Cultural Anthropology

FIFTEENTH EDITION

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Cultural Anthropology

Fifteenth Edition

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Preface

One approach to studying cultural anthropology is to explore a few topics in depth; for example, gender, human use of the environment, or globalization. In *Cultural Anthropology*, Fifteenth Edition, we take a different approach and focus on the unique ways anthropologists look at humans, regardless of the topic. First, our chapters consider the scope of human history. Second, we take seriously the approach that culture needs to be considered in a broader context—this means considering the environments in which people live as well as the biological attributes that human populations possess. Third, anthropology is broadly a comparative and global discipline, paying greater attention than most disciplines to variation in all world regions. Wherever possible, we include research that tests theory across time and with a worldwide scope. Finally, in discussing the constants and variables of human life, we take a holistic approach, considering many facets of life to give as a more contextual picture.

In other words, our textbook is holistic, biocultural, historical, and cross-cultural. This approach and philosophy has characterized all of our editions. The fact that our emphases have not changed over editions does not mean that our content and organization has not improved with each new edition. It has. Indeed, we realized with the help of some very savvy reviewers that streamlining our materials by removing the part sections, eliminating a chapter, and trimming some content will help make the material easier to navigate. With the inclusion of these changes, we hope the organization of this edition is clearer than it may have been previously. And, as in every edition, we update the text with new research. In this edition, we have added nearly 200 new references.

We recognize that some topics are very important at this time—topics for which cultural anthropology provides important insights. In *Cultural Anthropology*, Fifteenth Edition, we not only increased coverage of these topics in the chapter text, but we also used our box features to highlight topics of current importance. Our boxes focus on *diversity*—gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation; *global issues*—including climate change and environmental degradation; *applied anthropology*; as well as *current research* on issues of particular importance to the field.

In contrast to other anthropological textbooks, *Cultural Anthropology*, Fifteenth Edition, is more comparative and cross-cultural. This means that we not only provide a variety of concrete ethnographic examples to give students a vivid picture of cultural variation, but we also integrate the results of more than 800 cross-cultural hypothesis-testing studies to give the broadest possible information about the universality of a trait or the general predictors of variation. We are aided in this endeavor by a new database that the Human Relations Area Files produces called *Explaining Human Culture*. So, for example, in Chapter 9: Sex and Gender, we discuss general patterns in the division of labor by gender, cross-cultural predictors of the relative contribution of women and men to primary subsistence, and predictors of more restrictive rules about heterosexual and homosexual behavior.

Finally, we have always tried to go beyond descriptions to explain not only what humans are and were like, but also how they became that way, in all their variety. This edition is no different. An important part of updating is finding new explanations and new evidence. We take the effort to provide the most current evidence and explanations because we believe that ideas, including ideas put forward in academic materials, should not be accepted, even tentatively, without supporting tests that could have gone the other way. While we have always taken this approach in *Cultural Anthropology*, we feel our evidence-based approach is particularly important today since students need to be able to discern for themselves what are—and what are not—evidence-based understandings and explanations of both social and physical phenomena.

What's New to This Edition
A Streamlined Organization

In the last edition, we did a close reexamination of the text and added new pedagogy. Users responded very favorably to those changes. For this edition, our reviewers asked that we take a closer look at the overall organization as well as the length. Recognizing how difficult it is to cover all aspects of cultural anthropology in one semester or quarter, we decided to eliminate the global problems chapter and integrate that material into the remaining content. By placing global issues in context, our hope is that instructors will be able to illustrate the anthropological approach to these problems and cover more material in less time. We also eliminated the part structure since many reviewers told us it often made it difficult for them to determine how best to develop their syllabi.

Restructured Boxes Focusing on Issues Relevant in Today's World

While we have always discussed global issues and diversity, in this edition we have highlighted these important topics further with boxes spread throughout the text. Thus, we have added new Perspectives on Diversity and Global Issues boxes to better reflect issues of concern in the world today.

- *Global Issues Boxes.* Global Issues boxes discuss worldwide social problems such as terrorism, the effects of violence on children, global inequality, problems faced by refugees, environmental degradation,

and accelerating climate change and its effects on culture. While some of these boxes are new, many were adapted from material in the global problems chapter of the last edition.

- *Perspectives on Diversity Boxes.* These boxes consider issues pertaining to gender, ethnicity, and the movement of people, both in anthropology and everyday life. Examples include the discussion of migrants working abroad to send money home, sexism in language, arranging marriages in the diaspora, unequal treatment of African Americans in medicine, and women in combat. All have been closely evaluated for this edition.

- *Applied Anthropology Boxes.* These boxes provide students with a better understanding of the vast range of issues to which anthropological knowledge can be usefully applied. Anthropology is not a discipline focused on pure research. Most anthropologists want their work to be actively used to help others. And, in our increasingly interconnected world, it would seem that anthropological knowledge has become increasingly valuable for understanding others. Examples include keeping languages from extinction, how subsistence practices affect the environment, preserving rock art, eating disorders and cultural ideas about beauty, and creating better business cultures.

- *Current Research Boxes.* Current Research boxes focus on pure research. Examples include asking whether communal ownership leads to economic disaster; variation in love, intimacy, and sexual jealousy in the husband–wife relationship; emotion expressed in masks; and whether religion is a force for cooperation and harmony.

