

Chapter 1

Anthropology: Asking Questions About Humanity

Learning Objectives: After reading this chapter and discussing it in class, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain what kinds of questions anthropologists are interested in and how their knowledge is useful
- Distinguish among the different subdisciplines of anthropology, and assess what they have in common
- Identify the diverse methods anthropologists use to understand human variation, stability, and change
- Clarify where the different subdisciplines exist in the continuum between the natural sciences and humanities
- Explain the place of applied anthropology in the broader discipline
- Identify and analyze ethical issues raised by anthropological research
- Identify and analyze how the distinct subdisciplines pose questions and can actually work together on common projects

Key Terms and Definitions:

Anthropology: The study of human beings, their biology, their pre-prehistory and histories, and their changing languages, cultures, and social institution

Applied anthropology: Anthropological research commissioned to serve an organization's needs.

Archaeology: The study of past cultures, by excavating sites where people lived, worked, farmed, or conducted some other activity.

Biological anthropology: The study of the biological aspects of the human species, past and present, along with those of our closest relatives, the nonhuman primates.

Colonialism: The historical practice of more powerful countries claiming possession of less powerful ones.

Comparative method: A research method that derives insights from careful comparisons of aspects of two or more cultures or societies.

Cultural anthropology: The study of the social lives of living communities.

Cultural relativism: The moral and intellectual principle that one should withhold judgment about seemingly strange or exotic beliefs and practices.

Culture: The taken-for-granted notions, rules, moralities, and behaviors within a social group.

Diversity: The sheer variety of ways of being human around the world.

Ethics: Moral questions about right and wrong and standards of appropriate behavior.

Ethnocentrism: The assumption that one's own way of doing things is correct, while dismissing other people's practices or views as wrong or ignorant.

Ethnographic method: A prolonged and intensive observation of and participation in the life of a community.

Fieldwork: Long-term immersion in a community, normally involving firsthand research in a specific study community or research setting where people's behavior can be observed and the researcher can have conversations or interviews with members of the community.

Holism: Efforts to synthesize distinct approaches and findings into a single comprehensive interpretation.

Industrialization: The economic process of shifting from an agricultural economy to a factory-based one.

Linguistic anthropology: The study of how people communicate with one other another through language and how language use shapes group membership and identity.

Qualitative methods: A research strategy producing an in-depth and detailed description of social activities and beliefs.

Quantitative methods: A methodology that classifies features of a phenomenon, counting or measuring them and constructing mathematical and statistical models to explain what is observed.

Salvage paradigm: The paradigm which held that it was important to observe indigenous ways of life, interview elders, and assemble collections of objects made and used by indigenous peoples.

Scientific method: The standard methodology of science that begins from observable facts, generates hypotheses from these facts, and then tests these hypotheses.

Theory: A collection of tested and repeatedly supported hypotheses.