film by Nishta Jain, *Gulabi Gang* (Stavanger, Norway: Kudos Family Distribution, 2012); and the film by Kim Longinotto, *Pink Saris* (New York: Women Make Movies, 2011).
43. Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005[1969]), 45 .
44. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, *The Sexual Division of Labor in the Family*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1980, 192.
45. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, fieldnotes, India; and Mukhopadhyay, *The Cultural Context of Gendered Science: The Case of India*, 2001, www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay/papers.
46. For example, the major symposium on Man the Hunter sponsored by Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research included only four women among more than sixty listed participants. See Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1972[1968]), xiv-xvi.
47. Mukhopadhyay, Lecture Notes, Human Sexuality, Gender and Culture.
48. S.Washburn and C.S. Lancaster, "The Evolution of Hunting," in *Man the Hunter*, 299.
49. *Ibid.*, 303.
50. Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood and American Culture* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2013).
51. Abigail Disney and Kathleen Hughes, *The Armor of Light* (New York: Fork Films, 2015).
52. Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1997 [1971]), 101.
53. Some useful reviews include the following: Linda M. Fedigan, "The Changing Role of Women in Models of Human Evolution" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1986): 25-66; Linda Fedigan, *Primate Paradigms: Sex Roles and Social Bonds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pamela L. Geller and Miranda K. Stockett, *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2006); Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey, *Engendering Archeology: Women and Prehistory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991); Shirley Strum and Linda Fedigan *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Meredith F. Small, *What's Love Got to Do with It? The Evolution of Human Mating* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Nancy Makepeace Tanner, *On Becoming Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For a readable short article, see Meredith Small, "What's Love Got to Do with It," *Discover Magazine*, June 1991, 46-51.
54. Irven DeVore, ed. *Primate Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).
55. *Ibid.* Also, for primate politics in particular, see Sarah B. Hrdy, *The Woman That Never Evolved* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1981]). See also Hrdy's website <http://www.citrona.com/hrdy.html>.
56. Thelma Rowell. *Social Behaviour of Monkeys* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972). For an excellent online article on Rowell's work with additional references, read Vinciane Despret, "Culture and Gender Do Not Dissolve into How Scientists 'Read' Nature: Thelma Rowell's Heterodoxy." In *Rebels of Life. Iconoclastic Biologists in the Twentieth Century*, edited by O. Hartman and M. Friedrich (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 340-355. <http://www.vincianedespret.be/2010/04/culture-and-gender-do-not-dissolve-into-how-scientists-read-nature-thelma-rowells-heterodoxy/>.
57. See Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, eds. *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1972[1968]).
58. See Estioko-Griffin, Agnes A. Daughters of the Forest. *Natural History* 95(5):36-43 (May 1986).
59. Richard B. Lee, *The !Kung San. Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
60. Martha Ward and Monica Edelman, *A World Full of Women*, 26.
61. Susan Seymour, "Multiple Caretaking of Infants and Young Children: An Area in Critical Need of a Feminist Psychological Anthropology," *Ethos* 32 no. (2004): 538-556.

62. Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms, *Cultural Anthropology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2006), 274.
63. Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970); Barbara D. Miller, *Cultural Anthropology* (Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2012).
64. Mauma Downie and Christina Gladwin, *Florida Farm Wives: They Help the Family Farm Survive* (Gainesville: Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida, 1981).
65. Judith K. Brown, "A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex," *American Anthropologist* 72 (1970):1073-78.
66. See www.momsrising.org for some contemporary examples of the challenges and obstacles workplaces pose for working mothers, as well as efforts to advocate for improved accommodation of parenting and working.
67. Conrad Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology. Appreciating Cultural Diversity* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013).
68. See C. Mukhopadhyay, Human Sexuality Lecture notes, for the following analysis, available from <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay/courses/AnthBioHS140/>. See also Mukhopadhyay, Part II, "Culture Creates Race," especially chapter 7 and 9, in Carol Mukhopadhyay, R. Henze and Y. Moses *How Real is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture and Biology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).
69. Ibid.
70. This and subsequent material comes from C. Mukhopadhyay, Part 2, especially chapter 9, and p. 182-185, in Carol Mukhopadhyay, R. Henze and Y. Moses. *How Real is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture and Biology, 2nd edition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).
71. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, Yolanda Moses and Rosemary Henze, *How Real is Race?*, Chapter 9.
72. Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1987).
73. Lu Hui, "Preferential Bilateral-Cross-Cousin Marriage among the Nuosu in Liangshan," in *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*, Stevan Harrell, ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).
74. Elizabeth Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik*.
75. See the film *Maasai Women*, 1980.
76. An excellent documentary on two alternative paths some women take in contemporary India: the Miss India path and the fundamentalist Hindu path. Filmed in India, *The World Before Her*, <http://www.pbs.org/pov/world-beforeher/>.
77. See <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/the-way-we-still-never-were-brief-report/> and <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-09-14/singles-now-outnumber-married-people-america-and-thats-good-thing> for background and links to detailed information.
78. Material in this text box was adapted from "What Can We Learn from the Na? Shattering Ideas about Family and Relationships," a TEDx FurmanU presentation by Tami Blumenfield. See also Tami Blumenfield, "Chinese Tour Groups in Europe, Chinese Tour Groups in Yunnan: Narrating a Nation in the World" *The China Beat* June 2, 2011. <http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=3494>; Siobhan M. Mattison, Brooke Scelza, and Tami Blumenfield, "Paternal Investment and the Positive Effects of Fathers among the Matrilineal Mosuo (Na) of Southwest China" *American Anthropologist* 116 no. 3 (2014): 591-610; Tami Blumenfield, "Resilience in Mountainous Southwest China: Adopting a Socio-Ecological Approach to Community Change," in *Worlds in the Making: Interethnicity and the Processes of Generating Meaning in Southwestern China*, *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 23 (2014).
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NOW SHOWING: *I, TONYA*

I, Tonya is a fiction film loosely based on the life of the figure skater Tonya Harding, whose accomplishments on the ice were overshadowed by her association with a violent attack on her rival Nancy Kerrigan. Starring Margot Robbie in the title role, the film was directed by Craig Gillespie and released in 2017.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Interpreting Gender and Sexuality: Approaches from Cultural Anthropology" by Alma Gottlieb (2002)

"Post-Soviet Body Politics: Crime and Punishment in the Pussy Riot Affair" by Anya Bernstein (2013)

"I Used to Insist I Didn't Get Angry. Not Anymore. On female rage." by Leslie Jamison (2018)

Consider watching:

Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer, directed by Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin (2013)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Write a review of *I, Tonya* using at least three concepts from this chapter, e.g. gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender stratification, the figure of the angry woman (Jamison), etc.

Chapter 7: Race, Nation, and Capitalism

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a framework for understanding capitalism as a cultural practice and how it intersects with race and nation. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Race and Ethnicity" by Justin D. Garcia (2020) and "Economics" by Sarah Lyon (2020). The film is *13th*.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Justin D. García, Millersville University of Pennsylvania

jgarcia@millersville.edu

<https://www.millersville.edu/socanth/faculty/garcia-dr.-justin.php>

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 and explain how race has been socially constructed in the United States and Brazil.
- 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.
- Summarize the history of immigration to the United States, explaining how different waves of immigrant groups have been perceived as racially different and have shifted popular understandings of "race."
- 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.

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?

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 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 *papi* (an affectionate Spanish slang term for man). My transformation from “honky” to “*papi*” 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.”

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.

IS ANTHROPOLOGY THE “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.

Race: A Discredited Concept in Human Biology

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.

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.

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 classi-

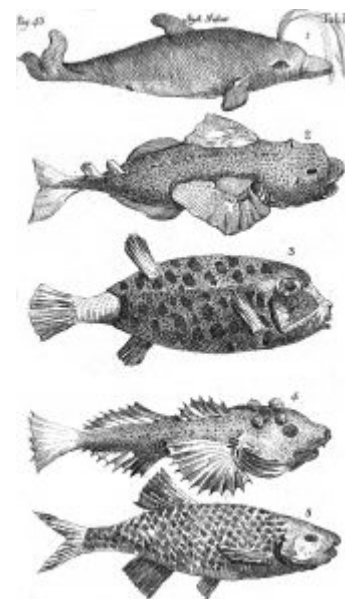


Figure 2: In *Systema Naturae*, Carolus Linnaeus attempted to create a taxonomy for all living things, including people.

fication 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.

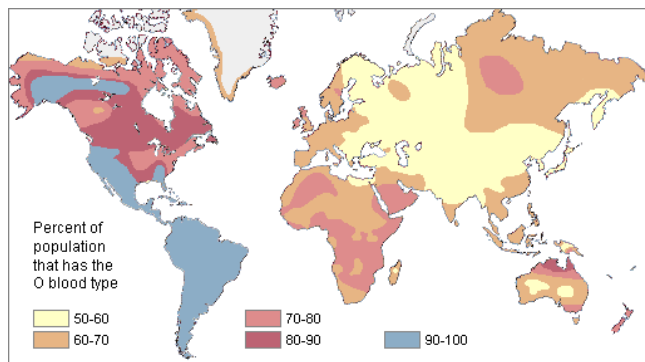


Figure 3: The global distribution of Type O blood reflects a clinal pattern.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

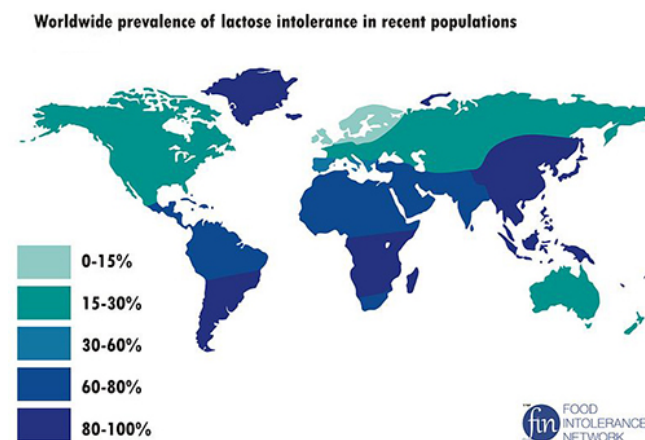


Figure 4: The ability to digest the lactose found in dairy products is more common in some populations than others.

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 tol-

erance 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. [13] 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

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

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.

RACE IN THREE NATIONS: THE UNITED STATES, BRAZIL, AND JAPAN

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

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

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’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 similar-

ities, 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 5: 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 Paulo, 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.

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 Crow** racial segregation laws in that had no equivalent in Brazil.



Figure 6: Jiichirō Matsumoto, a leader of the Buraku Liberation League.

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

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.

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.

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?

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.

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 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 immigrant 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.

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”



Figure 7: Many people in the United States cherish their ethnic identities and cultural traditions. This Hindu altar is from a home in San Diego, California.

(early 1900s) to “Negro” (1930s–1960s) to “Black” (late 1960s to the present) and “African American” (1980s to the present).

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 **acculturate** to 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.

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

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.

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.

ANTHROPOLOGY MEETS POPULAR CULTURE: SPORTS, RACE/ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY

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.

Discussion Questions

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

Acculturation: loss of a minority group’s cultural distinctiveness in relation to the dominant culture.

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: 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.

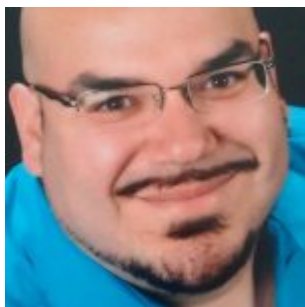
Reified: the process by which an inaccurate concept or idea is accepted as "truth."

Socially constructed: a concept developed by society that is maintained over time through social interactions that make the idea seem "real."

Symbolic ethnicity: limited or occasional displays of ethnic pride and identity that are primarily for public display.

Taxonomy: a system of classification.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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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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).
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.
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, *When 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 Brodtkin, *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).
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 Sourcebook 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 Lingered 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 Mukhopadhyay 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
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 Brodtkin. *How Jews Became White and What This Says About Race in America*.

32. Canadian Multicultural Act, 1985. <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/FullText.html>
33. Rene Lynch, "Michael Johnson Says Slave Descendants Make Better Athletes" *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2012.
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.

ECONOMICS

Sarah Lyon, University of Kentucky

sarah.lyon@uky.edu

<http://anthropology.as.uky.edu/users/smlyon3>

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.

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 dialogue (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 how these goods are distributed among people. 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.

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

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.



Figure 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.

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 fac-

tory 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

Fair-Trade Coffee Farmers: 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 2: 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 3: 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.

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.

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.

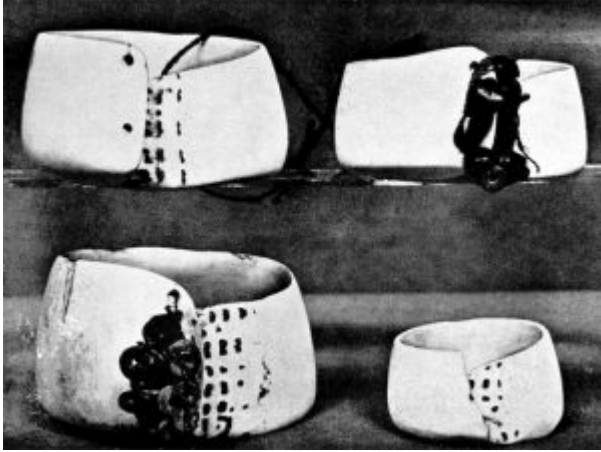


Figure 4: Mwali from the Kula Exchange

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.

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

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.

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 pot-

latch primarily served a livelihood function by ensuring the redistribution of goods between groups with surpluses and those with deficits.³⁴

Markets

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 5: 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.

CONSUMPTION AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

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 6: 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.

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

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.).

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

Discussion Questions

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.

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.

Homo economicus: a term used to describe a person who would make rational decisions in ways predicted by economic theories.

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.

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 pre-

venting them from meeting their basic needs.

Subsistence farmers: people who raise plants and animals for their own consumption, but not for sale to others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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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 75. Terry Buss, *Haiti in the Balance: Why Foreign Aid has Failed and What We Can Do about It* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2008).
 76. Mark Schuller, *Killing with Kindness*.
 77. J. K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy, *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xix.
 78. Byrne, Ken, "Iceberg Image," <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas>.

79. Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy, *Take Back the Economy*, 11.
80. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 62–63.
81. *Ibid.*, 65.
82. Keith Hart, “Money in Twentieth Century Anthropology.”

NOW SHOWING: *13th*

The documentary film *13th* makes the argument that the mass incarceration of "black bodies" is a continuation of slavery. The title refers to the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery, but left a loophole for crime. Directed by Ava DuVernay and released in 2013, the film was nominated for an Academy Award.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Understanding Inner-City Poverty: Resistance and Self-Destruction under U.S. Apartheid" by
Philippe Bourgois (2002)

"America's Enduring Caste System" by Isabel Wilkerson (2020)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain how capitalism is a cultural practice and how it is connected to race and nation in the U.S. Your response should mention caste (Wilkerson) and incarceration (*13th*).

Chapter 8: Class, Colonialism, and the World System

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the contemporary global economy as an extension of European and American colonialism. Capitalism is now the norm for almost everyone everyone in the world. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Globalization" by Lauren Miller Griffith and Jonathan S. Marion (2020). The film is *Parasite*.

GLOBALIZATION

Lauren Miller Griffith, Texas Tech University

lauren.griffith@ttu.edu

<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/sasw/People/Griffith.php>

Jonathan S. Marion, University of Arkansas

marion@uark.edu

<https://fulbright.uark.edu/departments/anthropology/directory/profile.php?uld=marion>

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.

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 adapt-

ing 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?

OVERVIEW AND 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 (see the Development of Anthropological Ideas chapter). 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

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 colo-

nial 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 ([see map](#)).

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.

THE ACCELERATION OF GLOBALIZATION

The 5 “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: ethnoscapas, technoscapas, ideoscapas, financescapas, and mediascapas. 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 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

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

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

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.

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.

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 ethnoscapes 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.

SELECTIVE IMPORTATION AND ADAPTATION

Glocalization

Globalization most certainly changes the landscape of contemporary social life (see our discussion of Appadurai above). 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

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

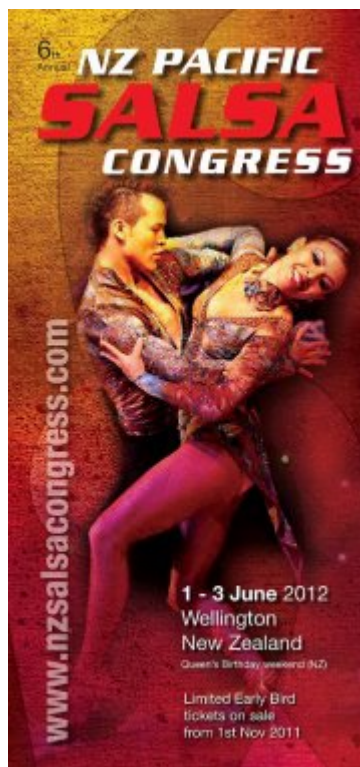


Figure 1: Advertisement for the New Zealand Salsa Congress, 2012.

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 (see the Performance chapter in this volume). 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 (see the Gender and Sexuality chapter for more on performance of identity). 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

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

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.

Advantages 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.

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 2a and 2b). 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 2a: 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 2b: 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 ethnoscaples. 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 ethnoscares 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 below).

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 Canudos 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 through 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 3).³⁹



Figure 3: 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](#).)

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.

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?



Figure 4: Candomblé practitioners, Embu das Artes, Brazil, 2012.

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, *Iemanjá*, 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.

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 ideo-

logical 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 Fieldwork chapter, 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 subdivided 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

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 get-

ting 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

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, espe-

cially 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 5: Figure 5: 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 YouTube 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.

Discussion Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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

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

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.”

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.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Lauren Miller Griffith is an assistant professor of anthropology at Texas Tech University. Her research agenda focuses on the intersections of performance, tourism, and education in Brazil, Belize, and the USA. Specifically, she focuses on the Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira and how non-Brazilian practitioners use travel to Brazil, the art's homeland, to increase their legitimacy within this genre. Dr. Griffith's current interests include the links between tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainability in Belize. She is particularly interested in how indigenous communities decide whether or not to participate in the growing tourism industry and the long-term effects of these decisions.



Dr. Jonathan S. Marion is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology and a member of the Gender Studies Steering Committee at the University of Arkansas, and the author of *Ballroom: Culture and Costume in Competitive Dance* (2008), *Visual Research: A Concise Introduction to Thinking Visually* (2013, with Jerome Crowder), and *Ballroom Dance and Glamour* (2014). Currently the President of the Society for Humanistic Anthropology, and a Past-president of the Society of Visual Anthropology, Dr. Marion's ongoing research explores the interrelationships between performance, embodiment, gender, and identity, as well as issues of visual research ethics, theory, and methodology.

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NOW SHOWING: *PARASITE*

Set in cosmopolitan South Korea, *Parasite* is a darkly humorous fiction film about a lower class family that scams its way into an upper class household - with devastating consequences. Directed by the acclaimed filmmaker Bong Joon-ho, the film was released in 2019 and won the Academy Award for Best Picture, becoming the first non-English language film to do so.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"World Markets: Anthropological Perspectives" by Jane Schneider (2002)

"*Parasite* and the Curse of Closeness" by Bo Seo (2019)

"Reading Colonialism in 'Parasite'" by juhyundred (2020)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain how the the analyses of *Parasite* by Seo and juhyundred differ. How do the theories of globalization in this chapter help explain the differences?

Chapter 9: Zones of Refuge

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the political formation of the state and the egalitarian people who occupy "zones of refuge" on the borders of states. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Political Anthropology" by Paul McDowell (2020). The film is *Winter's Bone*.

POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

Paul McDowell, Santa Barbara City College
paulanthropus@cox.net

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.
- Evaluate the extent to which the Islamic State meets the formal criteria for a state-level political organization.

All cultures have one element in common: they somehow exercise social control over their own members. Even small foraging societies such as the Ju/'hoansi or !Kung, the Inuit (or "Eskimo") of the Arctic north, and aboriginal Australians experience disputes that must be contained if inter-personal conflicts are to be reduced or eliminated. As societies become more complex, means of control increase accordingly. The study of these means of control are the subject of political anthropology.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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 matrilineal 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 headman, 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 per-

sonal 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

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

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.

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 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.

Basics of Marriage, Family, and Kinship

Understanding social solidarity in tribal societies requires knowledge of family structures, which are also known as kinship systems. The romantic view of marriage in today’s mass media is largely a product of Hollywood movies and romance novels from mass-market publishers such as Harlequin. In most cultures around the world, marriage is largely a device that links two families together; this is why arranged marriage is so common from a cross-cultural perspective. And, as Voltaire admonished, if we are to discuss anything, we need to define our terms.

Marriage is defined in numerous ways, usually (but not always) involving a tie between a woman and a man. Same-sex marriage is also common in many cultures. Nuclear families consist of parents and their children. Extended families consist of three generations or more of relatives connected by marriage and descent.

In the diagrams below, triangles represent males and circles represent females. Vertical lines represent a **generational link** connecting, say, a man with his father. Horizontal lines above two figures are **sibling links**; thus, a triangle connected to a circle represents a brother and sister. Equal signs connect husbands and wives. Sometimes a diagram may render use of an equal sign unrealistic; in those cases, a horizontal line drawn *below* the two figures shows a marriage link.

Most rules of descent generally fall into one of two categories. **Bilateral descent** (commonly used in the United States) recognizes both the mother’s and the father’s “sides” of the family while **unilineal descent** recognizes only one sex-based “side” of the family. Unilineal descent can be **patrilineal**, recognizing only relatives through a line of male ancestors, or **matrilineal**, recognizing only relatives through a line of female ancestors.

Groups made up of two or more extended families can be connected as larger groups linked by kinship ties. A **lineage** consists of individuals who can trace or demonstrate their descent through a line of males or females to the founding ancestor.

For further discussion of this topic, consult the Family and Marriage chapter.

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.