Updated Research

The world is constantly changing, so taking a closer look at the references and citations is always essential to a new edition, and we did our best to update wherever possible. The seminal works remain, but we have included current citations and updates to ensure students are receiving the latest information. We have added coverage on issues such as whether language promotes sexist thinking in Chapter 5. There is also new information on environmental and climate change in Chapters 2, 5, and 6 and updated and new content on global inequality in Chapter 8. These are just a few of the many updates you will find in *Cultural Anthropology*, Fifteenth Edition.

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Highlights of the Text

Chapter 1: What Is Anthropology? Chapter 1 introduces the student to anthropology. We discuss what we think is distinctive about anthropology in general and about each of its subfields in particular. We outline how each of the subfields is related to other disciplines such as biology, psychology, and sociology. We direct attention to the increasing importance of applied anthropology and the importance of understanding others in today's globalized world. To emphasize the importance of research, we include two Current Research boxes on individual researchers (an ethnographer and a physical anthropologist); and, to illustrate how anthropological research can provide insights into current issues, we've added a new Global Issues box on refugees.

Chapter 2: Culture and Culture Change After introducing the concept of culture and some of the controversies surrounding the concept, we emphasize that culture is always changing. Throughout the chapter, we discuss individual variation and how such variation may be the beginning of new cultural patterns. We also discuss attitudes that hinder the study of culture, cultural relativism and the issue of human rights, patterning of culture, culture and adaptation, and mechanisms of culture change, before getting to the emergence of new cultures and the impact of globalization. We have added a new section on the cumulative nature of culture, updated the discussion of acculturation to emphasize its generally coercive nature, and updated our discussion of the Arab Spring in discussing political change. The first box is a Current Research box on how much the Chinese government has been able to change culture. The second Applied Anthropology box, now updated, discusses an applied anthropologist's attempts to accommodate Bedouin needs in designed change programs with the Oman government. The new Global Issues box asks how much accelerating climate change will accelerate culture change.

Chapter 3: Culture and the Individual In this chapter, we discuss some of the universals of psychological development and the processes that contribute to differences in childhood experience and personality formation and have updated the section on children's work. We then turn to how understanding psychological processes may help us understand cultural variation. The chapter closes with a section on the individual as an agent of culture change.

The Current Research box addresses research on apparent cultural differences in emotional expressiveness. The Applied Anthropology box discusses the degree to which schools in different societies teach different values.

Chapter 4: Understanding and Explaining Culture   In this chapter, we focus on what it means to explain and what kinds of evidence are needed to evaluate an explanation. We provide a brief introduction to some of the major ideas that have historically guided anthropological explanations in the United States and then turn to the major methods used in cultural anthropology to gather evidence to test explanations. The two boxes focus on evidence and explanation: The first Current Research box evaluates alternative theories; a second Applied Anthropology box illustrates how evidence from anthropology can help international development organizations implement effective policies.

Chapter 5: Communication and Language   To place language in perspective, the chapter begins with a broader discussion of communication, including nonverbal human communication and communication in other animals. We discuss how language differs from other forms of communication and ideas about the origins of language. We then turn to some fundamentals of descriptive linguistics and linguistic divergence. We have added new research on tonal languages to the phonology section and in the section on processes of linguistic divergence extensively revised our discussion of the origin of Indo-European languages and the origin and spread of Bantu language families. Toward the end of the chapter, we discuss the postulated relationships between language and other aspects of culture, adding new research on language's effects on culture. Finally, we discuss the ethnography of speaking, writing, and literacy. The updated Applied Anthropology box discusses language extinction and what some anthropologists are doing about it. The updated Perspectives on Diversity box asks why some immigrant groups are more likely to retain their native languages. And, to stimulate thinking about the possible impact of language on thought, we ask in the considerably revised Perspectives on Diversity box whether some languages promote sexist thinking.

Chapter 6: Getting Food   This chapter discusses how societies vary in getting their food, how they have changed over time, and how this variation seems to affect other kinds of cultural variation. Our updated Perspectives on Diversity box explores where particular foods came from and how different foods and cuisines spread around the world as people migrated. Our new Global Issues box addresses the effects of climate change on food getting, and our updated Applied Anthropology box deals with the negative environmental effects of irrigation, animal grazing, and overhunting in preindustrial times.

Chapter 7: Economic Systems   Not only does this chapter describe variation in traditional economic systems and how much of it has been linked to ways of getting food, but there is also integrated discussion of change brought about by local and global political and economic forces. This chapter begins with a discussion of how societies vary in the ways they allocate resources, convert or transform resources through labor into usable goods, and distribute and perhaps exchange goods and services. The sharing section and the section on cooperative work organization among pastoralists has been updated. The Current Issues box addresses the controversy over whether communal ownership leads to economic disaster. The updated Perspectives on Diversity box discusses the impact of working abroad and sending money home. The completely reworked Global Issues box illustrates the impact of the world system on local economies, with special reference to the deforestation of the Amazon.

Chapter 8: Social Stratification: Class, Ethnicity, and Racism   This extensively revised chapter explores the variation in degree of social stratification and how the various forms of social inequality may develop. We point out concepts of how "race," racism, and ethnicity often relate to the inequitable distribution of resources. A new Global Issues box addresses the worldwide problem of inadequate housing and homelessness. The second Global Issues box that addresses the degree of global inequality and why the gap between rich and poor countries may have widened has been extensively revised. The Perspectives on Diversity box discusses why there are disparities in death by disease between African Americans and European Americans.

Chapter 9: Sex and Gender   This chapter opens with a section on culturally varying gender concepts, including diversity in what genders are recognized. After discussing universals and differences in gender roles in subsistence and leadership, we turn to theories about why men dominate political leadership and what may explain variation in relative status of women and men. We have updated how much housework women do compared to men and the seclusion of women in certain cultures and its influence on women's ability to work. The chapter continues with a discussion of the variation in attitudes and practices regarding various types of sexuality. The homosexuality section has been revised in light of different gender concepts in different societies. In the updated Perspectives on Diversity box, we examine why some societies allow women to participate in combat. The Perspectives on Diversity box discusses research on why women's political participation may be increasing in some Coast Salish communities of western Washington State and British Columbia now that they have elected councils. The Applied Anthropology box examines the impact of economic development on women's status.

Chapter 10: Marriage and the Family   After discussing various theories and evidence about why marriage might be universal, we move on to discuss variation in how one marries, restrictions on marriage, whom one should marry, and how many one should marry. We updated the section on couples choosing to live together, added a section on other types of marriage transaction, and updated the section on parallel cousin marriage. We close with a discussion of

variation in family form and customs of adoption. To better prepare students for understanding kinship charts in the chapter that follows, we have a diagram explaining different types of family structures. Our first Perspectives on Diversity box discusses arranged marriage and how it has changed among South Asian immigrants in England and the United States. The updated Current Research box discusses variation in love, intimacy, and sexual jealousy. The Global Issues box discusses why one-parent families are on the increase in countries like ours.

Chapter 11: Marital Residence and Kinship Rather than jumping right into principles of kinship, we broadly discuss the different functions of kinship, the consequences of different kinship systems, and how the importance of kin changes with economic fortunes. In addition to describing the variation that exists in marital residence, kinship structure, and kinship terminology, this chapter discusses theory and research that try to explain that variation. We now discuss alternative theories about what may explain variation in marital residence. The Perspectives on Diversity box explores how variation in residence and kinship affects the lives of women. The Applied Anthropology box, now updated, discusses how cross-cultural research on the floor area of residences in matrilocal versus patrilocal societies can be used to help archaeologists make inferences about the past. The Current Research box discusses the possible relationship between neolocality and adolescent rebellion.

Chapter 12: Associations and Interest Groups We distinguish associations by whether they are nonvoluntary (common in more egalitarian societies) or voluntary, and whether they are based on universally ascribed characteristics (like age and sex), variably ascribed characteristics (like ethnicity), or achieved characteristics. New data on the impact of social media has been added. The Current Research box discusses why street gangs may develop and why they often become violent. The updated Perspectives on Diversity box addresses the question of whether separate women's associations increase women's status and power and the updated Global Issues box looks at the importance of nongovernmental organizations in bringing about change at the local and international levels.

Chapter 13: Political Life: Social Order and Disorder In this extensively revised chapter, we look at how societies have varied in their levels of political organization, the various ways people become leaders, the degree to which they participate in the political process, and the peaceful and violent methods of resolving conflict. We emphasize change, including what may explain shifts from one type of organization to another, such as how colonialization and other outside forces have transformed legal systems and ways of making decisions. We then discuss the concepts of nation-states, nationalism, and political identity. We have expanded discussion of becoming a leader in egalitarian societies, added research on state terrorism, and expanded the section on explaining warfare. We added new sections on leadership in complex societies, a culture of violence, and what a culture of peace would look like. The first Global Issues box is on the cross-national and cross-cultural relationship between economic development and democracy. We also added two new Global Issues boxes—one on terrorism and one on ethnic conflicts. The Perspectives on Diversity box deals with how new local courts among the Abelam of New Guinea are allowing women to address sexual grievances.

Chapter 14: Religion and Magic The chapter opens with a discussion of how the concepts of the supernatural and natural have varied over time and space and then turns to theories about why religion is universal. We go on to discuss variation in the types, nature, and structure of gods, spirits, and forces; human/god interactions, concepts of life after death; ways to interact with the supernatural; and the number and types of religious practitioners. A major portion of the chapter deals with religious change, religious conversion and revitalization, and fundamentalist movements. We have updated our discussion of religion among hunter-gatherers and our discussion of gods and their role in moral behavior. The revised Current Research box raises the question of whether, and to what degree, religion promotes moral behavior, cooperation, and harmony. The Perspectives on Diversity box discusses the role of colonialism in religious change.

Chapter 15: The Arts After discussing how art might be defined and the appearance of the earliest art (now updated), we discuss variation in the visual arts, music, and folklore and review how some of those variations might be explained. In regard to how the arts change over time, we discuss the myth that the art of "simpler" peoples is timeless as well as how arts have changed as a result of European contact. We address the role of ethnocentrism in studies of art in a section on how Western museums and art critics look at the visual art of less complex cultures. Similarly, we discuss the problematic and fuzzy distinctions made in labeling some art negatively as "tourist" art versus more positively as "fine" art. The thoroughly revised Applied Anthropology box explores ancient and more recent rock art and the methods that can be used to help preserve it. We updated and reworked material into a Global Issues box that discusses the global spread of popular music. The Current Research box deals with universal symbolism in art, particularly research on the emotions displayed in masks.