To get a more detailed picture of how marriages integrate family groups, consider the following family diagrams. In these diagrams, triangles represent males and circles represent females. Vertical lines represent a generational link connecting, say, a man to his father. Horizontal lines above two figures are sibling links; thus, a triangle connected to a circle by a horizontal line represents a brother and sister. Equal signs connect husbands and wives. In some diagrams in which use of an equal sign is not realistic, a horizontal line drawn *below* the two figures shows their marriage link.

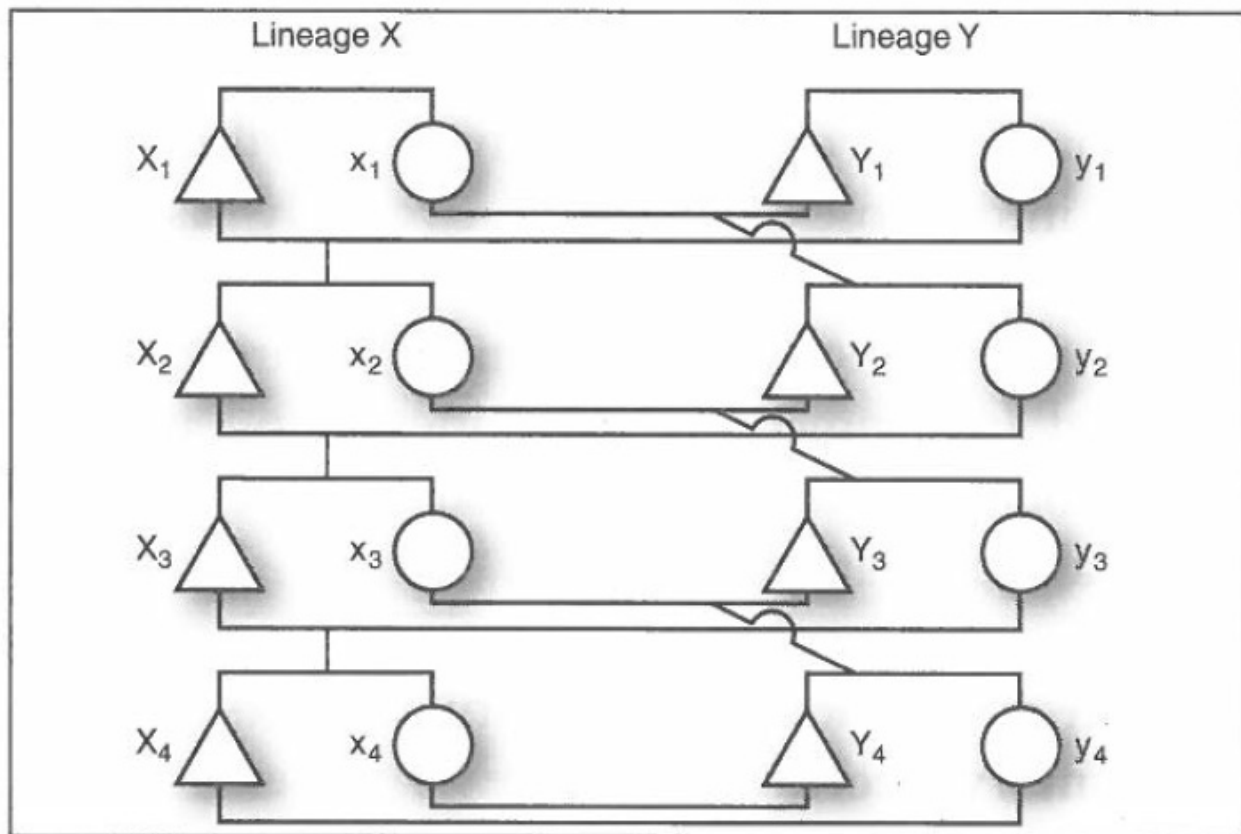


Figure 2: Bilateral cross-cousin marriage. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

Figure 2 depicts the alliance created by the bilateral cross-cousin marriage system. In this figure, uppercase letters represent males and lowercase letters represent females. Thus, X refers to all of the males of Lineage X and Y refers to all of the males of Lineage Y; likewise, x refers to all of the females of Lineage X and y refers to all of the females of Lineage Y.

Consider the third generation in the diagram. X3 has married y3 (the horizontal line below the figures), creating an **affinal** link. Trace the relationship between X3 and y3 through their matrilineal links—the links between a mother and her brother. You can see from the diagram that X3's mother is x2 and her brother is Y2 and his daughter is y3. Therefore, y3 is X3's mother's brother's daughter.

Now trace the patrilineal links of this couple—the links between a father and his sister. X3's father is X2 and X2's sister is x2, who married Y2, which makes her daughter y3—his father's sister's daughter. Work your way through the description and diagram until you are comfortable understanding the connections.

Now do the same thing with Y3 by tracing his matrilineal ties with his wife x3. His mother is x2 and her brother is X2, which makes his mother's brother's daughter x3. On the patrilineal, his father is Y2, and Y2's sister is y2, who is married to X2. Therefore, their daughter is x3.

This example represents the ideal **bilateral cross-cousin marriage**: a man marries a woman who is *both* his mother's brother's daughter and his father's sister's daughter. The man's matrilineal cross-cousin and patrilineal cross-cousin are the same woman! Thus, the two lineages have discharged their obligations to one another in the same generation. Lineage X provides a daughter to lineage Y and lineage Y reciprocates with a daughter. Each of the lineages therefore retains its potential to reproduce in the next generation. The obligation incurred by lineage Y from taking lineage X's daughter in marriage has been repaid by giving a daughter in marriage to lineage X.

This type of marriage is what Robin Fox, following Claude Lévi-Strauss, called **restricted exchange**.²⁵ Notice that only two extended families can engage in this exchange. Society remains relatively simple because it can expand only by splitting off. And, as we will see later, when daughter villages split off, the two lineages move together.

Not all marriages can conform to this type of exchange. Often, the patrilineal cross-cousin is not the same person; there may be two or more persons. Furthermore, in some situations, a man can marry either a matrilineal or a patrilineal cross-cousin but not both. The example of the ideal type of cross-cousin marriage is used to demonstrate the logical outcome of such unions.

Integration Through a Segmentary Lineage

Another type of kin-based integrative mechanism is a segmentary lineage. As previously noted, a lineage is a group of people who can trace or demonstrate their descent from a founding ancestor through a line of males or a line of females. A **segmentary lineage** is a hierarchy of lineages that contains both close and relatively distant family members. At the base are several minimal lineages whose members trace their descent from their founder back two or three generations. At the top is the founder of all of the lineages, and two or more maximal lineages can derive from the founder's lineage. Between the maximal and the minimal lineages are several intermediate lineages. For purposes of simplicity, we will discuss only the maximal and minimal lineages.

One characteristic of segmentary lineages is complementary opposition. To illustrate, consider the chart in Figure 3, which presents two maximal lineages, A and B, each having two minimal lineages: A1 and A2 for A and B1 and B2 for B.

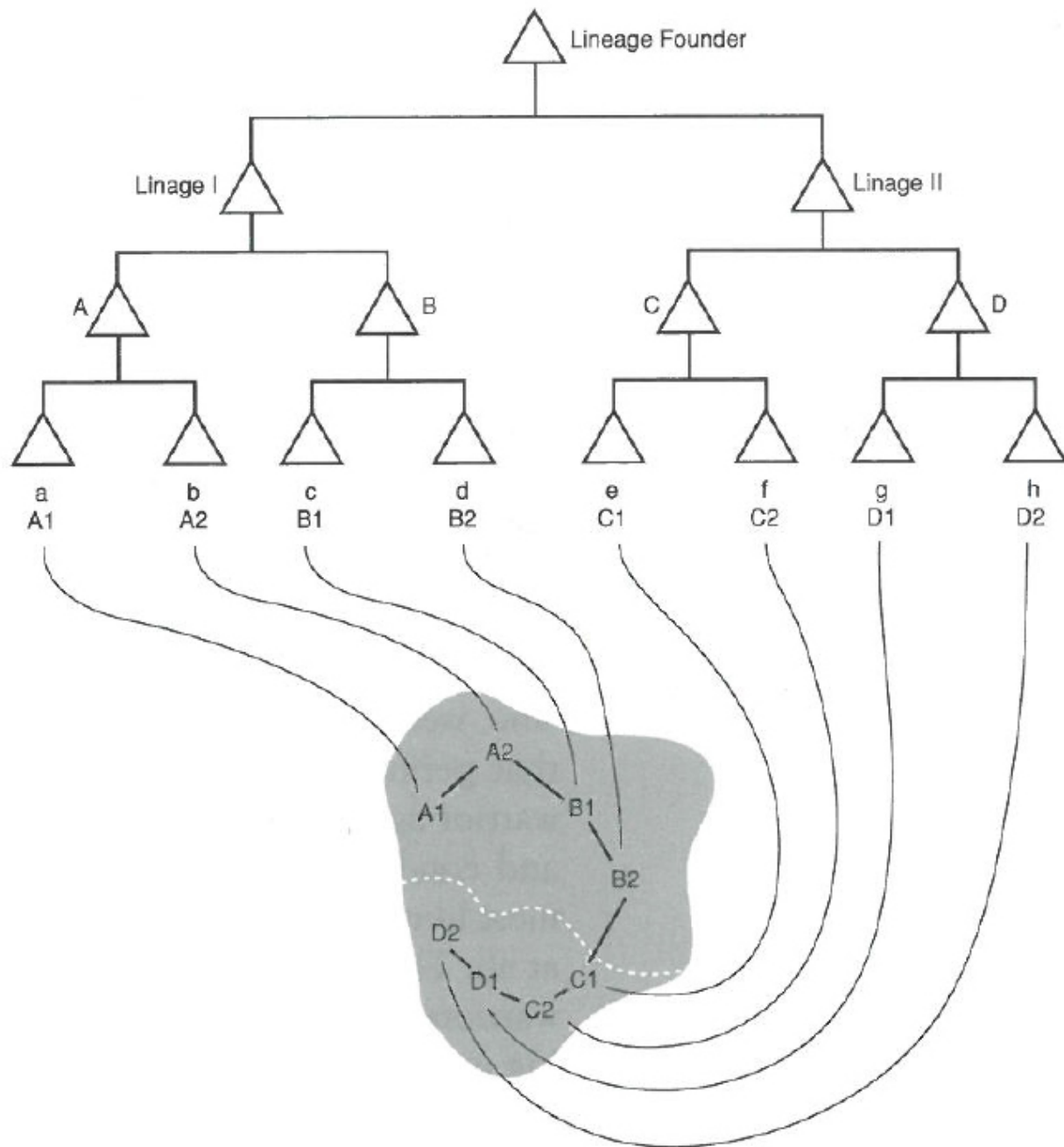


Figure 3: Segmentary lineage model. Note connection of each lineage, regardless of relative size, to its territory. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

Suppose A1 starts a feud with A2 over cattle theft. Since A1 and A2 are of the same maximal lineage, their feud is likely to be contained within that lineage, and B1 and B2 are likely to ignore the conflict since it is no concern of theirs. Now suppose A2 attacks B1 for cattle theft. In that case, A1 might unite with A2 to feud with B1, who B2 join in to defend. Thus, the feud would involve everyone in maximal lineage A against everyone in maximal lineage B. Finally, consider an attack by an outside tribe against A1. In response, both maximal lineages might rise up and defend A1.

The classic examples of segmentary lineages were described by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) in his discussion of the Nuer, pastoralists who lived in southern Sudan.²⁶ Paul Bohannan (1989) also described this system among the Tiv, who were West African pastoralists, and Robert Murphy and Leonard Kasdan (1959) analyzed the importance of these lineages among the Bedouin of the Middle East.²⁷ Segmentary lineages often develop in environments in which a tribal society is surrounded by several other tribal societies. Hostility between the tribes induces their members to retain ties with their kin and to mobilize them when external conflicts arise. An example of this is ties maintained between the Nuer and the Dinka. Once a conflict is over, segmentary lineages typically dissolve into their constituent units. Another attribute of segmentary lineages is local genealogical segmentation, meaning close lineages dwell near each other, providing a physical reminder of their genealogy.²⁸ A Bedouin proverb summarizes the philosophy behind segmentary lineages:

I against my brother
 I and my brother against my cousin
 I, my brother, and my cousin against the world

Segmentary lineages regulate both warfare and inheritance and property rights. As noted by Sahlins (1961) in studies of the Nuer, tribes in which such lineages occur typically have relatively large populations of close to 100,000 persons.²⁹

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.

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

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

RANKED SOCIETIES AND CHIEFDOMS

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.

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.

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.

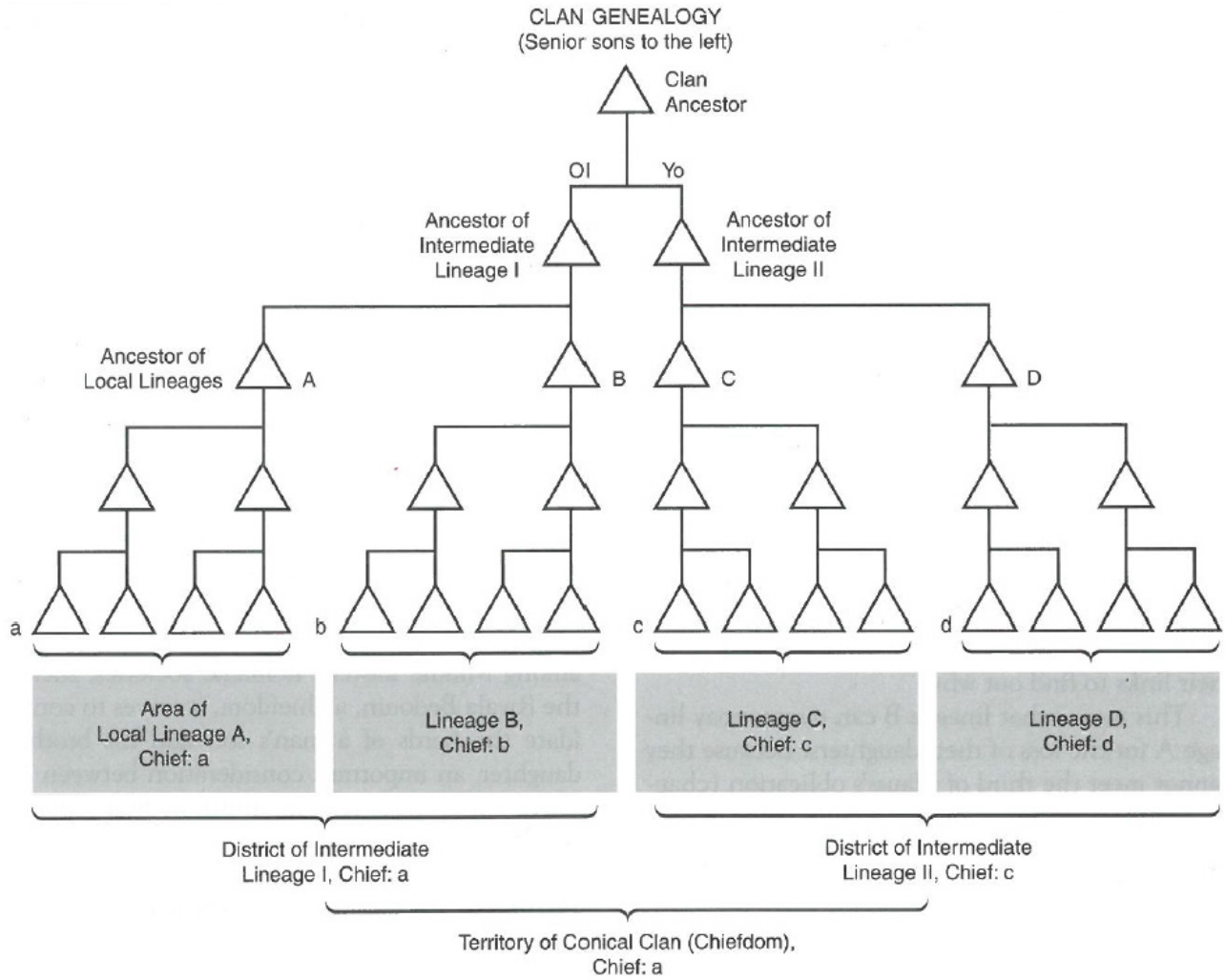


Figure 4: Conical clan design of a chiefdom. Scheme is based on relative siblings age and patrilineal descent. Eldest sons appear to the left. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

In the accompanying diagram (Figure 4), 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.

A particular kind of marriage known as **matrilateral cross-cousin** demonstrates this effect and is illustrated by the diagram in Figure 4. The figure shows three **patrilineages** (family lineage groups based on descent from a common male ancestor) that are labeled A, B, and C. Consider the marriage between man B2 and woman a2. As you can see, they are linked by B1 (ego's father) and his sister (a2), who is married to A1 and bears daughter a2. If you look at other partners, you will notice that all of the women move to the right: a2 and B2's daughter, b3, will marry C3 and bear a daughter, c4.

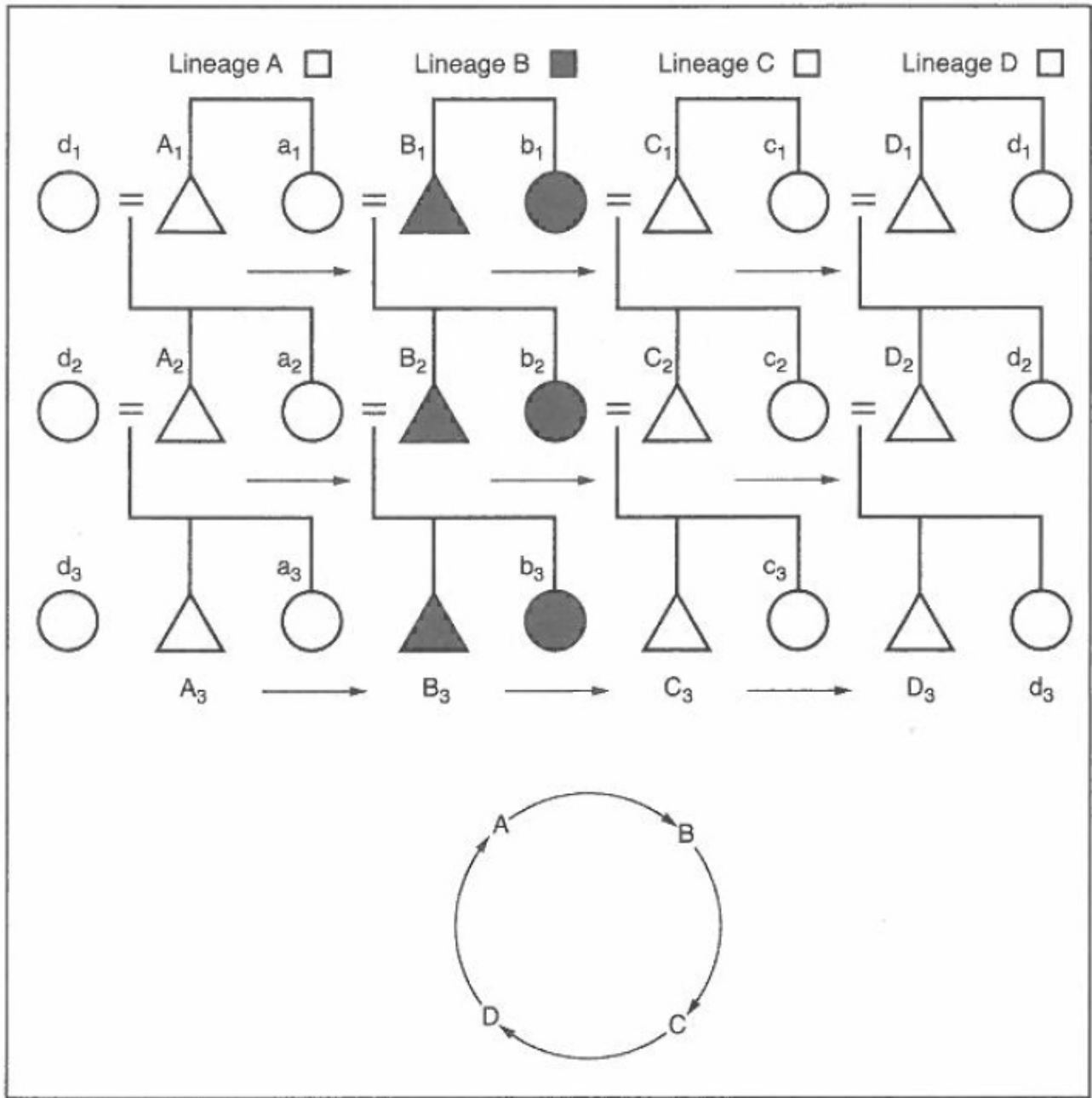


Figure 5: Matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. Reprinted with permission of Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

Viewed from the top of a flow diagram, the three lineages marry in a circle and at least three lineages are needed for this arrangement to work. The Purum of India, for example, practiced matrilineal cross-cousin marriage among seven lineages. Notice that lineage B cannot return the gift of A's daughter with one of its own. If A₂ married b₂, he would be marrying his patrilineal cross-cousin who is linked to him through A₁, his sister a₁, and her daughter b₂. Therefore, b₂ must marry C₂ and lineage B can never repay lineage A for the loss of their daughters—trace their links to find out why. Since lineage B cannot meet the third of Mauss' obligations, B is a beggar relative to A. And lineage C is a beggar relative to lineage B. Paradoxically, lineage A (which gives its daughters to B) owes lineage C because it obtains its brides from lineage C. In this system, there appears to be an equality of inequality.