Chapter 16: Health and Illness This extensively revised chapter examines cultural understandings of health and illness, the treatment of illness (particularly from a biocultural rather than just a biomedical point of view), varying medical practitioners, and political and economic influences on health. To give a better understanding of what medical anthropologists do, we focus on AIDS, mental and emotional disorders (particularly susto and depression), and malnutrition, including both obesity and undernutrition. We discuss alternative forms of medicine in the United States, include sections on placebos and nocebos, more thoroughly

discuss the controversy about culture-bound syndromes, and in the section on depression include additional research on links for economic deprivation and inequality. We have updated the section on political and economic influences on health, updated the section on HIV, and reoriented and expanded the discussion of undernutrition and obesity as forms of malnutrition. The Current Research box discusses an anthropologist's attempt to evaluate why an applied medical project didn't work, a new Global Issues box addresses the impact of violence on children's mental health and well-being, and the updated Applied Anthropology box explores eating disorders, biology, and the cultural construction of beauty.

Chapter 17: Practicing and Applying Anthropology   In this extensively updated chapter, an introductory section discusses specializations in practicing and applied anthropology. We move on to evaluating the effects of planned change and difficulties in bringing about change. Since most of the examples in the first part of the chapter have to do with development, the remainder of the chapter gives an introduction to a number of other applied specialties, including environmental anthropology, business and organizational anthropology, museum anthropology, cultural resource management, and forensic anthropology. We have updated our discussion of collaborative anthropology, revised our section on ethics, and updated the cultural resources section as well as the forensic anthropology section. The extensively revised Perspectives on Diversity box considers how women were and are treated by development programs. The new Global Issues box addresses the effects of worldwide sea-level rise on the viability of some societies. The extensively revised Applied Anthropology box is a case study of anthropologists who worked with General Motors to develop a better business culture.

Student-Friendly Pedagogy

Readability.   We derive great pleasure from attempting to describe research findings in ways that introductory students can understand. We do our best to minimize technical jargon, using only those terms students must know to appreciate the achievements of anthropology and to take advanced courses. We think readability is important not only because it will enhance the reader's understanding but because it should make learning about anthropology more enjoyable. When new terms are introduced, they are set off in boldface type and defined in the text, set off in the margins for emphasis, and of course they also appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

Learning Objectives.   Each chapter begins with learning objectives that indicate what students should know after reading the material. The learning objectives are tied to each major heading within the chapter and are reinforced at the end of each chapter in the summaries. The learning objectives also signal to students what topics they might have to reread to comprehend the material presented.

"Think on it" Critical Assessment Questions.   Each chapter concludes with thought-provoking questions that ask students to take concepts presented in the chapter and move beyond rote answers. The questions engage students at a metacognitive level asking them to think critically about the questions posed to formulate their own responses.

Key Terms and Glossary.   Important terms and concepts appearing in boldface type within the text are defined in the margins where they first appear. All key terms and their definitions are repeated in the glossary at the end of the book.

End-of-Chapter Summaries.   In addition to the previously mentioned learning objectives, each chapter ends with a detailed summary organized in terms of the learning objectives that will help students review the major concepts and findings discussed.

End-of-Book Notes.   Because we strongly believe in the importance of documentation, we think it essential to tell our readers, both professionals and students, upon what our conclusions are based. Usually, the basis is published research. The abbreviated notes in this edition provide information to find the complete citation in the bibliography at the end of the book.

Supplements

This textbook is part of a complete teaching and learning package that has been carefully created to enhance the topics discussed in the text.

Instructor's Resource Manual with Test Banks.   For each chapter in the text, this valuable resource provides a detailed outline, list of objectives, discussion questions, and classroom activities. In addition, test questions in multiple-choice and short-answer formats are available for each chapter; the answers to all questions are referenced to the text.

MyTest.   This computerized software allows instructors to create their own personalized exams, to edit any or all of the existing test questions, and to add new questions. Other special features of this program include random generation of test questions, creation of alternate versions of the same test, scrambling question sequence, and test preview before printing.

PowerPoint™ Presentation Slides.   These PowerPoint slides combine text and graphics for each chapter to help instructors convey anthropological principles in a clear and engaging way.

Strategies in Teaching Anthropology, Sixth Edition (0-205-71123-5).   Unique in focus and content, this book concentrates on the "how" of teaching anthropology across all four fields and provides a wide array of associated learning outcomes and student activities. It is a valuable single-source compendium of strategies and teaching "tricks of the trade" from a group of seasoned teaching anthropologists, working in a variety of teaching settings, who share their pedagogical techniques, knowledge, and observations.

Acknowledgments

In preparing this edition, we want to thank the team at Ohlinger Publishing Services and Integra, especially Barbara A. Heinssen and Jessica Wang-Strykowski, who have ably guided this revision. Carol Ember is also grateful to Kathy Ember Levy for her assistance in preparing the cultural chapters. Recognizing that any new edition rests on a critical foundation from the past, we want to thank our long-time editor, Nancy Roberts, for her long and steadfast steward-ship over many editions. And we especially are grateful for the words and spirit that are still present from Mel Ember's contributions before his death. Always the optimist, Mel believed there were laws governing human behavior that could be found if you thought hard enough, worked hard enough, and tested ideas against the anthropological record.