The patrilineal cross-cousin marriage system also operates in a complex society in highland Burma known as the Kachin. In that system, the wife-giving lineage is known as *mayu* and the wife-receiving lineage as *dama* to the lineage that gave it a wife. Thus, in addition to other mechanisms of dominance, higher-ranked lineages maintain their superiority by giving daughters to lower-ranked lineages and reinforce the relations between social classes through the *mayu-dama* relationship.⁴²

The Kachin are not alone in using interclass marriage to reinforce dominance. The Natchez peoples, a matrilineal society of the Mississippi region of North America, were divided into four classes: Great Sun chiefs, noble lineages, honored lineages, and inferior “stinkards” (commoners). Unlike the Kachin, however, their marriage system was a way to upward mobility. The child of a woman who married a man of lower status assumed his/her mother’s status. Thus, if a Great Sun woman married a stinkard (commoner), the child would become a Great Sun. If a stinkard man were to marry a Great Sun woman, the child would be the same rank as the mother. The same relationship obtained between women of noble lineage and honored lineage and men of lower status. Only two stinkard partners would maintain that stratum, which was continuously replenished with people in warfare.⁴³

Other societies maintained status in different ways. Brother-sister marriages, for example, were common in the royal lineages of the Inca, the Ancient Egyptians, and the Hawaiians, which sought to keep their lineages “pure.” Another, more-common type was **patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage** in which men married their fathers’ brothers’ daughters. This marriage system, which operated among many Middle Eastern nomadic societies, including the Rwala Bedouin chiefdoms, consolidated their herds, an important consideration for lineages wishing to maintain their wealth.⁴⁴

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.

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.

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 *Dalits*. 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 ladder 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

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 many rubber-stamp the executive’s decisions (or play an obstructionist role, as in the U.S. Congress during the Obama administration).

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.

State and Nation

Though **state** and **nation** are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. A state is a coercive political institution; a nation is an ethnic population. There currently are about 200 states in the world, and many of them did not exist before World War II. Meanwhile, there are around 5,000 nations identified by their language, territorial base, history, and political organization.⁵⁴ Few states are coterminous with a nation (a nation that wholly comprises the state). Even in Japan, where millions of the country's people are of a single ethnicity, there is a significant indigenous minority known as the Ainu who at one time were a distinct biological population as well as an ethnic group. Only recently has Japanese society opened its doors to immigrants, mostly from Korea and Taiwan. The vast majority of states in the world, including the United States, are multi-national.

Some ethnicities/nations have no state of their own. The Kurds, who reside in adjacent areas of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, are one such nation. In the colonial era, the Mande-speaking peoples ranged across at least four West African countries, and borders between the countries were drawn without respect to the tribal identities of the people living there. Diasporas, the scattering of a people of one ethnicity across the globe, are another classic example. The diaspora of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews is well-known. Many others, such as the Chinese, have more recently been forced to flee their homelands. The current ongoing mass migration of Syrians induced by formation of the Islamic State and the war in Syria is but the most recent example.

Formation of States

How do states form? One precondition is the presence of a **stratified society** in which an elite minority controls life-sustaining strategic resources. Another is increased agricultural productivity that provides support for a larger population. Neither, however, is a sufficient cause for development of a state. A group of people who are dissatisfied with conditions in their home region has a motive to move elsewhere—unless there is nowhere else to go and they are circumscribed. **Circumscription** can arise when a region is hemmed in by a geographic feature such as mountain ranges or desert and when migrants would have to change their subsistence strategies, perhaps having to move from agriculture back to foraging, herding, or horticulture or to adapt to an urban industrialized environment. The Inca Empire did not colonize on a massive scale beyond northern Chile to the south or into the Amazon because indigenous people there could simply pick up and move elsewhere. Still, the majority of the Inca population did not have that option. Circumscription also results when a desirable adjacent region is taken by other states or chiefdoms.⁵⁵

Who, then, were the original subjects of these states? One short answer is **peasants**, a term derived from the French *paysan*, which means “countryman.” Peasantry entered the anthropological literature relatively late. In his 800-page tome *Anthropology* published in 1948, Alfred L. Kroeber defined peasantry in less than a sentence: “part societies with part cultures.”⁵⁶ Robert Redfield defined peasantry as a “little tradition” set against a “great tradition” of national state society.⁵⁷ Louis Fallers argued in 1961 against calling African cultivators “peasants” because they had not lived in the context of a state-based civilization long enough.⁵⁸

Thus, peasants had been defined in reference to some larger society, usually an empire, a state, or a civilization. In light of this, Wolf sought to place the definition of peasant on a structural footing.⁵⁹ Using a funding metaphor, he compared peasants with what he called “primitive cultivators.” Both primitive cultivators and peasants have to provide for a “caloric fund” by growing food and, by extension, provide for clothing, shelter, and all other necessities of life. Second, both must provide for a “replacement fund”—not only reserving seeds for next year’s crop but also repairing their houses, replacing broken pots, and rebuilding fences. And both primitive cultivators and peasants must provide a “ceremonial fund” for rites of passage and fiestas. They differ in that peasants live in states and primitive cultivators do not. The state exercises domain over peasants’ resources, requiring peasants to provide a “fund of rent.” That fund appears in many guises, including tribute in kind, monetary taxes, and forced labor to an empire or lord. In Wolf’s conception, primitive cultivators are free of these obligations to the state.⁶⁰

Subjects of states are not necessarily landed; there is a long history of landless populations. Slavery has long coexisted with the state, and forced labor without compensation goes back to chiefdoms such as Kwakwaka’wakw. Long before Portuguese, Spanish, and English seafarers began trading slaves from the west coast of Africa, Arab groups enslaved people from Africa and Europe.⁶¹

For peasants, **proletarianization**—loss of land—has been a continuous process. One example is landed gentry in eighteenth century England who found that sheepherding was more profitable than tribute from peasants and removed the peasants from the land.⁶² A similar process occurred when Guatemala’s liberal president privatized the land of Mayan peasants that, until 1877, had been held communally.⁶³

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 fos-

sil 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.

Stratification and the State: Recent Developments

States elsewhere and the stratified societies that sustain them have undergone significant changes and, in some instances, dramatic transformations in recent years. Consider ISIS, formed in reaction to the ill-advised U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003, which is discussed in greater detail in the case study available from the [Perspectives website](#). Other states have failed; Somalia has all but dissolved and is beset by piracy, Yemen is highly unstable due in part to the Saudi invasion, and Syria has been decimated by conflict between the Bashar Assad government and a variety of rebel groups from moderate reform movements to extremist jihadi groups, al-Nusra and ISIS. Despite Myanmar’s (formerly Burma) partial transition from a militarized government to an elective one, the Muslim minority there, known as Rohingya, has been subjected to discrimination and many have been forced to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has been unable to enforce safety regulations to foreign investors as witnessed by the collapse of a clothing factory in 2013 that took the lives of more than 1,100 workers.

CONCLUSION

Citing both state and stateless societies, this chapter has examined levels of socio-cultural integration, types of social class (from none to stratified), and mechanisms of social control exercised in various forms of political organization from foragers to large, fully developed states. The chapter offers explanations for these patterns, and additional theories are provided by the works in the bibliography. Still, there are many more questions than answers. Why does socio-economic inequality arise in the first place? How do states reinforce (or generate) inequality? Societies that have not developed a state have lasted far longer—about 100,000 to 150,000 years longer—than societies that became states. Will states persist despite the demonstrable disadvantages they present for the majority of their citizens?

A Chinese curse wishes that you may “live in interesting times.”

These are interesting times indeed.

Discussion Questions

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?
3. Why is it important to understand whether ISIS is or is not likely to become a state?

GLOSSARY

Affinal: family relationships created through marriage.

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.

Bilateral cross-cousin marriage: a man marries a woman who is *both* his mother's brother's daughter and his father's sister's daughter.

Bilateral descent: kinship (family) systems that recognize both the mother's and the father's "sides" of the family.

Caste system: the division of society into hierarchical levels; one's position is determined by birth and remains fixed for life.

Chiefdom: large political units in which the chief, who usually is determined by heredity, holds a formal position of power.

Circumscription: the enclosure of an area by a geographic feature such as mountain ranges or desert or by the boundaries of a state.

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.

Ideologies: ideas designed to reinforce the right of powerholders to rule.

Legitimacy: the perception that an individual has a valid right to leadership.

Lineage: individuals who can trace or demonstrate their descent through a line of males or females back to a founding ancestor.

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage: a man marries a woman who is his mother's brother's daughter.

Matrilineal: kinship (family) systems that recognize only relatives through a line of female ancestors.

Nation: an ethnic population.

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.

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.

Patrilineal: kinship (family) systems that recognize only relatives through a line of male ancestors.

Peasants: residents of a state who earn a living through farming.

Poro and sande: secret societies for men and women, respectively, found in the Mande-speaking peoples of West Africa, particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Guinea.

Positive reinforcements: rewards for compliance; examples include medals, financial incentives, and other forms of public recognition.

Proletarianization: a process through which farmers are removed from the land and forced to take wage labor employment.

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.

Restricted exchange: a marriage system in which only two extended families can engage in this exchange.

Reverse dominance: societies in which people reject attempts by any individual to exercise power.

Segmentary lineage: a hierarchy of lineages that contains both close and relatively distant family members.

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.

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.

Unilineal descent: kinship (family) systems that recognize only one sex-based “side” of the family.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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 Anthro-*

pology: 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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 70. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2004).
 71. Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empires: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 285.
 72. Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

NOW SHOWING: *WINTER'S BONE*

Set in the Ozarks, *Winter's Bone* is a fiction film about a young woman who is drawn to the dark side of family politics as she searches for her missing father. Directed by Debra Granik and released in 2010, the film launched the career of Jennifer Lawrence.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Myth, Racism and Opportunism: Film and TV Representations of the San" by Keyan G. Tomaselli (1992)

"Hills, Valleys, and States: An Introduction to Zomia" by James Scott (2010)

"Life in a Shatter Zone: Debra Granik's Film *Winter's Bone*" by Michael Moon and Colin Talley (2010)

Consider watching:

The Gods Must Be Crazy, directed by Jamie Uys (1980)

A Kalahari Family: End of the Road, directed by John Marshall (2002)

Secrets of the Tribe, directed by Jose Padilha (2010)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain what a shatter zone is and how it changes the usual view of tribal people.

SECTION 3: ENTANGLEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces more advanced concepts in cultural anthropology, such as structural violence and the relation between nature and culture. These concepts emphasize that humans are entangled with forces beyond our control and we deny these entanglements at our peril.

Chapter 10:

Poverty, Structural Violence, and Ethnofiction

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the concept of structural violence - the idea that social structures can cause real harm to people by producing and reproducing inequality. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "The Good Life" by Michael Wesch (2018). The film is *The Florida Project*.

The Good Life

Memorizing these ideas is easy. Living them takes a lifetime of practice. Fortunately, the heroes of all time have walked before us. They show us the path.

CREATING "THE GOOD LIFE"

This book started with an invitation to see your own seeing by stepping out of your culture, biases, and assumptions to see that much of what you take for granted as reality is very different in other cultures. In doing this, we discovered a tremendous wealth of possibility in the human condition – physical capacities we did not know we had, unique and insightful ways of seeing and talking about the world, and different ways of surviving and thriving in many different environments. We also encountered different ways of thinking about love, identity, gender, race, morality, and religion. All of this can seem remarkably liberating, giving us a broader vision of what is possible. As anthropologist and psychologist Ernest Becker once wrote:

"The most astonishing thing of all, about man's fictions, is not that they have from prehistoric times hung like a flimsy canopy over his social world, but that he should have come to discover them at all. It is one of the most remarkable achievements of thought, of self-scrutiny, that the most anxiety-prone animal of all could come to see through himself and

discover the fictional nature of his action world. Future historians will probably record it as one of the great, liberating breakthroughs of all time, and it happened in ours."

But the discovery of our "fictions" is not because of anthropology. Rather, anthropology is itself a product of larger social and intellectual trends that moved our society away from the shackles of tradition toward the more intentional creation of modern society. In this sense, the ideas, ideals, values, beliefs, and institutions of modern society are constantly under scrutiny for ways in which they might be changed or improved to maximize human flourishing.

Most people would not question the value of these modern projects, and few would want to return to the more rigid traditional hierarchies and moral horizons of older social orders. However, the modern revisions come with a cost. The old orders provided exactly that: *order*. In order, there is meaning. In a clearly defined social role, there is purpose. In stable institutions, there is a promise for the future. With meaning, purpose, and the future now in question, we cannot help but constantly ask those three big questions: Who am I? What am I going to do? Am I going to make it?

In his landmark book, "Man's Search for Meaning," Victor Frankl claims that it is our Will to Meaning that is the dominant human drive, stronger than the Will to Pleasure or any other drive. But he worries that we now live in an "existential vacuum" due to two losses – first, the loss of instincts guiding all of our behavior, forcing us to make choices, and second, the loss of tradition. "No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do."

Compounding the crisis, the last chapter makes it evident that we now live in a time in which it is entirely possible to imagine cataclysmic change so dramatic that it would effectively constitute "the end of the world as we know it." Nuclear war, climate catastrophes, global economic collapse, and the possibility of

totalitarian super-states are ever-present threats, with constant reminders bombarding us throughout the 24-hour news cycle. And so we also must constantly ask those other three big questions: Who are we? What are we going to do? Are we going to make it?

These two sets of questions are interconnected. In order to find a personal sense of purpose in the world, one must have some vision of where the world is going and what would constitute a good and virtuous life. As Anthony Giddens has suggested, personal meaninglessness can become a persistent threat within the contexts of modernity that provide no clear framework for meaning.

Modernity leaves us with two unavoidable projects. First, as Giddens puts it, "the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities." This "consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives." Second, we have to choose or create values, virtues, and meanings in a world that does not offer a shared, definitive, unquestioned moral order that could define these things for us. In other words, we are freer than ever to be, do, and think whatever ... but when we all make different choices about who we will be, what we will do, and how we will think, we lose a shared system of meanings and values upon which we can find meaning, construct viable identities, and feel a sense of purpose and recognition.

Until recently, anthropology has been mostly silent on questions of "the good life." While documenting a wide range of different cultures, each of which may define "the good life" in different ways, anthropologists have been hesitant to offer any prescriptions for how one should live. But recent studies are changing that. In this lesson, we will see what anthropology has to tell us that might help us on our own projects of building meaning, setting the stage for your next challenge – to do what you have spent your whole life doing, revising your story and defining your core values.

ARE THERE UNIVERSAL VALUES?

In the late 1990s, psychologists Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson set out to explore the brighter side of human nature. They had grown concerned that psychology was focused only on problems and pathology. They turned instead to the ideas of happiness and human flourishing, and founded the field of positive psychology. One of their first projects was to construct a list of widely shared human values, characteristics, and virtues that would be more or less universally valid and recognized among all cultures. Given the tremendous diversity of cultures in the world, they knew they could not attain true universality, so they settled instead on finding "ubiquitous virtues and values ... so widely recognized that an anthropological veto ("The tribe I study does not have that one!") would be more interesting than damning."

They proceeded by brainstorming characteristics they thought might be universal, and then compared them against key texts from Asian and Western religions, world philosophies, and wisdom traditions. An obvious shortcoming of their study is that they did not include any representation from the Americas or Africa other than Islam. Nonetheless, their lists of virtues and positive character traits are an interesting start toward finding some universally agreed upon human virtues and values. The list of 24 character strengths is broken up into six core virtues:

- Wisdom (curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, emotional intelligence, perspective)
- Courage (valor, perseverance, integrity)
- Humanity (kindness, loving)
- Justice (citizenship, fairness, leadership)
- Temperance (self-control, prudence, humility)
- Transcendence (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor, zest)

These six virtues mirror the six foundations of morality established by Jonathan Haidt, and we can see how each virtue might provide evolutionary advantages that ensured our survival. We need wisdom and courage to survive. We need humanity, justice, and temperance to care for one another and work through inevitable social problems. A sense of transcendence (even of the secular sort) can provide us with a sense of meaning, purpose, and joy that motivates us through life.

The virtues are abstract enough to allow for significant cultural difference while still capturing some sense of what all humans value. Jonathan Haidt points out that we cannot even imagine a culture that would value their opposites. "Can we even imagine a culture in which parents hope that their children will grow up to be foolish, cowardly, and cruel?"

Probably not. But there are cultures where someone who is foolish, cowardly, and cruel will be greeted with kindness rather than scorn. Jon Christopher tells a story from his fieldwork in Bali, where a local drunk was constantly causing problems and failing to provide for his family. Instead of people judging him harshly, he was greeted with "pity, compassion and gentleness." The only way to understand this response is to understand the broader cultural frameworks of the Balinese. They see reality as broken up into two realms; the *sekala* or ordinary realm of everyday life, and the *niskala*, a deeper level of reality where the larger dramas of souls, karma, and reincarnation ultimately shape and determine what happens in the ordinary realm. This man deserved pity and compassion because his behavior in *sekala* was a reflection of the turmoil his soul was facing in *niskala*.

In fact, most cultures, including Western culture up until the Renaissance and Enlightenment, see the world as broken up into two tiers. One is an all-encompassing cosmological framework that provides meaning and value to the other tier of ordinary day-to-day life. According to philosopher-historian Charles Taylor, the West's cultural drive to flatten traditional hierarchies and inequalities through the Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, democracy, and

the scientific revolution called these ultimate cosmological frameworks of the top tier into question, and ultimately rendered them arbitrary at best, and at worst, a threat to human freedom and flourishing.

As a result, hierarchies were flattened and the two-tiered world collapsed. We were left with a worldview that places the individual self at the center as the sole arbiter of meaning and value. Our moral system came to champion the individual's right to choose their own meanings and to pursue happiness however we choose to define it, just as long as we do not impinge on the ability of others to pursue happiness, however they might define it.

Seligman's list of virtues is in many ways an attempt to use reason and science to discover meanings and values that, by virtue of being universal, might not feel so arbitrary. "I also hunger for meaning in my life that will transcend the arbitrary purposes I have chosen for my life," Seligman wrote in 2002 as he was working on the inventory of virtues.

Jon Christopher argues that while Seligman's list is an admirable effort and one worthy of continued discussion and exploration, it is ultimately limited by the Western cultural framework. Remember that Seligman and his colleagues started with a list of virtues, and then tried to find them in other traditions. This had the effect of flattening complex ideas like "wisdom" and "justice" so much that the real wisdom of other traditions was lost in translation.

THE VALUE AND VIRTUE OF OTHER VALUES AND VIRTUES

Christopher points to the example of Chinese philosophy that places five core values at the center of their moral world:

- Role fulfilment.
- Ties of sympathy and concern based on metaphysical commonalities.
- Harmony.

- Culmination of the learning process.
- Co-creativity with heaven and earth.

The contrast with Seligman's list is profound. In fact, "role fulfilment," which is a common value throughout much of the world, is not highlighted in any of Seligman's character strengths. But at an even deeper level, values that are based on "metaphysical commonalities" and "co-creativity of heaven and earth" signal a very different cosmological framework and, in fact, a different theory of being itself. Specifically, the Chinese virtues depend on a two-tiered model that places value on serving and maintaining the upper tier that provides meaning and significance, while Seligman's list depends on a cultural framework centered on individualism and the self.

Other research indicates that cultures live in a different emotional landscape. For example, in Japan the emotion of *amae* is often translated as a desire for indulgence or dependence. It is the feeling a twelve year-old child might have in asking a parent to "baby" them by tying their shoes. According to Takeo Doi, who first introduced the concept of *amae* to the Western world, the full experience of the emotion depends upon a larger cultural context that values interdependence and harmony, so there can be no adequate translation into the Western context.

Many traditions suggest that the self is in itself the problem. Hinduism suggests that enlightenment can only occur when one recognizes that the self (Atman) is one and the same as the Absolute all or Godhead (Brahman). Buddhism goes a step further by suggesting the concept of anatman or "non-self," which denies the existence of any unchanging permanent self, soul, or essence. Taoism suggests that one must put one's self in accord with the "tao" or way of all things. This "way" is beyond words and cannot be spoken about. It can only be known through living in accord with the "way" of life, nature, and the universe. In all of these traditions, the "self" as it is normally celebrated in the West is a hindrance to the good life.

Western psychology tends to judge "the good life" with measures of subjective well-being (often referred to in the literature as SWB).

Research participants are asked to rate items such as "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" or "I am satisfied with my life." But in many other cultures, what is "ideal" cannot and should not be determined by the individual, and subjective well-being is not necessarily "good." For example, in many non-Western cultures, negative emotions are valued as a sign of virtue when they alert the person to how they are not living in alignment with their role or social expectations. Measurements of subjective well-being often fail in cross-cultural contexts, because subjects refuse to consult their own subjective feelings to assess whether or not something is good. They tend to evaluate the good based on larger cosmological and social frameworks rather than their own personal experience.

But the modern West is not the first worldview to do away with the "second tier" and leave it to individuals to try to construct values and meaning. When Siddhartha Gautama Buddha laid out the original principles of Buddhism he did so in part as a critique of what he saw as a corrupt Hinduism in which authority was abused, ritual had become empty and exploitative, explanations were outdated, traditions were irrelevant to the times, and people had become superstitious and obsessed with miracles. Cutting through the superstition and corruption, the Buddha offered a philosophy that required no supernatural beliefs, rituals, or theology. Instead, he offered a set of practices and a practical philosophy (which together make up the eightfold path) that can lead to one living virtuously.

Of utmost importance to virtue in the original Buddhism was the idea that it is not enough simply to know what is virtuous or to "hold" good values. It is easy to know the path. It is much more difficult to walk the path. Therefor Buddha offered practices of mindfulness and meditation to quiet selfish desire, center the mind, and help people live up to their values.

The Buddha saw the source of human suffering in misplaced values. People want wealth, status, praise, and pleasure. But all of these are impermanent and out of one's control. In desiring them, we set ourselves up for disappointment, sadness and suffering. As

Buddha teaches in the teaching of the eight worldly winds, “gain and loss, status and disgrace, blame and praise, pleasure and pain: these conditions amount human beings are ephemeral, impermanent, subject to change. Knowing this, the wise person, mindful, ponders these changing conditions. Desirable things don’t charm the mind, and undesirable ones bring no resistance.”

The goal of Buddhist practice is to only desire the narrow path of mindful growth and development and to shrink selfish egotistical desires. As such, the practitioner comes to desire what is best for the world, not what is best for the self, and then feels a sense of enlightened joy and purpose.

The ancient Western world also offers an example of a tradition that did away with the “second tier” in Stoicism, which flourished in Greece and Rome from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD. While the Stoics did believe in God, they saw God not as a personified entity but as the natural universe itself imminent in all things. In order to understand God, they had to understand nature, making the study of nature and natural law essential to living a good and virtuous life.

Despite notable differences with Buddhism, the Stoics developed a similar method for arriving at good values and virtues. In short, we should not value those things that are out of our control. As Stoic philosopher Epictetus summed it up, “Some things are up to us, and some things are not up to us. Our opinions are up to us, and our impulses, desires, aversions – in short, whatever is our own doing. Our bodies are not up to us, nor are our possessions, our reputations, or our public offices, or that is, whatever is not our own doing.”

Such words and the foundational philosophy of stoicism were essential to Victor Frankl as he endured the horrors of concentration camps in WWII. In the midst of unimaginable suffering, starvation, humiliation, and death he found a place to practice his “Will to Meaning” by recognizing the Stoic truth of detaching from what is out of his control, and instead working to control what he could – his thoughts. He and his fellow prisoners “experienced the beauty of art

and nature as never before,” he writes. “If someone had seen our faces on the journey from Auschwitz to a Bavarian camp as we beheld the mountains of Salzburg with their summits glowing in the sunset, through the little barred windows of the prison carriage, he would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty.”

Stoicism has had a big impact on modern psychology, forming the philosophical foundations of Frankl’s Logotherapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, the most common form of therapy now used in clinical psychology.

At the center of both Buddhist and Stoic practice is recognizing that emotions are simply signals that can be observed and acted upon, but are not "good" or "bad" in themselves. Such emotions can be observed, which disempowers them, allowing an inner calm to develop. Freed from emotional reasoning, a person is more capable of living virtuously even in the face of complexity, conflict, and turmoil.

In colloquial terms, Mark Manson calls it (in the title of his best-selling book) "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck." Influenced by Buddhist and Stoic philosophy, Manson notes that the idea is not that one should be indifferent, but that we have to be careful about what we choose to "give a f*ck about" – or in other words, we have to choose our values – "what you're choosing to find important in life and what you're choosing to find unimportant." Manson does not shy away from the fact most people in the West will deny all-encompassing cosmological frameworks as questionable and arbitrary, which means we cannot help but choose our values. However, we can use the basic tenets from different wisdom traditions such as Stoicism and Buddhism to help us evaluate our values.

Manson arrives at three principles for evaluating values. They should be:

1. Based in reality.
2. Socially constructive.
3. Within our immediate control.

Many of the most common values held by people, such as pleasure, success, popularity, and wealth, are not good values, because they are either socially destructive or not in our immediate control. Studies show that people who pursue pleasure end up more anxious and prone to depression. Short-term pleasure just for the sake of pleasure can also lead to dangerous addictions or impulsive behaviors that can lead to long-term trouble.

Good values include character traits that are socially constructive and within our control. These would include honesty, self-respect, charity, and humility as well as many of the items on Seligman's original list, such as curiosity and creativity. But importantly, Manson suggests that these values should not be judged on whether or not they "feel good." One should be honest even when it hurts, humble even if it means forgoing praise and pleasure.

Ironically, it may be our individualistic focus on positive emotions and the pursuit of happiness that make it so difficult to achieve positivity and happiness. As Manson observes, "Our society today ... has bred a whole generation of people who believe that having these negative experiences – anxiety, fear, guilt, etc. – is totally not okay." As he poignantly observes, "the desire for more positive experience is itself a negative experience. And paradoxically, the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience."

This reflects a more profound vision of life in which avoiding problems and pain is not necessarily good. Instead, problems and pain become tools and opportunities for change. But studies show

that in order to get the most out of our problems and pain, we have to find ways to make sense of them. We have to make meaning.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE GOOD LIFE

In a recent study sure to become a landmark in anthropology, Edward Fischer sets out to study ideas of “the good life” in the supermarkets of Hannover, Germany and the coffee farms of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The two could hardly be further apart, geographically, culturally, and economically. The Guatemalans live with just 1/8 of the income of the Germans, but even worse, must suffer the violence of drug trafficking, creating one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Though the cultural context varies tremendously, Fischer still finds common concerns and themes where visions of the good life overlap. He suggests that these may form the foundation for a “positive anthropology” similar to positive psychology. But while positive psychologists like Seligman and Peterson list internal individualistic character traits or virtues that we should cultivate, Fischer instead finds five elements that a culture or society should aspire toward to ensure that everyone has adequate opportunity to pursue virtue however they might define it. Every society should provide:

1. Aspiration (hope)
2. Opportunity: power to act on that aspiration
3. Dignity
4. Fairness
5. Commitment to Larger Purposes

The list provides an interesting alternative to the current mode of judging cultures and countries based primarily on their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai notes, the “avalanche of numbers – about population, poverty, profit,

and predation” provides a limited view of the world that denies local perspectives. Instead, he advocates more nuanced ideas of the “good life” based on local ideals.

Fischer hopes that a turn in this direction could allow anthropologists to investigate and make suggestions about which cultural norms, social structures, and institutional arrangements foster wellbeing in different contexts. It is an inspiring idea. What if, instead of just trying to maximize wealth, we tried to maximize hope, opportunity, dignity, fairness, and purpose?

“It takes more than income to produce wellbeing,” Fischer concludes, “and policy makers would do well to consider the positive findings of anthropology and on-the-ground visions of the good life in working toward the ends for which we all labor.”



LEARN MORE

- ❖ The Good Life: Aspiration, Dignity, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing, by Edward Fischer
- ❖ Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being, by Martin Seligman
- ❖ “Positive Psychology, Ethnocentrism, and the Disguised Ideology of Individualism” by John Chambers Christopher and Sarah Hickinbottom.
- ❖ The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck by Mark Manson
- ❖ The Dhammapada. Translated by Eknath Easwaran
- ❖ Man’s Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl
- ❖ How to be a Stoic by Massimo Pigliucci

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

On my first day of graduate school, I watched my new advisor, Roy Wagner, walk onto the stage in front of 200 undergraduates in his Anthropology of Science Fiction class and drop-kick the podium. The podium slid across the stage and crashed to the floor. But Roy was not yet satisfied. He picked up the podium and hurled it off the stage and launched into a tirade. He said he had heard a story that dozens of students had decided to take the class because they thought it would be an “easy A.” He wanted to assure them that this wasn't the case, and invited anyone who was not fully committed to leave the room immediately. A couple dozen people walked out. Then he calmly picked up the podium, set it back up, warmly welcomed us to the class, and then proceeded to share with us "the secret" of anthropology: "Anthropology is storytelling."

He proceeded to reveal the importance of anthropology in crafting the storyworlds of classic Science Fiction texts like *Dune* and

The Left Hand of Darkness (written by Ursula Le Guin, the daughter of Alfred Kroeber, one of the most famous anthropologists of all time). But more importantly, he showed us the importance of storytelling in understanding and presenting the cultural worlds and life stories of others. As anthropologist Ed Bruner noted, "Our anthropological productions are our stories about their stories; we are interpreting the people as they are interpreting themselves."

Of course, the real insight here is that we are all always "anthropologists," in the sense that all of us are interpreting the stories of people around us, and the stories people tell about themselves are also simplified interpretations of a very complex history and web of deeply entangled experiences. But we are not just interpreting the stories of others, we are also constantly telling and retelling the story of our own selves. "*Yumi stori nau!*" is the most common greeting you will hear as you walk around Papua New Guinea. The direct English transliteration: "You Me Story Now!" perfectly captures the spirit of the request. It is an expression of the joy felt when two people sit down and share stories together. In Nimakot, where there are no televisions or other media forms, storytelling is king, just as it has been for most humans throughout all time.

Among the Agta, hunter-gatherers in the Philippines, anthropologist Andrea Migliano found that when the Agta were asked to name the five people they would most like to live with in a band, the most sought-after companions were the great storytellers. Being a great storyteller was twice as important as being a great hunter. And this wasn't just for the high-quality entertainment. Storytellers had a profound influence on the well-being of the group. Stories among the Agta often emphasize core cultural values such as egalitarianism and cooperation. So when Migliano's team asked different Agta groups to play a game that involved sharing rice, the groups with the best storytellers also turned out to be the most generous and egalitarian in their sharing practices.

The storytellers were also highly valued for the cultural knowledge that they possess and pass on to others. Societies use stories to encode complex information and pass it on generation after generation.

As an example, consider an apparently bizarre and confusing story among the Andaman Islanders about a lizard that got stuck in a tree while trying to hunt pigs in the forest. The lizard receives help from a lanky cat-like creature called a civet, and they get married. What could this possibly mean? Why is a lanky cat marrying a pig-hunting lizard? Such stories can provide a treasure of material for symbolic interpretation, but the details of such stories also pass along key information across generations about how these animals behave and where they can be found. As anthropologist Scalise Sugiyama has pointed out, this is essential knowledge for locating and tracking game.

One especially provocative and interesting anthropological theory about storytelling comes from Polly Wiessner's study of the Ju/'hoansi hunter-gatherers of southern Africa. While living with them, it was impossible not to notice the dramatic difference between night and day. The day was dominated by practical subsistence activities. But at night, there was little to be done except huddle by the fire.

The firelight creates a radically different context from the daytime. The cool of the evening relaxes people, and if the temperatures drop further they cuddle together. People of all ages, men and women, are gathered together. Imaginations are on high alert under the moon and stars, with every snap and distant bark, grumble or howl receiving their full attention. The light offers a small speck of human control in an otherwise vast unknown. They feel more drawn to one another, and the sense of a gap between the self and the other diminishes.

It is in this little world around the fire where the stories flow. During the day just 6% of all conversations involve storytelling. Practical matters rule the day. But at night, 85% of all conversation

involves storytelling or myth-telling. As she notes, storytelling by firelight helps "keep cultural instructions alive, explicate relations between people, create imaginary communities beyond the village, and trace networks for great distances."

Though more research still needs to be done, her preliminary work suggests that fire did much more for us than cook our food in the past. It gave us time to tell stories to each other about who we were, where we came from, and the vast networks of relations that connect us to others. The stories told at night were essential for keeping distant others in mind, facilitating vast networks of cooperation, and building bigger and stronger cultural institutions, especially religion and ritual. Fire sparked our imaginations and laid the foundation for the cultural explosion we have seen over the past 400,000 years.

STORIES ARE EVERYWHERE

Stories are everywhere, operating on us at every moment of our lives, but we rarely notice them. Stories provide pervasive implicit explanations for why things are the way they are. If we stop to think deeply, we are often able to identify several stories that tell us about how the world works, the story of our country, and even the story of ourselves. Such stories provide frameworks for how we assess and understand new information, provide a storehouse of values and virtues, and provide a guide for what we might, could, or should become. Most importantly, they do not just convey information, they convey meaning. They bring a sense of significance to our knowledge.

Stories are powerful because they mimic our experience of moving through the world – how we think, plan, act, and find meaning in our thoughts, plans, and actions.

We are in a constant process of creating stories. When we wake up, we construct a narrative for our day. If we get sick, we construct a narrative for how it happened and what we might be able to do about

it. Through a wider lens, we might look at the story of our lives and construct a narrative for how we became who we are today, and where we are going. Through an even broader lens, we construct stories about our families, communities, our country, and our world.

Cultures provide master narratives or scripts that tell us how our lives should go. A common one for many in the West is go to school, graduate, get a job, get married, have kids, and then send them to college and hope they can repeat the story. But what happens when our lives go off track from this story? What happens when this story just doesn't work for us? We find a new story, or we feel a little lost until we find one. We can't help but seek meaning and coherence for our lives.

What is the story of the world? Most people have a story, often unconscious, that organizes their understanding of the world. It frames their understanding of events, gives those events meaning, and provides a framework for what to expect in the future.

Jonathan Haidt proposes that most Westerners have one of two dominant stories of the world that are in constant conflict. One is a story that frames Capitalism in a negative light. It goes like this:

"Once upon a time, work was real and authentic. Farmers raised crops and craftsmen made goods. People traded those goods locally, and that trade strengthened local communities. But then, Capitalism was invented, and darkness spread across the land. The capitalists developed ingenious techniques for squeezing wealth out of workers, and then sucking up all of society's resources for themselves. The capitalist class uses its wealth to buy political influence, and now the 1% is above the law. The rest of us are its pawns, forever. The end."

In the other story, capitalism is viewed positively, as the key innovation that drives progress and lifts us out of poverty and human suffering. It goes like this:

"Once upon a time, and for thousands of years, almost everyone was poor, and many were slaves or serfs. Then one day, some good institutions were invented in England and Holland. These democratic institutions put checks on the exploitative power of the elites, which in turn allowed for the creation of economic institutions that rewarded hard work, risk-taking, and innovation. Free Market Capitalism was born. It spread rapidly across Europe and to some of the British colonies. In just a few centuries, poverty disappeared in these fortunate countries, and people got rights and dignity, safety and longevity. Free market capitalism is our savior, and Marxism is the devil. In the last 30 years, dozens of countries have seen the light, cast aside the devil, and embraced our savior. If we can spread the gospel to all countries, then we will vanquish poverty and enter a golden age. The end."

You probably recognize both of these stories. They operate just beneath the surface of news articles, academic disciplines, and political movements. If we pause, think deeply, and take the time to research, we would probably all recognize that both stories offer some insights and truth, but both are incomplete and inaccurate in some respects.

Haidt proposes that we co-create a third story that recognizes the truths of both stories while setting the stage for a future that is better for everybody. His proposal is a reminder that once we recognize the power of stories in our lives, we also gain the power to recreate those stories, and thereby recreate our understanding of ourselves and our world.

THE WISDOM OF STORIES

During the Great Depression, Joseph Campbell spent five years in a small shack in the woods of New York reading texts and stories from religious traditions all over the world. As he did so, he started to see common underlying patterns to many of the stories, and a common body of wisdom. One pattern he found was that of the

hero's journey. All over the world, he found stories of heroes who are called to adventure, step over a threshold to adventure, face a series of trials to achieve their ultimate boon, and then return to the ordinary world to help others.

He mapped out the hero's journey in a book appropriately titled *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949. The book would ultimately transform the way many people think about religion, and have a strong influence on popular culture, providing a framework that can be found in popular movies like *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Lion King*. The book was listed by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 best and most influential books of the 20th century.

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Campbell refers listeners to the similarities in the heroic journeys of Jesus and Buddha as examples:

Jesus receives his call to adventure while being baptized. The heavens opened up and he heard a voice calling him the son of God. He sets off on a journey and crosses the threshold into another world, the desert, where he will find his road of trials, the three temptations. First Satan asks him to turn stones into bread. Jesus, who has been fasting and must be very hungry, replies, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Satan takes him to the top of the temple and asks him to jump so that the angels may catch him, and Jesus says, "You shall not put the lord, your God, to the test." Then Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain from which all the kingdoms of the world can be seen. He promised Jesus he could have all of it "if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus says, "Away, Satan! For it is written; "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." The devil left him, and angels appeared to minister to him.

He had conquered fear and selfish desire and received his ultimate boon: wisdom and knowledge that he would spread to others.

Born a prince, Siddhartha lived a luxurious life behind palace walls, protected from the pain and suffering of the world. But at age

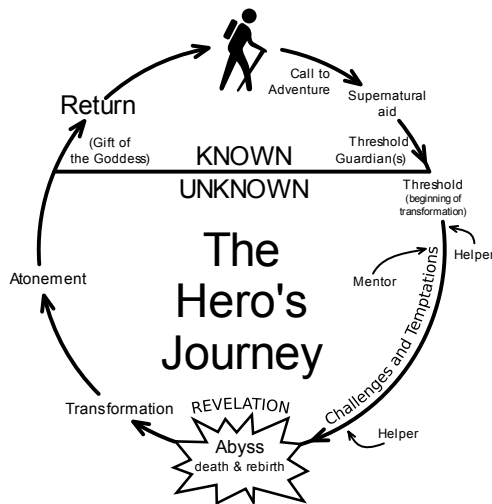
29 he made his way past the palace walls and encountered old age, sickness, and death. Seeing this he set out to find peace and understand how one is to live with this ever-present reality of human suffering. He found many teachers and patiently learned their beliefs, practices and meditations but he still felt unsatisfied. He set off alone and came to rest under a tree. There it was that Mara, the evil demon, gave him three trials. First, he sent his three daughters to seduce him. But Siddhartha was still and without desire. Then Mara sent armies of monsters to attack Siddhartha. But Siddhartha was still and without fear. Then Mara claimed that Siddhartha had no right to sit in the seat of enlightenment. Siddhartha was still and calmly touched the earth with his hand and the earth itself bore witness to his right.

He had conquered fear and selfish desire and received his ultimate boon: wisdom and knowledge that he would spread to others.

Both stories tell the tale of a hero who is unmoved by the selfish and socially destructive values of wealth, pleasure, and power to serve a higher purpose. Campbell was struck by ubiquitous themes he found across cultures in which people overcome basic human fears and selfish desires to become cultural heroes. In his book, he identified 17 themes that are common throughout hero stories around the world. They're not all always present, but they are common. Seven of them are especially prominent and essential:

1. **The Call to Adventure.** The hero often lives a quintessentially mundane life, but longs for something more. Something happens that calls the hero forth into the adventure. The hero often hesitates but eventually accepts the call.
2. **The Mentor.** There is usually someone who helps the hero as he crosses the threshold into the land of adventure.
3. **The Trials.** The hero must face many tests and trials, each one offers a lesson and helps the hero overcome fear.
4. **"The Dragon."** The hero's biggest fear is often represented by a dragon or some kind of ultimate threat.

5. **The Temptations.** There are usually some temptations trying to pull the hero away from the path. These test the hero's resolve and ability to quell their selfish desires.
6. **The Ultimate Temptation:** The ultimate temptation is usually the demand of social life, a "duty" we feel to be and act in a certain way that is not in alignment with who we really are.
7. **Ultimate Boon.** If the hero can move past fear and desire, he is granted a revelation and transforms into a new being that can complete the adventure.



That the same basic structure can be found all over the world in both story and ritual illuminates profound universals of the human condition. Specifically, all humans are born unfinished and in a state of dependency, and must make a series of major changes in identity and role throughout life. Hero stories highlight the key dilemmas we all must face.

But as Campbell studied the stories and traditions of the world, he became more and more concerned that modern society had lost its connection to the key wisdom and guidance that hero stories could provide. He worried that literal readings of the heroic stories in the Bible were not appealing to many people, because the core stories

are based in a society of the Middle East 2,000 years ago when slavery was commonplace and women were not equals. Back then it was common to assume, as described in Genesis, that the world is relatively young, perhaps just a few thousand years old, and is shaped like a flat disc with a dome above it – the firmament of heaven – that holds the stars.

Such stories are hard to square with our current knowledge that the earth is over 4 billion years old and sits on the outer edge of a vast galaxy which is itself just a small piece of a larger universe that is about 14 billion years old.

As a result, Campbell lamented, both Christians and atheists do not receive the potential wisdom of religious stories because they are overly focused on whether or not the stories are true rather than trying to learn something from them.

Campbell called on artists to develop new stories that could speak to the challenges of our times and serve the four functions of religion outlined earlier – stories that could teach us how to live a good life in today's world (the pedagogical function), stories that could help us get along and feel connected to one another (the sociological function), stories that could give us a better picture and understanding of how things work today (the cosmological function), and stories that could allow us to feel hopeful and stand in awe of the universe (the mystical function).

George Lucas was one of the first to hear the call.

REBIRTH OF THE HERO

Lucas came across Campbell's work while he was working on *Star Wars*. "It was a great gift," Lucas said, "a very important moment. It's possible that if I had not come across that I would still be writing *Star Wars* today." Thanks to Campbell's work, the stories of Jesus, Buddha, and other religious hero stories from all over the world came to influence characters like Luke Skywalker. George Lucas would

refer to Campbell as "my Yoda," and the influence of the great teacher is evident in the work.

Star Wars was just the first of many Hollywood movies that would use the hero cycle as a formula. In the mid-1980s Christopher Vogler, then a story consultant for Disney, wrote up a seven-page memo summarizing Campbell's work. "Copies of the memo were like little robots, moving out from the studio and into the jetsream of Hollywood thinking," Vogler notes. "Fax machines had just been invented ... copies of The Memo [were] flying all over town."

Movies have become the new modern myths, taking the elements of hero stories in the world's wisdom traditions and placing them in modern day situations that allow us to think through and contemplate contemporary problems and challenges. In this way, elements of the great stories of Jesus and Buddha find their way into our consciousness in new ways.

Movies like *The Matrix* provide a new story that allows us to reflect on our troubled love-hate codependency-burdened relationship to technology. The hero, Neo, starts off as Mr. Anderson, a very ordinary name for a very ordinary guy working in a completely nondescript and mundane cubicle farm. His call to adventure comes from his soon-to-be mentor, Morpheus, who offers him the red pill. Mr. Anderson suddenly "wakes up," literally and figuratively, and recognizes that he has been living in a dream world, feeding machines with his life energy. Morpheus trains him and prepares him for battle. Morpheus reveals the prophecy to Neo, who, Morpheus calls "The One" – the savior who is to free people from the Matrix and save humankind. (The name "Neo" is "One" with the O moved to the end of the word.) In this way, Neo's story is very much like the story of Jesus. At the end of the movie, he dies and is resurrected, just like Jesus; but here the story takes a turn toward the East, as upon re-awakening Neo is enlightened and sees through the illusion of the Matrix, just as Hindus or Buddhist attempt to see through the illusion of Maya.

The religious themes continue in the second movie, as Neo meets "the architect" who created the Matrix. The architect looks like a bearded white man, invoking common images of God in the West. But invoking Eastern traditions, the architect informs Neo that he is the sixth incarnation of "The One" and is nothing more than a necessary and planned anomaly designed to reboot the system and keep it under control. Neo is trapped in *Samsara*, the ongoing cycles of death, rebirth, and reincarnation.