We want to thank the following people for review-ing our chapters and offering suggestions for the fifteenth edition: Kanya Godde, University of LaVerne; Kenda Honeycutt, Rowan Cabarrus Community College; Nzinga Mezger, Florida A & M University; and Larry Ross, Lincoln University of Missouri.

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Thank you all, named and unnamed, who gave us advice.

Carol R. Ember and
Melvin Ember

About the Authors

CAROL R. EMBER began her career as a chemistry major at Antioch College. She began taking social science courses because some were required, but she soon found herself intrigued. There were lots of questions without answers, and she became excited about the possibility of a research career in social science. She spent a year in graduate school at Cornell studying sociology before continuing on to Harvard, where she studied anthropology, primarily with John and Beatrice Whiting. For her PhD dissertation, she worked among the Luo of Kenya and studied the possible effects of task assignment on the social behavior of children. For most of her career, she has conducted cross-cultural research on topics such as variation in marriage, family, descent groups, and war and peace, mainly in collaboration with Melvin Ember, whom she married in 1970. All of these cross-cultural studies tested theories on data for worldwide samples of societies. Her recent research funded by the National Science Foundation focuses on possible effects of climate-related hazards on cultural institutions and practices.

From 1970 to 1996, she taught at Hunter College of the City University of New York. She has served as president of the Society of Cross-Cultural Research and was one of the directors of the Summer Institutes in Comparative Anthropological Research, which were funded by the National Science Foundation. She has recently served as President of the Society for Anthropological Sciences. Since 1996, she has been at the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., a nonprofit research agency at Yale University, first serving as Executive Director and, since 2010, as President of that organization.

MELVIN EMBER majored in anthropology at Columbia College and went to Yale University for his PhD. His mentor at Yale was George Peter Murdock, an anthropologist who was instrumental in promoting cross-cultural research and building a full-text database on the cultures of the world to facilitate cross-cultural hypothesis testing. This database came to be known as the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) because it was originally sponsored by the Institute of Human Relations at Yale. Growing in annual installments and now distributed online as *eHRAF World Cultures* and *eHRAF Archaeology*, the HRAF databases currently cover more than 400 cultures and traditions, past and present, all over the world.

Melvin Ember did fieldwork for his dissertation in American Samoa, where he conducted a comparison of three villages to study the effects of commercialization on political life. In addition, he did research on descent groups and how they changed with the increase of buying and selling. His cross-cultural studies focused originally on variation in marital residence and descent groups. He has also done cross-cultural research on the relationship between economic and political development, the origin and extension of the incest taboo, the causes of polygyny, and how archaeological correlates of social customs can help us draw inferences about the past.

After four years of research at the National Institute of Mental Health, he taught at Antioch College and then Hunter College of the City University of New York. He served as president of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research. From 1987 until his death in September 2009, he was president of the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., a nonprofit research agency at Yale University.

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Chapter 1
What Is Anthropology?

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⌄ Learning Objectives

1.1 Explain the general definition and purpose of anthropology.

1.2 Describe the scope of anthropology.

1.3 Explain the holistic approach.

1.4 Explain anthropology's distinctive curiosity.

1.5 Differentiate among the five major fields of anthropology.

1.6 Explain the ways in which anthropologists specialize within their fields of study.

1.7 Communicate the relevance of anthropology.

What Is Anthropology?

1.1 **Explain the general definition and purpose of anthropology.**

Anthropology

A discipline that studies humans, focusing on the study of differences and similarities, both biological and cultural, in human populations. Anthropology is concerned with typical biological and cultural characteristics of human populations in all periods and in all parts of the world.

Anthropology, by definition, is a discipline of infinite curiosity about human beings. The term comes from the Greek *anthropos* for "man, human" and *logos* for "study." Anthropologists seek answers to an enormous variety of questions about humans. They are interested in both universals and differences in human populations. They want to discover when, where, and why humans appeared on the earth, how and why they have changed, and how and why the biological and cultural features of modern human populations vary. Anthropology has a practical side too. Applied and practicing anthropologists put anthropological methods, information, and results to use in efforts to solve practical problems.

The study of human beings is not an adequate definition of anthropology, however, since it would appear to incorporate a whole catalog of disciplines: sociology, psychology, political science, economics, history, human biology, and perhaps even the humanistic disciplines of philosophy and literature. Most of the disciplines concerned with human beings have existed longer than anthropology, and each has its distinctive focus. There must, then, be something unique about anthropology—a reason for its having developed and grown as a separate discipline for more than a century.

The Scope of Anthropology

1.2 **Describe the scope of anthropology.**

Anthropologists are generally thought of as individuals who travel to little-known corners of the world to study exotic peoples or dig deep into the earth to uncover the fossil remains, tools, and pots of people who lived long ago. Though stereotypical, this view does suggest how anthropology differs from other disciplines concerned with humans. Anthropology is broader in scope, both geographically and historically. Anthropology is concerned explicitly and directly with all varieties of people throughout the world, not just those close at hand or within a limited area. Anthropologists are also interested in people of all periods. Beginning with the immediate ancestors of humans, who lived a few million years ago, anthropology traces the development of humans until the present. Every part of the world that has ever contained a human population is of interest to anthropologists.

Anthropologists have not always been as global and comprehensive in their concerns as they are today. Traditionally, they concentrated on non-Western cultures and left the study of Western civilization and similarly complex societies, with their recorded histories, to other disciplines. In recent years, however, this division of labor among the disciplines has begun to disappear. Today anthropologists work in their own and other complex societies.

What induces anthropologists to choose so broad a subject for study? In part, they are motivated by the belief that any suggested generalization about human beings, any possible explanation of some characteristic of human culture or biology, should be shown to apply to many times and places of human existence. If a generalization or explanation does not prove to apply widely, anthropologists are entitled or even obliged to be skeptical about it. The skeptical attitude, in the absence of persuasive evidence, is our best protection against accepting invalid ideas about humans.

Because anthropologists are acquainted with human life in an enormous variety of geographic and historical settings, they are also often able to correct mistaken beliefs about different groups of people.

For example, when American educators discovered in the 1960s that African American schoolchildren rarely drank milk, they assumed that lack of money or education was the cause. But evidence from anthropology suggested a different explanation. Anthropologists had known for years that people do not drink fresh milk in many parts of the world where milking animals are kept; rather, they sour it before they drink it, or they make it into cheese. Why they do so is now clear. Many people lack the enzyme lactase that is

necessary for breaking down lactose, the sugar in milk. When such people drink regular milk, it actually interferes with digestion. Not only is the lactose in milk not digested, but other nutrients are less likely to be digested. In many cases, drinking milk will cause cramps, stomach gas, diarrhea, and nausea. Studies indicate that milk intolerance is found in many parts of the world.[1] The condition is common in adulthood among Asians, southern Europeans, Arabs and Jews, West Africans, Inuit (Eskimos), and North and South American native peoples, as well as African Americans.

The Holistic Approach

1.3   **Explain the holistic approach.**

In addition to its worldwide and historical scope, anthropology has the distinguishing feature of having a **holistic** approach to the study of human beings. Anthropologists study the many aspects of human experience as an integrated whole. For example, an anthropologist's description of a group of people is likely to encompass their physical environment, a history of the area, how their family life is organized, general features of their language, their settlement patterns, their political and economic systems, their religion, and their styles of art and dress. The goal is not only to understand these aspects of physical and social life separately but to glean connections among them. Throughout this book, you will see that these seemingly separate factors in a culture regularly co-occur; that is, they form patterns of traits. Anthropologists want not only to identify those patterns but to explain them.

Holistic

Refers to an approach that studies many aspects of a multifaceted system.

Anthropological Curiosity

1.4   **Explain anthropology's distinctive curiosity.**

Thus far, we have described anthropology as broader in scope, both historically and geographically, and more holistic in approach than other disciplines concerned with human beings. But this statement again implies that anthropology is the all-inclusive human science. How, then, is anthropology really different from the other disciplines? We suggest that anthropology's distinctiveness lies principally in the kind of curiosity it arouses.

Anthropologists tend to focus on the typical characteristics of the human populations they study rather than on individual variation or variation in small groups. Why do some populations have lighter skin than others? Why do some societies practice polygamy whereas others prohibit it? Where and when did people first start to farm rather than collect and hunt wild resources? Anthropologists want to know why the characteristics that others might take for granted exist. Whereas economists take a monetary system for granted and study how it operates, anthropologists ask how frequently monetary systems occur, why they vary, and why only some societies have had them during the last few thousand years. It is not that anthropologists do not concern themselves with individuals. For instance, in studying political systems, anthropologists might want to know why certain people tend to be leaders. But when they study individual traits of leaders to answer the question, it may be because they want to better understand the political process in a larger social group, such as a society. Or, anthropologists might ask an even broader question, such as whether certain qualities of leaders are universally preferred.

Because anthropologists view human groups holistically, their curiosity may lead them to find patterns of relationships between seemingly unrelated characteristics. So, for example, the presence of the ability to digest lactose (a physical trait) in a population seems to be found in societies that depend heavily on dairying. In recent times, as more anthropologists work in larger and more complex societies, the focus of inquiry has shifted from looking at a whole society to smaller entities such as neighborhoods, communities, organizations, or social networks. But the focus on the whole entity is still strong.

Fields of Anthropology

1.5 **Differentiate among the five major fields of anthropology.**

Biological (physical) anthropology

The study of humans as biological organisms, dealing with the emergence and evolution of humans and with contemporary biological variations among human populations.

Cultural anthropology

The study of cultural variation and universals in the past and present.

Applied (practicing) anthropology

The branch of anthropology that concerns itself with applying anthropological knowledge to achieve practical goals.

Human paleontology

The study of the emergence of humans and their later physical evolution. Also called **paleoanthropology.**

In the past, an anthropologist covered as many subjects as possible. Today, as in many other disciplines, so much information has accumulated that anthropologists tend to specialize in one topic or area (see Figure 1.1). Some are concerned primarily with the biological *or* physical characteristics of human populations; others are interested principally in what we call cultural characteristics. Hence, there are two broad classifications of subject matter in anthropology: **biological (physical) anthropology** and **cultural anthropology**. While biological anthropology is one major field of anthropology, cultural anthropology is divided into three subfields—archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology. Ethnology, the study of recent cultures, is now usually referred to by the parent name, cultural anthropology. Crosscutting these four fields is a fifth, **applied** or **practicing anthropology**.