In order to break the cycle, Neo ultimately has to give up everything and give entirely of himself – the ultimate symbol of having transcended desire. In a finale that seems to tie multiple religious traditions together, Neo lies down in front of Deus Ex Machina (God of the Machines) with his arms spread like Jesus on the cross, ready to sacrifice himself and die for all our sins. But this is not just a Christian ending. Invoking Eastern traditions, he ends the war by merging the many dualities that were causing so much suffering in the world. Man and machine are united as he is plugged into the machines' mainframe. And even good and evil are united as he allows the evil Smith to enter into him and *become* him. In merging the dualities, all becomes one, and the light of enlightenment shines out through the Matrix, destroying everything, and a new world is born.

The Matrix is an especially explicit example of bringing the themes of religious stories into the modern myths of movies, but even seemingly mundane movies build from the hero cycle and bring the wisdom of the ages to bare on contemporary problems. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* explores how to find meaning in the mundane world of corporate cubicles, and how to thrive in a cold and crass corporate system that doesn't seem to care about you. *The Hunger Games* explores how to fight back against a seemingly immense and unstoppable system of structural power where the core exploits the periphery, and how to live an authentic life in a Reality TV world that favors superficiality over the complexities of real feelings and real life. And *Rango*, which appears to be a children's movie about a pet lizard

who suddenly finds himself alone in the desert, is a deep exploration of how to find one's true self.

All these stories provide models for how we might make sense of our own lives, and as we will see in the concluding section to this lesson, incorporating what we learn from fictional heroes can have very real effects on our health and well-being.

MAKING MEANING

We all have a story in mind for how our life should go, and when it doesn't go that way, we have to scramble to pick up the pieces and find meaning. Gay Becker, Arthur Kleinman, and other anthropologists have explored how people reconstruct life narratives after a major disruption like an illness or major cultural crisis. This need for our lives to "make sense" is a fundamental trait of being human, and so we find ourselves constantly re-authoring our biographies in an attempt to give our lives meaning and direction.

Psychologist Dan McAdams has studied thousands of life stories and finds recurring themes and genres. Some people have a master story of upward mobility in which they are progressively getting better day by day. Others have a theme of "commitment" in which they feel called to do something and give themselves over to a cause to serve others. Some have sad tales of "contamination" as their best intentions and life prospects are constantly spoiled by outside influences, while others are stories of triumph and redemption in the face of adversity.

These studies have shown that "making sense" is not just important for the mind; "making sense" and crafting a positive life story have real health benefits. When Jamie Pennebaker looked at severe trauma and its effects on long-term health, he found that people who talked to friends, family, or a support group afterward did not face severe long-term health effects. He suspected that this was because they were able to make sense of the trauma and incorporate it into a positive life story. In a follow up study, he asked

one group to journal about the most traumatic experience of their lives for fifteen minutes per day for four days. In the control group, he asked them to write about another topic. A year later, he looked at medical records and found that those who had written about their trauma were less likely to get sick.

This was a phenomenal result, so Pennebaker looked deeper into what people had written during that time. There he found that the people who received the greatest health benefit were those who had made significant progress in making sense of their past trauma and experiences. They had re-written the story of their lives in ways that accommodated their past trauma.

McAdams and his colleagues have found that when people face the troubles and trials of their lives and take the time to make sense of them, they construct more complex, enduring, and productive life stories. As a result, they are also more productive and generative throughout their lives, and have a stronger sense of well-being.

But how do we craft positive stories in the face of adversity and find meaning and sense in tragedy and trauma? There are no secret formulas. People often find their stories of redemption by listening with compassion to the stories of others. In other words, they simply adopt the core anthropological tools of communication, empathy, and thoughtfulness to open themselves up to the stories of others. This is what makes our own life stories, as well as the legends and hero stories written into our religions and scripted on to the big screen so powerful and important. It's why we sat up by flickering fires for hour after hour for hundreds of thousands of years, and why we still find wisdom in the flickering images of movies and television shows.



LEARN MORE

- ❖ “Embers of Society: Firelight talk among the Ju/’hoansi Bushmen” by Paul Wiessner. PNAS 111(39):14027-14035.
- ❖ The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human by Jonathan Gottschall
- ❖ The Power of Myth, by Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers. Book and Video.
- ❖ The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom, by Jonathan Haidt
- ❖ What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life amidst Uncertainty and Danger, by Arthur Kleinman

Challenge Nine: Meaning-Making

Your challenge is to leverage what you learned in this lesson to make meaning by defining your values or re-writing your story of yourself or the world.

Objective: Reflect on your values, your past, or the world and take responsibility for the type of meaning you will make in your life and in the world.

Option 1: Define Your Values

Assess your current values and ideals and use the wisdom outlined in lesson nine to intentionally create and defend a set of core values.

Option 2: Rewrite Your Story

Use the hero story structure to rethink the obstacles, problems, or pains of your life in a way that makes sense of meaning.

Option 3: Rewrite the World

Take Jonathan Haidt up on his challenge to write a "third story" that explains the history, problems, and paradoxes of the world in such a way that provides a meaningful way for you to live in it.

Go to anth101.com/challenge9 to download a worksheet to get you started.

NOW SHOWING: *THE FLORIDA PROJECT*

The Florida Project is a fiction film about a single mother and her six-year-old daughter who live in a budget motel on the outskirts of Disneyworld. The film has been called an ethnofiction because it uses many nonprofessional actors and authentically conveys the lived experience of the community in the motel. Directed by Sean Baker, it was released in 2017 to critical acclaim, especially for the performances of Willem Dafoe and Brooklyn Prince.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Poverty, Culture of" by Philippe Bourgois (2001)

"On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below" by Paul Farmer (2009)

"Review: In 'The Florida Project,' Enchantment in a Shabby Motel" by A.O. Scott (2017)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain how the concept of structural violence works against the concept of "the culture of poverty" and apply the concept of structural violence to *The Florida Project*.

Chapter 11: Nature and Culture Revisited

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a framework for understanding nature as culturally constructed and for the consequences that this construction has had for the planet and human life. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "Culture and Sustainability" by Christian T. Palmer (2020). The film is a double feature: *Blackfish* and *Anthropocene*.

CULTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY: ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Christian T. Palmer, Windward Community College
ctpalm@hawaii.edu

Learning Objectives

- Identify the methods and theories anthropologists use to examine human interactions with the environment.
- Define political ecology and explain its relationship to anthropology.
- Describe the Anthropocene and discuss how anthropology contributes to understanding the human role in environmental destruction.
- Explain how anthropology contributes to public discussions and the creation of public policy with lawmakers, activists, corporations, and others regarding major environmental challenges.

LIVING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

We live on a planet where the climate—winds, precipitation, weather, temperatures—is being modified by the collective impact of the human species. I arrived at anthropology through an interest in understanding human impacts on the environment. I began by studying ethnobotany as an undergraduate and received a master's degree in environmental science. As I researched human-environmental dynamics, I realized that scientists had largely identified what needed to be done to address many of the world's pressing environmental problems, but few of the recommended changes had been adopted, thwarted by political, cultural, and economic forces. Anthropologists' approach is holistic; they seek to simultaneously understand all of the interactions of political, cultural, and economic factors to fully explore the complexity of human-environmental interactions. Thus, I felt that anthropology provided a good place to start to understand and begin to address some of the most important questions facing our species. For example, how can we provide for basic human needs while not sacrificing the welfare of other species? Why do many people say that they care about protecting the environment but then do nothing about it? What political, economic, and cultural factors are prohibiting world leaders from agreeing on solutions to global environmental challenges? To answer such questions, we must understand how humans think and act as groups, our socially and culturally mediated ways of interacting with each other, other species, and the world around us.

Arriving at Environmental Anthropology

In many ways, anthropology as a discipline is only now starting to address these questions. In December 2014, Bruno Latour, a French anthropologist, spoke to a standing-room-only audience at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in Washington, D.C., to discuss the relationship between the **Anthropocene** and anthropology.¹ Anthropocene is a term used to describe the period (or epoch) in geological time in which the effects of human activities have altered the fundamental geochemical cycles of the earth as a result of converting forests into fields and pastures and burning oil, gas, and coal on a large scale. Because human activities have changed the earth's atmosphere, anthropologists can make important contributions to studies of geology, chemistry, and meteorology by considering the effects of humans and their cultural systems. As Latour noted, the discipline of anthropology is uniquely qualified to provide insight into key components of current environmental crises by determining the reasons behind choices various groups of humans make, bridging the social and natural sciences, and studying contradictions between cultural universals (traits all humans have in common) and particularities (interesting cultural differences).

This chapter summarizes how anthropologists have contributed to analysis and resolution of environmental concerns. I begin with a brief overview of anthropological analysis of human interactions with the environment and then explore how anthropological perspectives toward human-environmental interactions have changed over time. I end the chapter with a call to action—an invitation for students to use lessons they have learned from anthropology to challenge the kinds of thinking that have produced current environmental crises and see where those anthropological approaches take them. Environmental anthropology is an exciting subfield that will grow in importance as questions of environmental sustainability become increasingly central to scientific and popular conversations about the future of our species and the planet.

Humans and the Environment

If we think about anthropology from the classic four-field approach, which includes both physical anthropology and archaeology, many of the questions with which those disciplines have historically wrestled were related to our species' long-term relationship with the environment. Around two million years ago, climate changes decreased the amount of forest and expanded grasslands in Africa, which led to the early **Hominin** radiation (the geographic expansion of multiple Hominin species). It also led hominin species to walk upright, which freed their hands to make and use tools. Subsequent climate changes, particularly expansions and contractions of glaciers associated with ice ages, also contributed to *Homo sapiens* expanding to new parts of the globe.

Fast-forwarding to the beginning of human agriculture roughly 10,000 years ago, we can see how the global expansion of *Homo sapiens* and their first permanent settlements and urban centers led to the development of agriculture, a profound new way of interacting with the environment. The ability of early humans to shape the landscape, first by simply encouraging wild plants to grow and later by planting and irrigating crops and domesticating plants and animals, set humans on the path toward our current problematic relationship with the planet. Archaeologists' questions about human diets, tools, and architecture inevitably explore how ancient civilizations interacted with their environments. For example, archaeologists examine the relative frequency of different kinds of pollen and tree rings over thousands of years to understand how landscapes changed over time through both human and natural processes.

Many archaeologists credit increased productivity that came with agriculture as the foundation of civilization, allowing humans to live in larger settlements, specialize in craft production, and develop social hierarchies and eventually math, writing, and science. From this perspective, the seeds of social complexity were contained within the first grains domesticated in the hills surrounding the Fertile Crescent. Others have questioned the idea that the effects of agriculture were purely beneficial. For example, Marshall Sahlins called foraging (hunter-gatherer) societies "the original affluent societies" and noted that hunter-gatherers had more leisure time, healthier diets, more time to socialize, and greater social equality than agricultural or even industrial societies.² He also noted that they were affluent not because they had everything, but because they could easily meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and sociality. Others have looked at the advances in science, medicine, and communication technology and disagreed with Sahlins, arguing that we are better off with the developments brought by agriculture. Sahlins' critique of agriculture (and subsequently of civilization) should not be seen as a suggestion to deindustrialize; rather, it is a challenge to assumptions that Western civilization and its technological developments necessarily represent improvements for human societies. Perhaps the strongest argument against capitalism and industrialization is the real possibility of environmental collapse that those systems have brought.

Sahlins' analysis calls into question the idea that humans as a species are necessarily progressing through history and encourages us to think about how "necessities" are culturally constructed. Do we really need cars or cell phones to be happy? How about books and vaccines? Because many of our innovations in technology, agriculture, and transportation have come at the expense of the natural systems that support us, we need to think about human "progress" in relationship to its impact on the environment. The impacts of climate change from our dependence on fossil fuel, toxic byproducts from expanding chemical industries, and pollution of land, soil, and water from industrialized agriculture are a significant challenge to a vision of human history in which we expect things to get better and better.

Archaeological evidence of collapses of earlier societies—Harappan cities in the Indus River Valley, the Mayans in Central America, and the Rapa Nui of Easter Island, for example—provides a sobering warning as many pre-historic cultures' practices were, at some level, environmentally unsustainable, leading to deforestation, soil salinization, or erosion.



Figure 1: The ball courts at Copan show the complexity and development of early Mayan society. Research suggests that deforestation was one of the causes of the collapse of the city-state.

For example, archaeologists have explored the collapse of a number of Mayan cities from an environmental perspective.³ After examining samples of pollen from nearby lakebeds, they determined the relative abundance of various ecosystems, such as cornfields and pine forests, over time. They found that deforestation in the uplands associated with an expanding population around the Mayan city of Copan was one of the factors that led to the city's decline. Land was cleared to increase agricultural production and to harvest wood for the construction of houses, fueling cooking fires, and producing lime, which was used to make plaster for large-scale construction projects. The study suggests that pre-historic groups' lack of adequate environmental management systems could have affected their ability to maintain their complex urban societies—a warning for society today.

Another fascinating story of the complex relationships between culture, plants, and the economy relates to development of sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz documented how our sweet tooth led to development of the slave trade, industrialization, capitalism, and colonization in the Americas.⁴ He examined how sugar went from being a luxury good associated with the upper class as a spice and medicine to a regular staple for factory workers. The increased consumption of sugar associated with industrialization provided financial incentives for continuing slavery and colonization projects in the Americas. Mintz's work is not usually described as environmental anthropology, but his careful documentation of the relationship between people and sugar cane clearly demonstrates the importance of certain species of plants in shaping human history.

The question of how humans interact with their environment through hunting and gathering, agriculture, and deforestation is central to understanding how human groups meet their basic needs and continue to survive and develop. By examining these past and present cultural configurations critically and carefully, anthropology provides a valuable perspective from which to understand such environmental questions.

Sustainability and Public Anthropology

Environmental anthropology provides an opportunity for anthropologists to engage in larger public

debates. The American Anthropological Association, for example, recently issued a [Statement on Humanity and Climate Change](#) meant to “to recognize anthropological contributions to global climate change-related issues, articulate new research directions, and provide the American Anthropological Association with actions and recommendations to support and promote anthropological investigation of these issues including the development of course curricula and application of anthropological theory and methods to the issues.”⁵ Such statements emphasize the importance of anthropological contributions to current scientific and political debates.

Anthropologists have become involved in environmental causes around the world. In Brazil, for example, they have worked with indigenous groups to maintain land claims, prevent deforestation, and organize against construction of large hydropower projects that threaten the river ecosystems.⁶ Others have challenged development of parks throughout the world as a major conservation strategy for biodiversity and explored the impacts of those parks on local communities.⁷ Studies of these diverse topics benefit from incorporation of an ethnographic perspective that emphasizes the importance of identity politics, connection to place, and cultural beliefs for understanding how groups of people interact with their environment. This work also reminds us that environmentalism and conservation are grounded in sets of beliefs, assumptions, and world views developed in Western Europe and North America and must be translated as environmentalists work in other cultures.

Environmental anthropology naturally lends itself to use of anthropological perspectives to inform and engage in public policy decisions, land-use management, and advocacy for indigenous communities, urban minorities, and other groups that are often under-represented in places of power and in traditional environmental movements. In that sense, environmental anthropology is a way to inform and connect with a variety of other disciplines that address similar questions of sustainability. Regardless of whether you decide to study anthropology, understanding the value of anthropological insights for environmental questions will allow you to better appreciate and understand the complexity of environmental questions in modern society and potential solutions. The next section examines the diverse ways that anthropologists have historically looked at the human-environmental dynamic, highlighting some of the key theories, methods, and approaches and how they have developed over time.

CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Early Cultural Ecologists

One of the earliest anthropologists to think systematically about the environment was Leslie White. His work built on earlier anthropological concepts of cultural evolution—the idea that cultures, like organisms, evolve over time and progress from simple to more complex. White described how cultures evolved through their ability to use energy as they domesticated plants and animals, captured the energy stored in fossil fuels, and developed nuclear power.⁸ From this perspective, “human cultural evolution was best understood as a process of increasing control over the natural environment” through technological progress.⁹ White’s conclusions are at odds with Franz Boas’ historical particularism, which rejected theories based on evolution that labeled cultures as more advanced or less advanced than others and instead looked at each society as a unique entity that had developed based on its particular history. Like earlier anthropologists, White viewed anthropology as a natural science in which one could generate scientific laws to understand cultural differences. His model is useful, however, when exploring the nature of change as our society increasingly harnessed new sources of energy to meet our wants

and needs. He was writing at a time when the U.S. economy was booming and our technological future seemed promising, before the environmental movement raised awareness about harm caused by those technologies.

How the Future Looked 50 Years Ago

This National Public Radio [Planet Money episode](#) captures the enthusiasm for technological progress at the 1964 World's Fair, when little was known about the environmental damage such technologies would cause. How did people see the future in 1964? How is their idea of the future different ours today?

Anthropologist Julian Steward first used the term **cultural ecology** to describe how cultures use and understand their environments. His fieldwork among the Shoshone emphasized the complex ways they had adapted to the dry terrain of the Great Basin between the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountain ranges. He described how a hunting and gathering subsistence economy that relied on pine nuts, grass seeds, berries, deer, elk, sheep, antelope, and rabbits shaped Shoshone culture. Their detailed knowledge of various microclimates and seasonal variations in resource availability structured their migration patterns, social interactions, and cultural belief systems.¹⁰ Rather than looking for single evolutionary trajectories for cultures as White had done, Steward looked for multiple evolutionary pathways that led to different outcomes and stressed the variety of ways in which cultures could adapt to ecological conditions.

Both White and Steward were influenced by **materialism**, a Marxist concept that emphasized the ways in which human social and cultural practices were influenced by basic subsistence (economic) needs. Both were trained as scientists, which shaped how they looked at cultural variation. Steward was also influenced by **processual archaeology**, a scientific approach developed in the 1960s that focused primarily on relationships between past societies and the ecological systems they inhabited. The shift in anthropology represented by White and Steward's work led to increased use of scientific methods when analyzing and interpreting data. In subsequent decades, movements in both anthropology and archaeology criticized those scientific perspectives, challenging their objectivity, a process I examine in greater detail later in this chapter.

Pigs and Protein

Subsequent anthropologists built on the work of White and Steward, looking for ecological explanations for cultural beliefs and practices. They also drew on newly developed computer science to think about dynamic feedback systems in which cultural and ecological systems self-regulate to promote social stability—**homeostasis**. Some fascinating examples of this work include Roy Rappaport's work in Papua New Guinea and Marvin Harris' work in India.

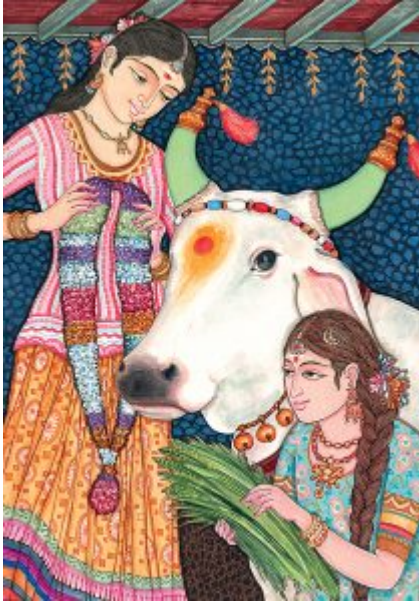


Figure 2: Honoring the cow, is a part of Hindu religious tradition.

Marvin Harris examined Hindu religious beliefs about sacred cattle from functional and materialist perspectives. Among Hindus in India, eating beef is forbidden and cows are seen as sacred animals associated with certain deities. From the perspective of a Western beef-loving country, such beliefs may seem irrational. Why would anyone not want to eat a juicy steak or hamburger? Rejecting earlier academics who regarded the Hindu practice as illogical, Harris argued that the practice makes perfect sense within the Hindu ecological and economic system. He argued that cows were sacred not because of cultural beliefs; instead, the cultural beliefs existed because of the economic and ecological importance of cows in India. Thus, Hindu restrictions regarding cows were an “adaptive” response to the local ecological system rather than the result of Hindu theology.¹¹ Harris explored the importance of cattle for milk production, dung for fuel and fertilizer, labor for plowing, and provision of meat and hides to the lowest caste, untouchables, who were able to slaughter and eat cows and tan their hides because they were already seen as ritually impure.

Roy Rappaport examined subsistence practices of the Tsembaga in Highland New Guinea, a group that planted taro, yams, sweet potatoes, and sugar cane and raised pigs. Rappaport used scientific terms and concepts such as caloric intake, carrying capacity, and mutualism to explain methods used by the Tsembaga to manage their resources. A population of pigs below a certain threshold provided a number of benefits, such as keeping villages clean by eating refuse and eating weeds in established gardens that had relatively large fruit trees that would not be damaged by the pigs. Once the population reached the threshold, the pigs ate more than weeds and garbage and began to create problems in gardens. In response, the people used periodic ritual feasts to trim the population back, returning the ecological system to equilibrium. Rappaport, like Harris, used ecological concepts to understand the Tsembaga subsistence practices, thus downplaying the role of cultural beliefs and emphasizing ecological constraints.

These early cultural ecologists viewed cultures as trying to reach and maintain social and ecological equilibrium. This idea aligned with ecological thinking at the time that emphasized the balance of nature and the importance of the various components of an ecosystem in maintaining that balance. However, environments and cultures were rapidly changing as colonization, globalization, and industrialization spread throughout the world. In many of those early cases, anthropologists had ignored the larger processes.

As ecologists began to develop more-complex models of how ecosystems change through long-term dynamic processes of **succession** and disturbances (such as storms, droughts, and El Nino events), anthropological approaches to the environment also changed. The next sections examine those shifts in anthropology as environmental movements developed in response to increasing degradation of natural environments.

Early anthropologists were notable for their attempts to understand how different groups of people interacted with their environments over time. Their work paved the way for future environmental anthropologists even though they generally were not directly concerned with environmental problems associated with modernity, such as pollution, tropical deforestation, species extinctions, erosion, and global warming. As people around the world became more familiar with such issues, environmental anthropologists took note and began to analyze those problems and accompanying conservation move-

ments, especially in the developing world, which was still the primary focus of most anthropological research.

ETHNOECOLOGY

Slash-and-Burn versus Swidden Cultivation

Traditionally, anthropologists studied small communities in remote locations rather than urban societies. While much of that work examined rituals, political organizations, and kinship structures, some anthropologists focused on **ethnoecology**: use and knowledge of plants, animals, and ecosystems by traditional societies. Because those societies depended heavily on the natural world for food, medicine, and building materials, such knowledge was often essential to their survival.