Biological Anthropology

Biological (physical) anthropology seeks to answer two distinct sets of questions. **Human paleontology** or **paleoanthropology** poses questions about the emergence of humans and their later evolution. A focus on **human variation** includes questions about how and why contemporary human populations vary biologically.

To reconstruct evolution, human paleontologists search for and study the buried, hardened remains or impressions—known as **fossils**—of humans, prehumans, and related animals. Paleontologists working in East Africa, for instance, have excavated the fossil remains of humanlike beings that lived more than 4 million years ago. These findings have suggested the approximate dates when our ancestors began to develop two-legged walking, very flexible hands, and a larger brain.

In attempting to clarify evolutionary relationships, human paleontologists may use not only the fossil record but also geological information on the succession of climates, environments, and plant and animal populations. Moreover, when reconstructing the past of humans, paleontologists are interested in the behavior and evolution of our closest relatives among the mammals—the prosimians, monkeys, and apes—which, like ourselves, are members of the order of **Primates**. Anthropologists, psychologists, and biologists who specialize in the study of primates are called **primatologists**. The various species of primates are observed in the wild and in the laboratory. One especially popular subject of study is the chimpanzee, which bears a close resemblance to humans in behavior and physical appearance, has similar blood chemistry, and is susceptible to many of the same diseases. Indeed, chimpanzees share up to 99 percent of their genes with humans.[2]

From primate studies, biological anthropologists try to discover characteristics that are distinctly human, as opposed to those that might be part of the primate heritage. With this information, they may be able to infer what our prehistoric ancestors were like. The inferences from primate studies are checked against the fossil record. The evidence from the earth, collected in bits and pieces, is correlated with scientific observations of our closest living relatives. In short, biological anthropologists piece together bits of information obtained from different sources. They construct theories that explain the changes observed in the fossil record and then attempt to evaluate their theories by checking one kind of evidence against another. Human paleontology thus overlaps such disciplines as geology, general vertebrate (particularly primate) paleontology, comparative anatomy, and the study of comparative primate behavior.

The second major focus of biological anthropology, the study of human variation, investigates how and why contemporary human populations differ in biological or physical characteristics.

Figure 1.1 The Four Fields of Anthropology

The subdisciplines of anthropology (in bold letters) may be classified according to the period with which each is concerned (distant past or recent past and present) or by subject matter. Traditionally, the three fields shown in blue are classified as cultural anthropology, as distinct from biological (or physical) anthropology, shown in green. Found in all four fields is a fifth subfield, applied anthropology.
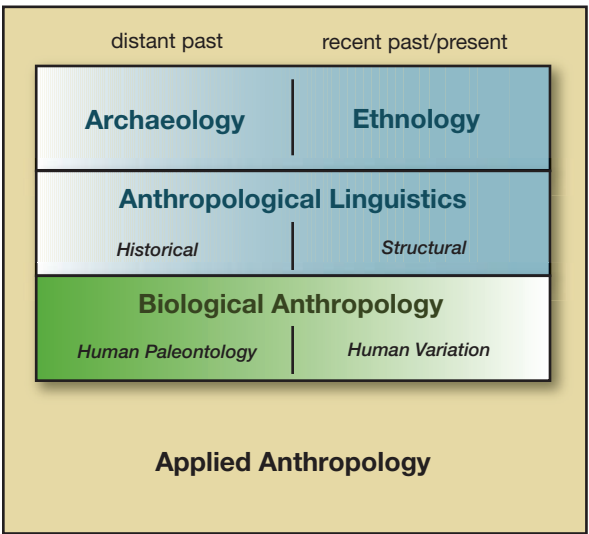
All living people belong to one species, *Homo sapiens*. Yet much varies among human populations. Investigators of human variation ask such questions as: Why are some peoples generally taller than others? How have human populations adapted physically to their environmental conditions? Are some peoples, such as Inuit (Eskimos), better equipped than other peoples to endure cold? Does darker skin pigmentation offer special protection against the tropical sun?

To better understand the biological variations among contemporary human populations, biological anthropologists use the principles, concepts, and techniques of at least three other disciplines: human genetics (the study of inherited human traits); population biology (the study of environmental effects on, and interaction with, population characteristics); and epidemiology (the study of how and why diseases affect different populations in different ways). Although research on human variation overlaps research in other fields, biological anthropologists remain primarily concerned with human populations and how they vary biologically.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is the study of how and why cultures in the past and present vary or are similar. But what is culture? The concept of culture is so central to anthropology that we will devote an entire chapter it. Briefly, the term culture refers to the customary ways that a particular population or society thinks and behaves. The culture of a social group includes many things—from the language people speak, childrearing, and the roles assigned to males and females to religious beliefs and practices and preferences in music. Anthropologists are interested in all of these and other learned behaviors and ideas that have come to be widely shared or customary in the group.

ARCHAEOLOGY **Archaeology** is the study of past cultures, primarily through their material remains. Archaeologists seek not only to reconstruct the daily life and customs of peoples who lived in the past but also to trace cultural changes and to offer possible explanations for those changes. While their subject matter is similar to that of historians, archaeologists reach much farther back in time. Historians deal only with societies that left written records, which limits their scope to the last 5,000 years of human history and to the small proportion of societies that developed writing. Human societies have existed for nearly two million years, however, and archaeologists serve as historians for all those past societies that lacked a written record. With scant or no written records to study, archaeologists must try to reconstruct history from the remains of human cultures. Some of these remains are as grand as the Mayan temples discovered at Chichén Itzá in Yucatán, Mexico. More often, what remains is as ordinary as bits of broken pottery, stone tools, and garbage heaps.