As anthropologists, Harris and Rappaport worked to make the strange familiar by taking seemingly bizarre practices such as ritual slaughtering of pigs and sacredness of cows in India and explaining the practices within the context of the people's culture and environment. This work explains not only how and why people do what they do, but also the advantages of their systems in the environments in which they live. An indigenous practice long demonized by the media, environmental activists, and scientists is slash-and-burn agriculture in which small-scale farmers, mostly in tropical developing countries, cut down a forest, let the wood dry for a few weeks, and then burn it, clearing the land for cultivation. Initially, the farmers plant mostly perennial crops such as rice, beans, corn, taro, and manioc. Later, they gradually introduce tree crops, and the plot is left to regrow trees while they open new fields for crops. Every year, as the soil's fertility declines and insects become a problem in the original plot, new land is cleared to replace it. Environmentalists and developers have decried slash-and-burn cultivation as a major cause of deforestation, and governments in many tropical countries have prohibited farmers from cutting and burning forests.



Figure 3: Beans and bananas planted in a swidden field in Acre, Brazil. Note the fallen and burnt logs and the proximity of the forest. Photo by Christian Palmer.

Anthropologists have challenged these depictions and have documented that slash-and-burn cultivators possess detailed knowledge of their environment; their agricultural processes are sustainable indefinitely under the right conditions.¹² When there is a low population density and an adequate supply of land, slash-and-burn cultivation is a highly sustainable type of elongated crop rotation in which annuals are planted for a few years, followed first by tree crops and then by forest, rebuilding soil nutrients and mimicking natural processes of forest disturbance in which tree falls and storms periodically open up small patches of the forest. They used the term **swidden** cultivation instead of slash and burn to

challenge the idea of the practice as inherently destructive. The surrounding forest allows the fields to quickly revert to forest thanks to seeds planted in the cleared area as birds roost in the trees and defecate into the clearing and as small rodents carry and bury the seeds. Furthermore, by mimicking natural

processes, the small patches can enhance biodiversity by creating a greater variety of microclimates in a given area of forest.

The system breaks down when cleared forests are not allowed to regrow and instead are replaced with industrial agriculture, cattle raising, or logging operations that transform the open fields into pasture or permanent agricultural plots.¹³ The system can also break down when small-holders are forced to become more sedentary because the amount of land they control is reduced by arrival of new migrants or government land seizures. In that case, local farmers must replant areas more frequently and soil fertility declines. A desire to plant cash crops for external markets can also exacerbate these changes because food is no longer grown solely for local consumption and more land is put into agriculture. Anthropologists' studies uncovered the sustainability of these traditional practices, which were destructive only when outside forces pressured local farmers to modify their traditional farming systems.

Plants, People, and Culture

One branch of ethnoecology is ethnobotany, which studies traditional uses of plants for food, construction, dyes, crafts, and medicine. Scientists have estimated that 60 percent of all of the current medicinal drugs in use worldwide were originally derived from plant materials (many are now chemically manufactured). For example, aspirin came from the bark of willow trees and an important muscle relaxant used in open-heart surgery was developed from curare, the poison used on arrows and darts by indigenous groups throughout Central and South America. In light of such discoveries, ethnobotanists traveled to remote corners of the world to document the knowledge of shamans, healers, and traditional medical experts. They have also looked at psychoactive plants and their uses across cultures.

What The People of the Amazon Know That You Don't

This [TED talk by ethnobotanist Mark Plotkin](#) describes some important cases of knowledge of medicinal plants learned from indigenous people in the Amazon.

Ethnobotanical work is interdisciplinary, and while some ethnobotanists are anthropologists, many are botanists or come from other disciplines. Anthropologists who study ethnobotany must have a working knowledge of scientific methods for collecting plant specimens and of botanical classification systems and basic ecology. Similarly, archaeologists and paleobotanists study prehistoric people's relationships and use of plants, especially in terms of domestication of plants and animals.

The Kayapó project is a famous ethnobotanical study organized by Darrell Posey and a group of twenty natural and social scientists who examined how the Kayapó people of Brazil understood, managed, and interacted with the various ecosystems they encountered as the region was transformed from a dry savanna-like *Cerrado* to Amazonian rainforest.¹⁴ By documenting Kayapó names for different ecosystems and methods they used to drop seeds and care for certain plants to expand islands of forest in the savanna, the project illustrated the complex ways in which indigenous groups shape the environments in which they live by documenting how the Kayapó cared for, managed, and enhanced forests to make them more productive.

Posey was also an activist who contributed to drafting of the Declaration of Belem, which called

for governments and corporations to respect and justly compensate the intellectual property rights of indigenous groups, especially regarding medicinal plants. He accompanied Kayapó leaders to Washington, D.C., to protest construction of a large dam using funds from the World Bank. Pressure from numerous international groups led to a halt in the dam's construction (plans for the dam have recently been resurrected). Posey's identification of the Kayapó as guardians of the rainforest provided a powerful symbol that resonated with Western ideas of indigeneity and the moral high ground of environmental conservation.

In recent years, some anthropologists have questioned whether the idea of indigenous people having an innate positive connection to the environment—what some call the myth of the ecologically noble savage—is accurate.

The Myth of the Ecologically Noble Savage

The image of the noble savage developed many centuries ago in Western culture. From the beginning of European exploration and colonialism, Europeans described the “natives” they encountered primarily in negative terms, associating them with sexual promiscuity, indolence, cannibalism, and violence. The depictions changed as Romantic artists and writers rejected modernity and industrialization and called for people to return to an idealized, simpler past. That reactionary movement also celebrated indigenous societies as simple people living in an Eden-like state of innocence. French painter Paul Gauguin's works depicting scenes from his travels to the South Pacific are typical of this approach in their celebration of the colorful, easygoing, and natural existence of the natives. The continuing influence of these stories is evident in Disney's portrayal of Pocahontas and James Cameron's 2009 film *Avatar* in which the primitive Na'vi are closely connected to and defenders of an exotic and vibrant natural world. Cameron's depiction, which includes a sympathetic anthropologist, criticizes Western capitalism as willing to destroy nature for profit.

Disney's Pocahontas: Colors of the Wind Song

[Disney's Pocahontas presents many of the stereotypes](#) of the ecologically noble savage. What are these stereotypes? Where else do we see these kinds of depictions?

Despite its positive portrayals of indigenous groups, the idea of the ecologically noble savage tends to treat indigenous peoples as an imagined “other” constructed as the opposite of Western culture rather than endeavoring to understand the world views and complexities of indigenous cultures. Similarly, a naive interpretation of indigenous environmentalism may merely project an imaginary Western ideal onto another culture rather than make a legitimate observation about that culture on its own terms.

The Kayapó in the Amazon and another group known as the Penan, who live in the Indonesian rainforest, were both confronted in the past by plans to open logging roads in their traditional territories and build dams that would flood vast amounts of their land. These indigenous communities organized, sometimes with the aid of anthropologists who had connections to media and environmental organizations, to protest the forest. The combination of two causes—rainforest conservation and indigenous rights—was powerful, successfully grabbing media attention and raising money for conservation. Their success led to later instances of indigenous groups joining efforts to halt large-scale development projects. These movements were especially powerful symbolically because they articulated the longstand-

ing Western idea of the environmentally noble savage as well as growing environmental concerns in Europe and North America.¹⁵

Some anthropologists have noted that these alliances were often fragile and rested on an imagined ideal of indigenous groups that was not always accurate. The Western media, they argue, imagined indigenous groups as ecologically noble savages, and the danger in that perspective is that the indigenous communities would be particularly vulnerable if they lost that symbolic purity and the power that came with it. The image of ecologically noble savages could break down if they were seen as promoting any kind of non-environmental practices or became too involved in messy national politics. Furthermore, indigenous groups' alliances with international activists tended to cast doubt on their patriotism and weaken their position in their own countries. Though these indigenous groups achieved visibility and some important victories, they remained vulnerable to negative press and needed to carefully manage their images.

It is important to note that depictions such as the ecologically noble savage rely on an overly simplistic portrayal of the indigenous "other." For example, some indigenous groups have been portrayed as inherently environmentalist even when they hunt animals that Western environmentalists want to preserve. Often, the more important questions for indigenous groups revolve around land rights and political sovereignty. Environmental concerns are associated with those issues rather than existing separately. The ramifications of these differences are explained in the next section, which discusses the people-versus-parks debate.

Land Claims and Mapping

One way that anthropologists have successfully used traditional ecological knowledge to advance indigenous rights is through advocacy on behalf of indigenous groups seeking to establish legal ownership or control over their traditional lands. This was first done in Alaska and Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. Indigenous groups wanted to map their seasonal movements for hunting, gathering, and other subsistence practices. The maps would demonstrate that they used the land in question and that it was important for their continued physical and cultural survival.

Since then, communities throughout the developing world have adopted similar strategies with the help of geographers and anthropologists to demarcate their lands. Often, lands used by indigenous groups are seen as empty because their population densities are quite low, and developers imagine the land as unused and open for taking. The production of maps by indigenous communities challenges those notions by inscribing the landscape with their names, relationships, and the human histories that mark their claim to the land. The maps become important symbols and tools for organizing local resistance against large development projects.

The non-governmental organization (NGO) Native Lands, for example, assisted in mapping the Mosquitia region of Honduras. Although the area, which consisted of 20,000 square kilometers, included 170 communities, most government maps showed it as practically empty. Earlier, in a back-room deal, the entire area had been granted as a logging concession to Stone Container Corporation, a Chicago-based company that made cardboard boxes and paper bags.¹⁶ When Native Lands became involved in the early 1990s, mapping was used to bring the diverse communities in the region together to communicate their presence and advocate for an end to the logging concession. The power of maps to communicate the presence of indigenous people on the land is critical, especially when the indigenous groups lack legal ownership.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Questioning Science

In the 1960s, theoretical movements in the social sciences and humanities began to challenge the presumed benefits of modernity and science. These movements were led in part by feminist and post-colonial theorists who saw science as part of a patriarchal system that was complicit in the subjugation of women and colonized people throughout the world. In environmental sciences, this move to question the objectivity of science can be seen in political ecology, a diverse field that includes many anthropologists along with geographers, political scientists, sociologists, and other social scientists. Political ecology's primary message is the importance of examining environmental questions that seem, at first glance, to be strictly scientific (i.e., apolitical). Questions of cause and effect, for instance, are comprised of political and economic agendas that can be masked by a seemingly neutral language of scientific objectivity. By focusing our attention on the power dynamic in political dimensions of conservation, principally in the developing world, political ecologists illustrate why conservation efforts so often fail to achieve the desired goals.

In an early and influential study of political ecology, Piers Blaikie and others argued that soil erosion was not caused by many of the factors blamed by state governments, including overpopulation, bad farming practices, and environmental stresses. Instead, they found that state policies such as taxes forced farmers into capitalist economic systems that encouraged unsustainable farming practices.¹⁷ From this perspective, soil erosion, which seemed to be primarily a local problem, was actually connected to national politics and needed to be addressed in that larger context. Once attention had been drawn to the relationship between state policies and soil erosion, the solution to the problem could no longer come from simply teaching small-scale farmers better soil conservation techniques. It required eliminating government practices and economic conditions that provided an incentive to use unsustainable farming practices.

Political ecology often focuses on the impacts of governments and corporations in establishing political and economic systems that constrain local behavior and challenges standard narratives regarding environmental destruction and conservation. Learning about political ecology can be difficult for environmentally minded people because it requires them to rethink many of their own positions and the science that supports them.

Revisionist Environmental History

Some of my favorite work in political ecology challenges the causes and effects of tropical deforestation. James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, for example, looked at tropical deforestation in the West African country of Guinea.¹⁸ The state's forestry department and later conservation organizations described the savanna as containing only small fragments of a once extensive tropical forest. Administrators, foresters, and botanists had created forest policies based on the idea that this degradation was caused by local villagers as they cleared and burned forests to create fields for agriculture. Through careful study of historical archives, oral histories, and historical aerial photographs, Fairhead and Leach challenged these narratives. Instead, they argued that the remaining fragments of forest had been planted by local villagers who had gradually planted useful species around their villages, improving the

soil for planting and generating other positive ecological changes. Rather than being the cause of the deforestation in areas that was previously forest, the villagers were creating the forest in an area that had previously been savanna through generations of hard work, turning the colonial narrative on its head.

Another fascinating tale comes from William Balee's work in the Amazon. Balee was a friend of Darrell Posey, and their work together got Balee thinking about the extent to which the Amazon rainforest is a product of human productive activities and not entirely natural processes. Balee disagreed with earlier anthropologists who had described how primitive groups were forced to adapt to the constraints imposed by fragile tropical ecosystems, such as declining soil fertility, a lack of plants and animals that provided protein, and other limiting factors that constrained their behavior. Balee examined a wide variety of ecosystems in the Amazon that seemed to have been created or significantly modified by human activity, including the forest islands of the Kayapó discussed by Posey, babassu palm forests, bamboo forests, Brazil nut forests near Maraba, and liana forests. His conservative estimate was that at least 12 percent of the Amazon, the largest rainforest on the planet, was a product of indigenous intervention. This conclusion challenged two major assumptions made about the rainforest and the people who lived there. First is the notion that indigenous groups were forced to adapt to the harsh environment of the rainforest. Instead, Balee found that they were resource managers who had developed ecosystems to better provide for their needs. Second is the notion that the Amazon was primeval, untouched, and pristine.¹⁹ If we extend this analysis to other regions and ecosystems, it challenges the entire notion of "untouched nature." If the wildest, least populated, and largest rainforest in the world is already highly **anthropogenic**, or shaped by humans, what can we say about supposed ideas of wilderness in other places?

Environmental historian William Cronon tackled this question directly in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature."²⁰ Cronon argued that, by celebrating a nature supposedly untouched by human hands, we tend to forget about preserving the nature with which we come in contact every day. If we focus exclusively on a concept of **wilderness**, which excludes humans and human activities by definition, we may ignore ways to help humans better interact with nature, leading to conservation policies that try to create parks without anyone inside of them and do not fully consider agricultural and urban areas. It means that one must leave civilization behind to be in contact with nature. Cronon ended his essay with a plea:

If wildness can stop being (just) out there and start being (also) in here, if it can start being as humane as it is natural, then perhaps we can get on with the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world, not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both.²¹

Cronon's call to action is for humans to consider themselves fully part of nature and to look for ways to behave responsibly in that relationship. In a way, his message is similar to Bruno Latour's about the Anthropocene. By recognizing that nature does not exist outside of human activities, we must come to terms with the impacts of our lifestyles on the environment. Some may believe that this cheapens nature, making it less sacred and significant, but understanding the diverse ways in which humans have affected the environment should make us better able to appreciate and evaluate our interactions with it. Instead of seeing nature as outside of human activities, we need to consider how our food production, transportation, and habitation systems affect the environment.

People Versus Parks

Generally, when we think of nature, we tend to think of national parks and other kinds of **protected**

areas set aside for conservation under various categories. In the United States, these include national and state parks, forests, wilderness areas, recreation areas, and wildlife conservation areas. In most cases, people are allowed to visit these areas for recreational or scientific purposes but cannot live directly in them, and regulations control the kinds of activities allowed. Protected areas developed from the Western vision of nature that separates it from culture and assumes that one must exclude humans to conserve nature. This model of setting aside protected areas has been exported to the rest of the world and persists as the most common strategy for numerous environmental goals, including protection of watersheds, endangered plants and animals, and providing space for people to interact with nature.



Figure 4: Yosemite Valley, one of the first national parks in the United States, established a precedent of setting aside natural areas for their scenic beauty, recreation, and conservation. Photo by Christian Palmer.

The most common example of a protected area is a national park. In the United States, national parks are so popular that they have been called “America’s Best Idea.” While I am an enthusiastic fan of national parks, I also recognize problems associated with the concept. We often forget, for example, that the “natural” state of such parks is mostly a recent phenomenon. Many Native American groups were systematically removed from parks (and rarely compensated) to make the parks “natural,” and some parks, such as Mt. Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Devil’s Tower in Wyoming, are directly on top of sacred sites for Native Americans. In other areas of the world, especially in developing countries, most protected areas are occupied by groups of people who have lived there for decades or centuries and have legitimate claims to the land. Some may not be aware that their land is being transformed into a park and, once informed, are shocked by all of the new regulations they are expected to obey. In worst-case scenarios, they are evicted without compensation, becoming environmental refugees. From the perspective of such groups, the govern-

ment seems to value elephants, tigers, or scenic vistas more than the people living on the land.

The conflicts that have developed between local communities in and around protected areas and state conservation officials and international conservation NGOs that advocate for the parks is referred to as the “people-versus-parks debate.”²² Communities, rather than seeing parks as preserving a public good that benefits everyone, view creation of a park as an effort by government officials to extend their power to remote rural areas. And those negative views can thwart conservation efforts when locals resent preferential treatment of animals and choose to poach or simply ignore the new regulations.

Conservation groups have begun to recognize that they must support economic development of local communities to get them on board with conservation efforts. When local residents benefit from jobs as park guards, tour guides, and research assistants, they recognize the positive economic benefits of conservation and support the initiatives. This approach aims to combine conservation and development, bringing together typically different objectives. Initially, this approach was a response to development policies associated with building infrastructure such as roads and dams that had huge environmental impacts and created negative press for the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other institutions that funded the projects. Now, most conservation projects incorporate development objectives, and the environmental impacts of development projects usually must

be assessed. In addition, the failure of many of these projects has inspired governments and NGOs to include local communities in planning and operating conservation and development schemes.

Conservation and Sustainable Development

Since the early 1990s, environmental conservation organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International and development organizations such as the World Bank and USAID have been working to bring conservation and development together. The structures and success of these approaches vary widely. Some aim to help local communities develop industries that depended on rainforests in nondestructive ways, such as non-timber forest products like rattan, rubber, medicines, and fruit. By assisting local communities in developing and marketing such products, the programs have provided them with economic alternatives that encourage people to preserve rainforests instead of chopping them down, a form of **sustainable development**.

The conservation and development project with which I am most familiar is related to **extractive reserves** in the Brazilian Amazon. I spent a summer doing research for my master's thesis on extractive reserves established by Brazilian rubber tappers in Acre, which is in the northwestern corner of the Brazilian Amazon. These rubber tappers live in the rainforest and tap natural rubber by scraping a long thin cut into the bark of the tree and returning later in the day to collect the sap that had dripped into a small container hung on the tree. Rubber trees do not grow together; they are spread out throughout the forest, requiring rubber tappers to walk several trails each day. Many also collect and sell Brazil nuts, which fall from ancient trees that live for centuries. Brazil nuts cannot be commercially grown so they must be collected from rainforests. Both of these economic activities require a healthy, mature forest. And although rubber can be produced synthetically, natural rubber is stronger, longer lasting, more flexible, and more resistant to heat than synthetic alternatives, making it ideal for use in medical and aeronautic industries where high-quality material is essential.

As cattle ranching expanded in the Amazon, rubber tappers were being evicted because they did not have formal title to the land on which they lived and worked. Led by local activist Chico Mendes, the rubber tappers organized and petitioned the government for the right to remain on the land. Mendes was eventually assassinated by owners of some of the cattle ranches who were unhappy about his activism, but ultimately, the movement was successful. Environmentalists who were worried about Amazonian deforestation joined forces with the rubber tappers, who were worried about their livelihoods, and together they created extractive reserves—protected areas owned by the federal government but managed by local communities of rubber tappers who could stay on the land indefinitely as long as they followed the environmental regulations they established. The model was successful and has since been expanded to include millions of hectares throughout the Amazon.

As with many conservation and development projects, the economic benefits of the extractive reserves were slow to accrue. When rubber prices fell in response to international commodity markets, many families stopped tapping rubber and focused on subsistence agriculture. In fact, some turned to cattle ranching, mimicking on a smaller scale many of the destructive processes they had originally protested. Because the regulations were poorly enforced, a number of families gradually turned old swidden fields into pastures instead of letting the fields revert to rainforest.

Despite these challenges, development of the land was significantly reduced relative to the original plan of allowing owners of large tracts to move in and convert large areas to pasture and soy plantations. Likewise, the rubber tappers, though still poor, had access to greater resources than they would if they have been evicted and forced to move to urban slums. Extractive reserves succeeded because they were

implemented across vast areas of the Brazilian Amazon and provided rights to thousands of small-holders.

Significant challenges remain for organizations working to improve the standard of living of rubber tappers in Brazil and conserve biodiversity, and this case study illustrates many of the problems associated with conservation and development models. Often, the economic gains are limited and require compromises in terms of conservation benefits. Usually, neither local communities nor environmentalists are completely happy with the models and their results but also agree that compromise is better than the rampant destruction averted by a reserve. Research on political ecology from such case studies forces us to recognize that the debates are not solely about environmental ethics; they also involve control over valuable resources such as land, timber, and oil. Political ecology invites us to think about the local political and cultural processes that shape the outcomes of conservation projects and determine who benefits from such projects.

First World Political Ecology

A significant challenge for political ecologists is that most of the research so far has been done in the developing world; relatively few studies have been conducted in the United States and Europe. Some newer studies are aiming to showcase what political ecology might look like when applied to similar questions in the developed world. One such study came from the Sierra Nevada foothills in California. There, a participatory conservation project was being developed that would have included local conservation organizations, government offices, and other groups. Their goal was to create an environmental management plan for the region that would limit development and urban growth. They tried to bring together a variety of environmental and pro-development groups to dialogue but were met with an intense political backlash. Pro-development forces, rather than participating, mobilized politically to remove supporters of the plan from county government seats and derail the process. In first world countries, local groups can mobilize significant political and economic resources to influence the fate of a project. This is an unlikely scenario in the developing world where conservation organizations are generally more powerful than local communities.²³

Clashes between environmentalists, who are often **exurban** migrants who moved from urban to rural areas for outdoor activities and scenic nature, and longtime residents who are involved in extractive industries such as mining, ranching, and agriculture are common in the western United States. In many cases, communities are bitterly divided over the importance of nearby public lands and the role of the federal government in managing those lands. In developing countries, political ecologists as a group tend to side with local communities and against government intervention. In the United States, left-leaning and environmental sympathies can push them to side with government intervention at the expense of local communities. Some political ecologists have noted this contradiction and called for local movements and their pushes against extension of states power to be taken more seriously, including in the United States.²⁴

Another fascinating political ecology associated with the first world is a study by Paul Robbins and Julie Sharp that looked at the American lawn, noting that 23 percent of urban land in the United States is dedicated to lawns and that urban areas are growing at a rate of 675,000 hectares a year.²⁵ In addition, the vast majority of those lawns are sprayed with fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Because these chemicals wash into waterways, lawns have an enormous collective environmental impact. Robbins and Sharp analyzed advertisements for lawn care products and interviewed and surveyed households across the country, leading to some startling discoveries. One of the strongest indicators of intensive

and toxic lawn care was not a lack of knowledge about the environmental impacts of the products, but how well they knew the names of their neighbors. They describe the moral economy of a turf grass commons in which maintaining a healthy lawn signified important values of being connected to the community, your family, and nature. The aesthetics and family values associated with lawns outweighed concerns about environmental impacts, suggesting that water conservation activists must understand and address underlying cultural ideas about lawns in the United States.

Where's the Ecology?

Political ecologists Andrew Vayda and Bradley Walters have noted that the field of political ecology seems to be increasingly political, overemphasizing how different groups use environmental issues to gain control over land and resources and ignoring important ecological considerations.²⁶ They argue that political ecologists need to take the limits, constraints, and challenges associated with natural systems more seriously and research those systems in addition to local cultural and political systems. In a study of the destruction of mangrove forests in the Philippines, they examined both the role of local communities in the destruction and management of mangrove ecosystems and the natural limits that impede replanting in the area. The next section presents examples of anthropologists who thought creatively about how to integrate theories from the natural sciences back into anthropology while simultaneously questioning whether science provides unbiased objective results. This requires a careful balancing act but is necessary to generate an approach that respects the contributions of scientific and anthropological knowledge.

ADDITIONAL APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Eco-Justice: Race, Gender, and Environmental Destruction

Many environmental justice advocates are anthropologists and political ecologists. They examine environmental questions from the perspective of social equality, identifying impacts and risks associated with environmental damage that have disproportionately affected socially marginalized groups. For example, on the Hawaiian island of Oahu the trash incinerator and landfill are on the west side of the island where many native Hawaiians and other low-income groups live.²⁷ Locating landfills, incinerators, chemical plants, industrial factories, nuclear waste storage, and other environmentally hazardous facilities near communities of color, Native American reservations, and relatively poor communities is not accidental. A lack of economic and political power prevents residents of such communities from influencing the large industries and government agencies that determine where such facilities are placed.

The same process is at work when environmentally toxic jobs and waste storage facilities are outsourced. For example, many computers and other electronic appliances that contain toxic components made from heavy metals are shipped to West Africa for disassembly and recycling.²⁸ This arrangement makes economic sense for consumers in relatively rich countries in North America and Europe, but the workers in Africa are out of sight and out of mind, often working without proper protection from the toxic metals or even training on their dangers. And as global supply chains have expanded, consumers in the United States rarely know where the clothes, electronics, and toys they purchase are made, the

impacts of that production, or what happens to them after they dispose of them. By looking at these long complex commodity or supply chains, which cover products from their cradle to grave, social scientists interested in **eco-justice** can create awareness of these issues.

Anthropologists also work to connect **ecocide** (environmental destruction) with **ethnocide** (cultural destruction). In many indigenous communities worldwide, cultural activities and beliefs are connected to specific landscapes and ecologies. Consequently, as a logging or mining company moves in, it destroys both the environment and culture. Eco-justice studies call attention to these connections and seek to protect both culture and the environment and the relationship between them. Barbara Rose Johnston's work with Marshallese Islanders in Micronesia documented the impact of U.S. atomic bomb testing on the atolls and supported their claims for compensation from the United States for damage by carefully documenting the relationship between their culture and the contaminated landscapes ruined by nuclear testing.²⁹

Anthropologists are often involved in these kinds of research projects because they are on the ground in remote locations around the world and share a disciplinary interest in raising awareness of cultural differences and inequality. They are also trained to examine categories of race, class, nationality, and other social factors that differentiate groups of people and are the basis for unequal treatment. While valuing cultural diversity, anthropologists also argue for a holistic perspective that universally values human life regardless of such differences.

Science and Technology Studies

The study of science and technology is a diverse field that uses social science methods to analyze the culture of science in industrialized and modern societies. Like political ecology and ethnoecology, science and technology studies question the objectivity of modern science to some extent and view science as a product of specific cultural understandings. These studies often look to the history of a science to understand its development in a specific cultural, political, and economic context.

An early developer of the discipline is Bruno Latour, who introduced the idea of the Anthropocene discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Latour's earlier work included a study, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979), written with Steve Woolgar, that used the ethnographic technique of participant observation in a laboratory at the Salk Institute for Biological Sciences to determine how scientific knowledge is produced and challenged dominant narratives about the scientific method.³⁰ Other studies have examined concepts of race and indigeneity in the Human Genome Project and how remote sensing technologies shape how anthropologists interact with ecosystems in the Guatemalan rainforest.³¹ As science and technology become increasingly important parts of our lived experiences and our understanding of the environment around us, anthropologists naturally analyze those connections.

Many anthropologists who study science and technology endeavor to make sure they do not throw the baby out with the bath water. They do not deny the important contributions of science and the scientific method. However, they also pay attention to the limitations and biases inherent in those methods.

Multispecies Ethnographies

Multispecies ethnographies challenge the centrality of humans in the world. Most of the stories we

tell about ourselves and our place in the world and especially stories told by anthropologists revolve around *Homo sapiens*. Increasingly, though, some anthropologists have begun to think about how other species make decisions and exercise a degree of agency that can influence history. For example, Donna Haraway writes about dogs and how the relationship between dogs and humans has evolved over time. She criticizes people who anthropomorphize dogs and challenges her readers to understand dogs on their own terms.³²

We can also think about the role of bacteria in human evolution and cultural development and remind ourselves that diseases, parasites, and symbiotic gut bacteria that allow us to eat certain kinds of foods have been very influential in shaping human history and cultural development over time. Other works have, for example, re-examined plant and animal domestication from non-human perspectives and explored how forests “think.”³³ By carefully considering other species and ecological processes, we decenter our increasingly human-centered focus. Much of the work on multispecies ethnography has been done by feminist anthropologists who have already been at work for decades on similarly decentering male-focused histories of our species.

APPLYING ANTHROPOLOGY IN CONSERVATION

Reforestation

Anthropological analyses of the environment may seem overly theoretical and abstract, far removed from actual practices and the work of learning to live with and within our environment. Anthropologists may be seen as hidden in ivory towers of academia, disconnected from real world issues and problems. However, applied and activist anthropology offer avenues for anthropologists to tackle problems on the ground and make a direct difference. Applied anthropologists often work with conservation and development organizations to implement projects that depend on an accurate understanding of local cultures and practices to succeed.

Anthropologist Gerald Murray’s doctoral dissertation examined land tenure among small-holders in Haiti. After finishing his dissertation work, Murray delivered a presentation to USAID on a Haitian reforestation project. He joked that if they gave him “a jeep and carte blanche access to a \$50,000 checking account” he could prove his “anthropological assertions about peasant economic behavior and produce more trees on the ground than their multi-million-dollar Ministry of Agriculture charade.”³⁴ USAID program officers accepted his challenge, inviting him to head a \$4 million project to reforest Haiti. Using his understanding of Haitian small-holders, he drastically changed the USAID’s approach. Instead of trying to convince small-holders that trees were valuable for their environmental services, he emphasized fast-growing species that could be sold for firewood, charcoal, and lumber. By giving the trees to the small-holders and allowing them to harvest and sell them whenever they wanted, he motivated them to plant and care for the seedlings like any other valuable cash crop. In prior projects, tree-cutting was prohibited and the trees belonged to the government. Consequently, no one took care of the trees and they were eventually destroyed by livestock or neglect and rarely reached maturity. Treating the trees as a cash crop motivated farmers to plant trees on their own land, thus meeting USAID’s goals of stabilizing the soil and reducing illegal tree cutting (since farmers had access to stands of their own) and providing a direct economic benefit from selling wood. The project was a stunning success—20 million trees were planted in the first four years. By understanding local farmers’ perspectives, Murray

was able to work with Haitian small-holders instead of seeing them as an impediment to reforestation efforts.

A number of anthropologists are working with conservation and development organizations to assist them in understanding local cultures and implementing conservation and development projects. This work is often done in teams in which anthropologists join with foresters, conservation biologists, agronomists, and others to implement projects. Because they often speak the local language, understand the peoples' perspectives, and are interested in close, on-the-ground observations, anthropologists make valuable contributions in support of conservation and economic development.

Climate Change

In 2014, the American Anthropological Association's Global Climate Change Task Force submitted a report on climate change that summarized anthropology's engagement with the issue. Currently, climate change is perhaps the single most important environmental issue worldwide, and our responses to it will shape the future of our species on the planet. The report identified the human causes and contributions to climate change and emphasized that climate change is already having an impact as rising sea levels are forcing residents of places such as Kiribati to flee their island homes and melting ice shelves threaten the subsistence practices and the lifestyle of Inuit groups in Alaska. These examples illustrate how the impacts of climate change will disproportionately affect groups who have contributed the least to the accumulation of greenhouse gases, highlighting the social inequality of impacts of climate change around the world.

The report analyzed drivers of climate change, focusing on consumption, land use, energy, and population growth. An anthropological analysis of consumption reminds us that the categories of "necessities" and "luxuries" are cultural constructs. For example, Western societies now accept cell phones as necessities despite the fact that humans survived perfectly well for thousands of years without them. As the global middle class expands and places new demands on ecosystems, a cultural understanding of social classes and related consumption practices will be increasingly important to analyses the causes of climate change and potential solutions.

The report also criticized much of the language of climate change and its focus on concepts of adaptation, vulnerability, and resilience that elided the differential impacts of climate change on different groups of people. The task force noted that proposed global solutions focused on top-down management strategies that did not take existing social issues of "poverty, marginalization, lack of education and information, and loss of control over resources" that structure vulnerability of different populations to the impacts of a warming planet into account.³⁵ The report also illustrates the power of language to shape certain debates and potential solutions to problems, an important piece of anthropological analysis.

At the end of the report, the task force recommended actions anthropologists could take to contribute to efforts to address global climate change, including reducing the carbon footprint of anthropological meetings, working with interdisciplinary research teams to continue research, and maintaining a research agenda that stresses the importance of anthropological contributions to discussions of climate change. Perhaps most interesting is their conclusion that many of the most innovative and creative approaches to addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change were occurring at local and regional levels, recognizing communities' innovative efforts to bypass national and international gridlock and develop approaches that reflect local realities and address local problems. The anthropological

focus on local communities is a welcome change of perspective when, by definition, the scale of global climate change seems to preclude local involvement and solutions.

Anthropologists at Work in Conservation Organizations

Anthropologists work for international conservation organizations like Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Wildlife Fund and with government agencies like the National Park Service, the Peace Corps, and USAID. They also work for smaller conservation organizations, urban planning initiatives, environmental education groups, environmental activist networks, and other initiatives aimed at reducing our negative impact on the planet.

Cultural Resources Management

Management of cultural resources is a growing field of anthropology that catalogs and preserves archaeological sites and historic places threatened by development, bringing together various principles developed in anthropology over the years. First, it recognizes the need to preserve both “natural” ecosystems and ecosystems shaped by past human activities. By connecting natural and human diversity, anthropologists recognize humans’ interdependence with the environment over time. Second, cultural resource managers recognize the need for continuing involvement of indigenous communities with archaeological sites and seek their input to inform management plans and practices. As cultural resource management has become standard operating procedure, archaeologists have begun to meet with members of the local community and others who have a stake in their research. These interactions improve archaeological research and create the kind of cross-cultural bridges that strengthen the discipline. Finally, destruction of historical places and archaeological sites is a form of environmental destruction that, like climate change and species extinctions, requires us to critically examine the cultural values underlying that destruction.

CONCLUSION

The discipline of anthropology provides a unique perspective on human-environmental interactions and thus generates valuable insights into the social, political, and cultural complexity of modern environmental problems. Anthropologists are hard at work with governments, conservation organizations, and community groups to understand and solve complex environmental problems. I hope this discussion has challenged you to think about the environment and conservation in a new way, allowing you to help reframe these debates and develop innovative solutions to the complex problems that confront us.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways have anthropologists examined human interactions with the environment over time?

2. What is the myth of the ecologically noble savage? What are some recent examples of this myth? What is the impact of this idea on indigenous people?
3. How has research in political ecology challenged traditional conservation efforts? What are some of the problems with promoting parks or ecological reserves as solutions to environmental problems?
4. What is the Anthropocene? How has research in anthropology contributed to an improved understanding of how humans interact with the “natural” world?
5. What insights from anthropology do you think would be most useful to the public, environmental activists, and government officials when considering policies related to current environmental challenges?

GLOSSARY

Anthropocene: a term proposed to describe the current moment (or epoch) in geological time in which the effects of human activities have altered the fundamental geochemical cycles of the earth. There is some disagreement about when the Anthropocene period began—most likely, it began with industrialization.

Anthropogenic: environments and pollutants produced by human activities.

Cultural ecology: a subfield of cultural anthropology that explores the relationship between human cultural beliefs and practice and the ecosystems in which those beliefs and practices occur.

Cultural evolutionism: a theory popular in nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology suggesting that societies evolved through stages from simple to advanced. This theory was later shown to be incorrect.

Ecocide: destruction of an environment, especially when done intentionally by humans.

Eco-justice: a movement to recognize and remedy the adverse relationship between social inequality and the harms and risks that come from environmental destruction and pollutants.

Ethnocide: destruction of a culture, often intentionally, through destruction of or removal from their territory, forced assimilation, or acculturation.

Ethnoecology: the relationships between cultural beliefs and practices and the local environment. Components include ethnobiology, ethnobotany, and ethnozoology.

Extractive reserves: community-managed protected areas designed to allow for sustainable extraction of certain natural resources (such as fish, rubber, Brazil nuts, and rattan) while maintaining key ecosystems in place.

Exurban: migration of generally affluent people from urban areas to rural areas for the amenities of nature, recreation, and scenic beauty associated with rural areas.

Historical particularism: the theory that every culture develops in a unique way due to its history, including the interaction of people with the natural environment.

Homeostasis: the movement of a particular system (a human body, an ecosystem) towards equilibrium. In ecology this is associated with the idea that ecosystems should remain at a climax ecosystem associated with an area.

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

Materialism: a Marxist theory emphasizing the ways in which human social and cultural practices are influenced by basic subsistence (economic) needs.

Multispecies ethnographies: an ethnographic approach in which anthropologists include non-human species as active participants in a society or culture and study their influence and actions.

Political ecology: an interdisciplinary field of research that emphasizes the political and economic dimensions of environmental concerns.

Processual archaeology: a shift in archaeological studies toward scientific methods, testing of hypotheses, quantitative analysis, and theory-driven approaches and away from an earlier emphasis on typologies and descriptive analysis.

Protected areas: lands set aside for conservation of the environment for their scenic beauty, biodiversity, recreational value, and other reasons.

Succession: changes in types of species in an area over time. For example, it would describe the different ecosystems that gradually replace one other after a forest fire.

Sustainable development: development that can meet present needs without damaging the environment or limiting the potential for future generations.

Swidden: an agricultural practice, also called shifting cultivation and slash-and-burn, in which fields are cleared, burned, and planted for several seasons before being returned to fallow for an extended period.

Wilderness: a natural area that is untouched or unchanged by human activities and often seen as a cultural construct of the American West.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I grew up hiking and surfing in Hawaii and became interested in the environment and conservation. I studied Biology and International Cultural Studies at Brigham Young University-Hawaii as an undergraduate, including research on how traditional Hawaiian healers adapted to introduced plant species and diseases. My master's degree is in Environmental Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies where I researched extractive reserves in the Brazilian Amazon. My Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz focused on tourism, urban development, and conservation in a small fishing town in Northeastern Brazil that was transitioning to a tourist economy.

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NOW SHOWING: DOUBLE FEATURE: *BLACKFISH* AND *ANTHROPOCENE*

Blackfish is powerful documentary about the treatment of killer whales at SeaWorld. Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite and released in 2013, the film was instrumental in changing SeaWorld's practices. *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* is the third film in a trilogy by Jennifer Baichwal, Nicholas de Pencier, and Edward Burtynsky. The Anthropocene is the geological epoch defined by the human impact on the planet. Released in 2018, the film includes stunning images of the scale of the destruction wrought by human activity.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

"Anthropocene" by Liana Chua and Hannah Fair (2019)

"There Are No Peripheries to Humanity: Northern Alaska Nuclear Dumping and the Inupiat's Search for Redress" by Edith Turner (1997)

"How dogs dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of transspecies engagement" by Eduardo Kohn (2007)

Davis, "Another World: Theme Parks and Nature" by Susan G. Davis (1997)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Explain to a friend or family member the idea that "nature is culturally constructed," using examples from *Blackfish* and *Anthropocene*.

Chapter 12: Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews some of the key insights from cultural anthropology, including the possibility that we can make whatever world we want. The chapter consists of a lightly edited version of "The Art of Being Human" by Michael Wesch (2018). The film is *The Social Dilemma*.

The Art of Being Human

They show us that collectively, we make the world. Understanding how we make the world – how it could be made or understood differently – is the road toward realizing our full human potential. It is the road to true freedom.

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS

In 1983, a young anthropology graduate from Duke University named Paul Farmer set off for Haiti. He had done research on Haitian migrant workers at Duke and become deeply interested in their home country. He wanted to become a doctor and an anthropologist and thought he might sample a bit of both by going to Haiti and volunteering in health clinics.

While there, he boarded a bus with a new friend, Ophelia Dahl. Ophelia, the daughter of movie star Patricia Neal and author Roald Dahl, was just 18 at the time, and looking for a calling in life. As they navigated the rough, unkempt roads of Haiti, Paul leaned out the window and waved happily to all who greeted them, which Ophelia found nerdy but beautifully innocent and charming. Then they came upon an overturned bus on the road. Mangos destined for the market were scattered everywhere as people meandered about making sense of what had just happened. A woman lay lifeless, with a strip of cardboard covering her body.

Paul went stone silent. Ophelia tried to comfort him by saying, "It's just an accident." But Farmer was "seeing big" like an anthropologist. He saw that the neglected road was no accident. The

worn shocks of the bus were no accident. The overloading of the bus with peasants going to market with their mangoes was no accident. These were all a result of poverty, and Farmer could see through this poverty the past 400 years of history in Haiti. He saw the 17th century slave colony of France, the brutal and bloody fight for independence, the French demand that Haiti pay back \$21 billion for their "lost property" (the slaves who were now the citizens of Haiti being asked to pay for themselves), and the environmental collapse that came from trying to pay those debts. So when he saw the woman who was riding in a worn-out bus over a torn-up road to sell mangos in a Third World market, lying dead on the side of the road, he turned to Ophelia and responded, "It is never 'just an accident'."

This peculiar view of the world, that there are no pure accidents, is also an empowering one. Paul Farmer and Ophelia Dahl would soon recruit the young anthropologist Jim Kim to their cause and set out to provide the best healthcare possible to the world's poor. Thirty years later, their efforts would be celebrated as "the friendship that changed the world." And it all started by applying the anthropological perspective of seeing your own seeing, seeing small, seeing big, and seeing it all to realize that there are no pure accidents. If the message building from the preceding chapters was "We make the world," the message of this trio has been, "We can do better."

"TOUT MOUN SE MOUN"

During one of his first trips to Haiti, Farmer shadowed an American doctor. He was enamored with his competence, talent, and care, and saw him as a great role model. But he was soon disenchanted to find out that this American doctor had no intention of staying in Haiti. "I'm an American, and I'm going home," the doctor said. Farmer kept pondering the conversation and hanging on those words, "I'm an American," wondering how it is that we come to classify ourselves into these exclusive categories, thus limiting our responsibilities and allegiances to others.

That night, a pregnant woman suffering from severe malaria came in and crashed into a coma. She needed a blood transfusion, but the only place to get blood was far away in the capital city, and the blood would cost money. Farmer ran around the hospital gathering money and came up with fifteen dollars. The woman's sister took the money and set off for the city, but returned empty handed. She did not have enough money for the bus and the blood. The pregnant woman, a mother of five, died.

The sister was distraught, sobbing and crying. Through her tears Farmer heard her say, "You can't even get a blood transfusion if you're poor." And then she kept repeating, "*Tout moun se moun. Tout moun se moun.*" We are all human beings.

Tout moun se moun. Driven by such words, Farmer dedicated himself to serving all humans as humans. He turned his attention to those who had been most neglected by the world. He set off for Cange in the central highlands of Haiti, the poorest of the poor in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Cange was the perfect place for Paul Farmer. From the mountain road entering Cange, there is a beautiful vista of an expansive blue lake framed by the steep mountainsides. But Farmer, who could see that same scene through the eyes of local Haitians, with the benefit of an anthropological lens to see the bigger picture, saw that this was no simple beautiful mountain lake. It was, despite the deceptive calm and tranquility of the mountain lake, one of the many reasons for the extensive poverty of Cange, and it was no accident.

The lake was artificially created by a dam project led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide irrigation and power to Haiti. However, the recipients of the water and power were not the poor of Haiti, but American-owned agribusinesses and the Haitian elite living downstream.

The lake swallowed up the best farm land of Cange and destroyed people's homes. Farmer called the people who had to evacuate the valley "the water refugees," and they were some of the most poor and destitute in a country full of the poor and destitute. Instead of farming in the once-fertile valley the river ran through, the people were forced onto the steep mountainsides where water would not hold. They tried to farm anyway, which led to devastating erosion. Pushed beyond malnutrition toward famine, virtually everything green was consumed and used up, so that today Cange is a shocking glimpse into a world that has suffered true environmental devastation.

Paul Farmer frequently writes and speaks about the dam near Cange as an example of structural power and the structural violence that can result.

"THE ANTHROPOLOGIST WITHIN"

Farmer enrolled in a program at Harvard that allowed him to pursue a degree in anthropology while simultaneously earning his doctorate in medicine. He knew that if he was going to serve the world's poor, he would need the anthropological perspective to understand the broader cultural environment and issues impacting their health outcomes.

Throughout his training, he continued to spend most of his time in Haiti. His professors were not against it, as he was providing important medical care to people who needed it, and it proved to be a fruitful place to apply what he was learning in graduate school.

His work had a profound influence on anthropology. In one of his first essays, "The Anthropologist Within," he argued that the traditional manner of practicing anthropology as an impartial observer made him feel restricted in his ability to help solve the many problems surrounding him in Haiti. Since that article was written in the early 1980s, anthropologists have become much more active in their work, and are more likely to actively participate in providing

solutions to local problems rather than standing idly by as impartial observers.

But Farmer was struggling to make a big impact in Cange. He needed money to complete his vision of building a free hospital providing outstanding medical care to the poor. His essay caught the eye of Tom White, the owner of a construction company in Boston who was interested in donating money to feed the poor in Haiti. In fact, he planned to give away every last dollar of his substantial fortune before he died. In Paul Farmer, he thought he had found someone who could make sure his money was well spent.

With the first \$1 million donated by White, Paul Farmer established Partners in Health/Zanmi Lasante. The plan was not to simply support Paul Farmer in Haiti, but instead to create "partners in health" by training community health workers throughout rural areas of Haiti.

"O FOR THE P"

As the three friends – Farmer, Kim, and Dahl – set about crafting the core goals for Partners in Health, they continually came back to the idea of "O for the P," short for "preferred option for the poor." The "preferred option" refers to the idea that poor people should not just get the bare essentials of healthcare, but they should receive the same top-quality "preferred options" that the wealthy receive. *Tout moun se moun* – we are all human beings – drove every aspect of their operating philosophy.

While this might seem like an obvious and uncontroversial goal, it ran against the operating consensus of other development professionals, as well as the top global aid organizations such as the World Health Organization. The standard consensus at the time was organized around the idea of "cost effectiveness." Instead of providing the "preferred option" the scarce resources available to development projects should be used to maximize benefits to the most people.

"O for the P" opened up a serious controversy. Imagine a fairly common scenario that one might face in rural Haiti or any other impoverished area. A patient has a complicated case of TB that will cost \$5,000 or more to cure. Ordinary cases of TB cost just \$200 to cure. Do you cure the one for \$5,000 or do you cure 25 ordinary cases for the same amount? The principle of cost effectiveness would suggest that you cure the 25, not the one.

But Farmer, Kim and Dahl were taking a longer view. They so strongly believed that the highest quality healthcare should be available to all that they decided to go down that long, hard, unexplored path of providing the best for everyone, in hopes that they might be able to attract more money, lower costs, and ultimately save even more lives than they could by following the traditional model of "cost effectiveness."

THE STRUCTURAL POWER OF MEDICINE

The key barrier to O for the P was the cost of medicine. When they first decided to try to treat the most complicated cases of TB, the treatment drugs could cost as much as \$60,000 for just one patient. With such high prices, the World Health Organization (WHO) would not recommend the drugs, since it goes against the logic of cost effectiveness. And since the WHO would not recommend the drugs, generic manufacturers would not produce them. These three factors create an interlocking triad in which prices are high, so the WHO will not recommend it, so generics will not produce it, so prices stay high – a vicious cycle that continues as people all over the world continue to die while drugs are readily available that could save their lives.

Jim Kim took the lead on trying to break through this vicious cycle that kept prices so high. As he did, he kept encountering a prevailing supporting myth for why the drugs were not being made more available: 'Poor people are poor because they are stupid and lazy.' They are lazy, so they do not deserve the drugs. Their lives are

not as highly valued as those of the wealthy. And they are stupid and will likely misuse the drugs, build resistance to the drugs, and cause further harm.

The WHO and development professionals who held these views were not as prejudiced as you might think. They formed their opinions based on experience. They came into their careers idealistic and full of hope, but constantly found their carefully crafted plans fell apart in practice, and treating TB was especially difficult. To properly treat TB, the patient must take the proper drugs and keep taking them after the symptoms have cleared in order to ensure that the TB does not recur or get passed on to others. Unfortunately, when people do not complete the drug sequence, the TB can develop resistance to the cheap drugs, and an outbreak of multi-drug resistant TB can take hold.

Paul Farmer saw the same patterns, but he refused to blame the patients. Instead, he studied them anthropologically and developed a new prescription for TB. His new prescription was not just for drugs, but also for regular visits from community health workers who would travel throughout rural areas to check up on the patients and make sure they were taking all of their drugs. And as a third element, he even prescribed money – a cash stipend so that they could pay for good food and childcare while they were sick. His studies had shown that the poor were not stupid, they were simply constrained and forced to make bad decisions while they were sick in order to make ends meet. A small cash stipend of just \$5 was enough to let them rest properly and pay for help until they were fully recovered.

The success rates before Farmer's intervention were dismal. Afterward, the success rate soared to nearly 100 percent. When he published the results, it became a model for others all over the world.

With their success, they decided to push harder against the structural power that was keeping the drugs for more complicated forms of TB so high, and launched a project in the shanty towns outside of Lima, Peru where there was an outbreak of Multidrug Resistant TB (MDR). Farmer held to his same prescription: drugs,

regular visits, and a cash stipend. The problem was that the drugs were \$15,000 per patient.

The World Health Organization and other development professionals pushed back. It was not cost effective to treat people for \$15,000 each. It was not sustainable. *Tout moun se moun*, Farmer thought, and they set off to find a way.

With their background in anthropology, Farmer and Kim know that price is a social construction. There is no inherent quality of the drugs themselves that make them worth \$15,000. So they set about changing the structure to lower the cost. Jim Kim, with his passion for policy and transforming bureaucratic structures, threw himself into the problem. He had to find a way to convince generic manufacturers to produce the drugs, which would create competition and drive down the cost. But the WHO would not recommend the drugs due to their high cost, and because of their concerns about poor people and poor regions not having the knowledge and resources to properly administer the drugs.

To convince the WHO, Kim promised them that Partners in Health would set up a "Green Light Committee" to create standards and require training to ensure that the drugs would be administered responsibly. With the WHO on board, Kim went to the generic manufacturers, who agreed to make the drugs. Prices fell 97%. 750,000 lives were saved.

It was an amazing feat. Jim Kim was trained as a medical doctor and hoped that one day he would save lives—and here he had just saved 750,000 lives without even touching a human body. He simply recognized a configuration of structural power that was causing great structural violence, and changed the structure.

AIDS IN AFRICA

By 2001, their money was running out. Tom White was determined to die without a dollar to his name, and he was nearing his end. They had created an effective treatment for TB that was

spreading throughout the world, and they were having great success treating AIDS in Haiti at a time when much of the world thought that treating AIDS among poor people would not be "cost effective" or "sustainable."

At that time, thirty million people in Africa had AIDS, and only 50,000 of them were receiving treatment. The Partners in Health model was working in Haiti, in circumstances similar to those in many African countries. This made people hopeful, and The Global Fund to fight AIDS was launched, raising millions of dollars to combat AIDS. The Gates Foundation followed soon after this with a \$45 million initiative.

Paul Farmer joined Dr. Agnes Binagwaho in Kenya to set up a system that followed the same prescription Farmer had always preferred: the proper drugs, follow-ups by health workers, and a cash stipend to cover expenses while sick. While many still saw the treatment (and especially the stipend) as radical, the results were proven time and time again. The program in Kenya worked, and it showed people throughout the entire system that we could go after AIDS in Africa.

The WHO was brought on board, the generic manufacturers started producing the drugs, and the cost of treatment plummeted. "Anti-viral drugs can extend life for many years," President of the United States George Bush announced in his State of the Union address later that year, "And the cost of those drugs has dropped from \$12,000/year to under \$300/year, which places a tremendous possibility within our grasp ... Ladies and Gentlemen, seldom has history given an opportunity to do so much for so many." He proceeded to ask Congress to dedicate \$15 billion over the next five years "to turn the tide against AIDS in the most afflicted nations of Africa and the Caribbean." His request was greeted by a jubilant standing ovation, delivered from both sides of the political aisle.

Jim Kim, Paul Farmer, and Ophelia Dahl were astonished. In just twenty years of deeply dedicated service to their calling, they moved from working and struggling outside the system to being insiders. A

few years later, Jim Kim was appointed by Barack Obama as the new President of the World Bank, an opportunity to use tremendous wealth and power to bring better health and well-being to the world.

LEARN MORE

- ❖ Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, by Tracy Kidder

- ❖ Bending the Arc: A Friendship that Changed the World. Documentary Film.

**IF PAUL FARMER IS THE MODEL,
WE'RE ~~SCREWED~~ GOLDEN**

At Partners in Health headquarters there is a sign that says, "If Paul Farmer is the model, we are golden." But "golden" is on a piece of paper taped over another word, "screwed" (or rather, a synonym of screwed starting with "F"). It is a favorite saying of Jim Kim. What he meant was that nobody can hope to be just like Paul Farmer. He is incredibly intelligent and selfless with natural gifts for medicine and anthropology. It would do us no good to hold ourselves up to that high of a standard. Instead, we can learn from Paul Farmer (and Jim Kim and Ophelia Dahl) that seemingly impossible problems can be solved. We can discover that "we make the world" and that "we can do better."

In a recent commencement address at the Maharishi University of Management, comedian Jim Carrey reminded us that the dynamics of fear and love operate in every moment of our life. "Fear is going to be a major player in your life," he said, "but you get to decide how much. ... You can spend your whole life imagining ghosts, worrying about your pathway to the future, but all there will ever be is what's happening here, and the decisions we make in this moment, which are based in either love or fear."

Perhaps we have all caught a little glimpse of what lies down the road of the hero's path. We have had moments of hope where fear fades away. For a brief moment, we have that sense of connection, clarity, and conviction that allowed Martin Luther King to say in his final speech, "We got some difficult days ahead, but it really doesn't matter to me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. I've seen the Promised Land." He was, by that time, living beyond fear and beyond even the most basic desire to preserve his own life. He was living for something much greater than himself. "I may not get there with you," he told the overflowing crowd. "But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land." For that moment, we feel that sense of connection that the heroes who have come before us talk about.

Most of us will not lead a movement like Martin Luther King. We will not lead a revolution like Gandhi, or end apartheid like Nelson Mandela. But we will all have to face millions of decisions, some mundane and others momentous, and each time we will do so out of fear or love.

To find out how these decisions play out in everyday life, and how the lessons of this class might help in those decisions, I reached out to alumni of this class and asked them to share with me their own heroic journeys through life. I received letters back from all over the world.

They were now engaged in every kind of career you could imagine all over the world, applying the mindset, methods, and goals of anthropology to a wide range of problems. One had been paid by Virgin Records to travel across the United States in an RV studying how young people listen to music. Another was working with Facebook on what to do with social media profiles after people die. Many were living abroad in places like Dubai, Cambodia, South Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. Some were working on global health care while others held military leadership positions in combat zones. Others had settled into jobs in the United States in a

wide range of careers including game design, clinical psychology, advertising, and business.

All of them had stories to tell about how the “art of seeing” or how communication, empathy, and thoughtfulness had been essential to their careers, but I was especially struck by how many of them had found these ideas so essential in helping them in their everyday lives. Indeed, it was their letters that inspired me to write this book.

One shared her journey out of fear toward true love and how anthropology helped her understand her journey. She realized that she had fallen into an abusive relationship because she feared being alone. "It was my default to love myself through the eyes of men," she recalled. "I treated relationships as a safety net, holding me high above a pool of insecurity." It was like a spider's web, she said, and she was like a fly, "stuck there on my own accord ... smack in the middle while a spider consumed me."

She ended up in an extremely abusive relationship. "I lost hold of myself and ended up where I had been leading myself all along, existing as an object for him." She realized that the core of her fear that led to these poor decisions was the fear of being alone and unloved. She went to a very rural area for several months where she was forced to live with her loneliness. There she found that she was not afraid. She felt free to love herself, which freed her to love others rather than to simply be consumed by them.

Another former student shared how he had battled against the dynamics of fear and hate, and how he came to discover these dynamics through the anthropological perspective. He fell in love with a girl who had been in an abusive relationship. One night he had a dream, and in the dream he could see ships burning on a lake.

"I watched a burning ship that represented her old boyfriend, who had abused her, sailing past other ships, catching them each on fire. Those ships would sail on and set fire to more ships, and so on. I watched as his ship pull alongside her and lit her on fire. They pulled up to me on my island and began shooting fire at me, and it

seemed to me like it was the most important thing in the world that I not catch on fire, that I don't topple.

"Do people who are hurting spread the pain to others in an attempt to elicit empathy?" he wondered. "And does this create a cycle of hurting that spreads like a fire, like burning ships bumping into one another on a lake?"

He resolved to not allow himself to get burned, but she burned him. He tried to withstand the pain and let it dissipate so he would not spread the fire, but it only smoldered inside of him, ready to ignite into a raging inferno at any moment. She could see it inside of him. "She didn't think we could stay together," he said, and so, "I told her that I wouldn't see her that evening. I was going to fight my demon."

He rode his bike out to the lake where they had camped together for the first time, and laid down on top of a hill. A massive thunderstorm moved in. "I was scared," he recalled. "That thing could really kill me ... 'You're nothing,' God seemed to whisper." But then the winds calmed and the sky opened up as he gazed up at the stars. "It really was the balance of infinity staring me in the face," he remembers. "The moon seemed so close. The stars became joined by strands of light, forming a beautiful web. The sky fell then rose, zooming towards me and retreating like the lungs of an animal." And this is when he had his revelation:

I somehow ended up kneeling back on my blanket, and the world collapsed inside of me. I saw myself. I knew myself. It was terrifying. I held myself before me, suspended in the air above me. Every piece of my identity was evident. Every fabric of construction, every pride, stubborn impulse, and conceited motivation. Each piece of my ego swirled together and formed me, suspended in the air beside the full moon.

I was hugging myself in a child's pose and I remember crying out, almost screaming as I saw myself like never before. In horror. In awe. I saw me. I saw the pieces of me

that were destroying me. I knew and understood. I also saw her. I saw hurt and love.

I took these things, these destructive aspects of myself which I had been too proud to recognize before, which was producing the pain within myself, and let them float into that yawning abyss above me. They were not bound by gravity, but by my ego.

I spent the entire night on that moon-bathed hill. I learned that that my conflict was not coming from without, but from within myself, due to pride and stubbornness. I was able to let them go. It was painful and terrifying to look so deeply into myself, but I found that the source of my pain was within myself, not within her.

That night on the hill wrestling with myself was one of the most intense experiences of my life, but it worked. I'm currently in the healthiest, most fulfilling relationship that I can imagine. If I had placed the blame on the world around me and bolstered myself on my own ego, I would have collapsed, our relationship would have collapsed ... we would have set fire to more ships.

As it is, we are able to pass our joy and loving relationship to others every day.

He ended his letter by recounting the lessons of anthropology that have become a part of his everyday life, his way of being the best human he can be. His ability to see big and see small allow him to empathize with others, and also to reflexively understand himself, the inner forces that drive him, and where they come from. "I would not be with her today if I had not made the basics of anthropology an integral part of my life, my identity, and my way of thinking about the world."

A HERO'S GUIDE TO EVERYDAY LIFE

by Dean Eckhoff

Class of 2012

FedEx Courier

I began college with lofty, idealistic hopes and dreams about who I wanted to be, and how I wanted to change the world. I think at one point, I convinced myself I wanted to be President of the United States. I do not regret those ambitions, but a little over halfway through college I began to realize (literally, make real) two things:

1. The depth, breadth, and diversity of the tedious mess the world is in.
2. How I, personally, am a blatant, contributing part of the problem.

I want to be certain that this is not seen as hopelessness, so I will clarify that these were very positive, grounding, and educational realizations...even if they felt kind of crappy at the time.

Sure, at the time, it was not fun to see how I not only had no real power to change the world in all the idealistic ways I thought I did, but was actually participating in reinforcing all the corrupt, irresponsible ways people and our planet are being treated. That "downer," however, was very brief.

Through lessons learned in cultural anthropology and in life, and through my own desire, I began to discover a deeper, heart-level awareness: I may not have the power to change the world, but I have all the power to change and be responsible for myself and my own life.

Gandhi said it best, in regard to being the change we wish to see in the world, when he stated, "If we could change

ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do."

I began to learn through my experience in cultural anthropology that my willingness to change myself might be simultaneously the ONLY and BEST thing I can offer the world; that challenging myself to be a healthy, responsible human might not only be incredibly beneficial to me, but also to those around me; that the world is just a reflection of its people, of me; that healthy, responsible individuals can create a healthy, responsible world.

The power part of this realization was that it applies to me, at all times, where I am at, and as I am! I didn't (and don't) need to have a lot of money, or incredible amounts of soft power, or an amazing ability to move millions with my words, or be the President of the United States. I can work on myself at any time, and choose to learn and grow and live and give responsibly in every aspect of my life, and in any given circumstance. In fact, I am the ONLY one who has the power to do that in my life.

From this realization came decisions, some rather hard and personal ones, which were (and continue to be) met with considerable criticism, even from those I was close to. However, the gifts I have gained from these decisions have been deep and personal and profoundly meaningful.

Through working on growing in relationships, finances, physical health, and other areas of my own life, I have met people and discovered opportunities and done things I never would have dreamed I'd be able to in the past.

I was able to pay off my student loans, which turned out to be one of the most difficult, empowering, and educational endeavors I've ever faced (even more than, dare I say, getting my degree).

I have chosen to embark on a program that has helped me heal myself and outgrow cluster migraines, stomach ulcers, depression, and other debilitating illness, which was even more difficult and profound than student loans.

I have chosen to travel and challenge myself and place myself in uncomfortable territory to learn and grow and experience myself and the world.

I have been able to share my music at venues around Denver, and challenge myself to be vulnerable with music in front of people in new ways.

This only scratches the surface for me, but these and many other decisions gifts can be attributed to that realization I gained through my experience at K-State, and most of all with lessons in cultural anthropology.

These decisions are not monumental. They are not going to upset any corrupt establishments, or end hunger, or create peace among the nations, or abolish modern forms of slavery, or create economic equality, or reverse the degradation of our beautiful planet and its resources. At least, I have a very hard time finding any correlation between these things and the decisions I have made. Singing cover songs in a Denver brewery doesn't exactly exude heroism.

I'm just a normal guy. I live a normal (pretty mundane, from a surface view) life. I am merely a human, learning how I can be the best (however flawed) human I can be, and make the most out of my life.

However, if I can help anyone around me, or anyone who allows me to share this with them, to discover within themselves the courage, freedom, creativity, empowerment, and love I have discovered by choosing to take back my life and take responsibility for who I am, I would like to.

I would like to, because it is the most meaningful (yet somewhat terrifying) experience I have had.

I would like to, because I my life means more to me than I ever thought possible, thanks to the decisions I've made and the people from whom I've learned.

I would like to, because these decisions continue to shape me into a healthier, more open person whose effect on the world will be at least a little more positive.

I would like to, because there is something redemptive about the raw, unfiltered, falling-down-getting-back-up beauty of everyday human life.

Challenge Ten: Your Manifesto

Your challenge is to reflect on what you have learned in this class and write a manifesto for your life. This document should outline a vision for your highest goals for yourself, your future, and for how you will contribute to life on earth. In addition to the manifesto, post a collage of the work you have done in this class on Instagram, or post a photo or work of original art that captures your vision for who you want to be or how you want to contribute to the world.

#anth101challenge10

Your manifesto should include:

1. Your life goals (What problems do you want to address in your life and/or the world?)
2. Your ideas, ideals, beliefs, and values (Why do these problems matter to you and to the world?)
3. Your view of the world, past, present, and future.
4. Why your goals and vision for the future matter. (What are the consequences of failure?)
5. Key lessons learned from this class (How will these lessons and insights help you in your quest?)
6. How your goals, ideas, values, and vision have been changed, strengthened, or questioned in this class.

Go to anth101.com/challenge10 for more inspiration, and a helpful worksheet to get you started.

NOW SHOWING: *THE SOCIAL DILEMMA*

The Social Dilemma is a documentary about the impact of social media on human life. Directed by Jeff Orlowski and released in 2020, the film is a terrifying call to action.

Consider reading as a companion piece:

Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, and Everyday by Christine Hine (2015)

"Social Media Ethnography: The Digital Researcher in a Messy Web" by John Postill and Sarah Pink (2012)

THINKING CRITICALLY

Apply any concept from this book to *The Social Dilemma*, then pick a film that is not mentioned in this book and explain why you think it should be.

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About the Author

Christian Hammons is a writer, producer, and director who works in documentary, fiction, and the space in between. Ethnographically informed, his work often focuses on the everyday lives of marginalized people. His most recent work includes the short film *Rumor*, which premiered at the Beverly Hills Film Festival in 2020, the short documentary *Messengers*, which premiered at the IFS Los Angeles Film Festival in 2019, and the short film *Lemonade*, which premiered at the Lone Star Film Festival in 2018. His in-between work includes the live documentary *Tripod: Mead, Bateson, Bali* and participatory media projects on the Ft. Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota and in the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia.

Chris is a cultural anthropologist by aptitude and training. He received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Southern California. His research on indigeneity and the state in the Mentawai Islands has been published widely, and he is the author of the book *Exploring Culture and Gender through Film*. He also holds an MFA in film production from the USC School of Cinematic Arts. He has worked at PBS, Cruise-Wagner Productions/Paramount, ICM, Disney Channel, and Bunim-Murray Productions/ABC. He now heads up the production company Deranged Penguin (with Eric Coombs Esmail) and teaches anthropology and critical media practices at the University of Colorado Boulder. He is the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies in the Department of Critical Media Practices and the Associate Director of the Center for Documentary and Ethnographic Media.