Most archaeologists deal with **prehistory**, the time before written records. But a specialty within archaeology, called **historical archaeology**, studies the remains of recent peoples who left written records. This specialty, as its name implies, employs the methods of both archaeologists and historians to study recent societies.

To understand how and why ways of life have changed through time in different parts of the world, archaeologists collect materials from sites of human occupation. Usually, these sites must be unearthed. On the basis of materials they have excavated and otherwise collected, they then ask a variety of questions: Where, when, and why did the distinctive human characteristic of toolmaking first emerge? Where, when, and why did agriculture first develop? Where, when, and why did people first begin to live in cities?

To collect the data they need to suggest answers to these and other questions, archaeologists use techniques and findings borrowed from other disciplines as well as what they can infer from anthropological studies of recent and contemporary cultures. For example, to guess where to dig for evidence of early toolmaking, archaeologists rely on geology to tell them where sites of early human occupation are likely to be found due to erosion and uplifting near the earth's surface. More recently, archaeologists have employed aerial photography and even radar imaging via satellite (a technique developed by NASA) to pinpoint sites. To infer when agriculture first developed, archaeologists date the relevant excavated materials by a process originally developed by chemical scientists. Information from the present and recent past can also help illuminate the distant

Human variation

The study of how and why contemporary human populations vary biologically.

Fossils

The hardened remains or impressions of plants and animals that lived in the past.

Primate

A member of the mammalian order Primates, divided into the two suborders of prosimians and anthropoids.

Primatologists

People who study primates.

Homo sapiens

All living people belong to one biological species, *Homo sapiens,* which means that all human populations on earth can successfully interbreed. The first *Homo sapiens* may have emerged about 200,000 years ago.

Archaeology

The branch of anthropology that seeks to reconstruct the daily life and customs of peoples who lived in the past and to trace and explain cultural changes. Often lacking written records for study, archaeologists must try to reconstruct history from the material remains of human cultures. See also **Historical archaeology.**

Prehistory

The time before written records.

Historical archaeology

A specialty within archaeology that studies the material remains of recent peoples who left written records.

Current Research

Researcher at Work: Alyssa Crittenden

When an anthropologist's best-laid plans meet the "facts on the ground," the results can be unexpected. For Alyssa Crittenden, an anthropology professor at the University of Nevada, fieldwork also brought some delightful revelations.

In 2004, Crittenden began working with the Hadza, a hunter-gatherer people in Tanzania. (Because hunter-gatherers subsist by foraging for their food, they represent the basic economy and way of life that has characterized most of human history. Therefore, such few remaining peoples are valued subjects for anthropological study.) As a biological anthropologist, Crittenden was especially interested in what Hadza culture might reveal about the evolution of the human diet. She chose the diets of women for study and measured the relationship between their reproductive capacity and the amount and nutritional value of the food they foraged. Yet that data told only part of the previously untold story of Hadza women.

"I quickly realized," Crittenden says, "that I could not study the women's diet in isolation. These women belonged to a community of people, a support system of kin and neighbors. To understand women's contributions to the Hadza economy, I had to be an ethnographer, as well as a biological anthropologist." Thus, after 10 years of fieldwork among the Hadza, Crittenden characterizes herself as a biocultural anthropologist.

One surprising discovery Crittenden made was that Hadza children were hunters and gatherers in their own right. They were helping their mothers indirectly by providing their own food and thus contributing to their economy. This evidence contradicted what was known about the children of other hunter-gatherer groups, such as the San of the Kalahari Desert, whose children were observed to help process mongongo nuts but otherwise do little else but play. The difference may partly be due to the environment. The Kalahari has less variable terrain, less water, and more predators than southwestern Tanzania.

For Hadza children, foraging for their own food becomes an extension of play. Children 5 years old and younger can contribute up to 50 percent of their caloric needs by foraging for their own food. By the time they turn 6, children can contribute up to 75 percent of their own food. While girls collect water

Alyssa Crittenden interacting with Hadza children.
Source: Firestick Productions-UNLV

and plant foods, boys also hunt, using a bow and arrow like their elders. Indeed, at age 3, Hadza boys receive their own child-sized bow and arrow and begin to hunt for the birds, rodents, bush babies, and lizards that make up their meat diet. Moreover, children learn to process and cook their own food. Crittenden observed children as young as 4 years old building their own miniature fires with embers from camp to cook their foraged meals.

Hadza children spend their days together in groups, seemingly unsupervised, though there is usually an older child nearby keeping an eye on them. Toddlers join a group of children as soon as they are weaned—that is, when their mothers can no longer carry them, usually between 1 1/2 and 3 years of age.

"Observing Hadza children, you can't help but wonder how the long, dependent childhood most of us experience evolved," says Crittenden.

Based on Crittenden 2013.

past. For example, to try to understand why cities first emerged, archaeologists may use information from historians, geographers, and political scientists about how recent and contemporary cities are related economically and politically to their hinterlands. By discovering what recent and contemporary cities have in common, archaeologists can speculate about why cities developed originally.

Anthropological linguistics

The anthropological study of languages.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS **Anthropological linguistics** is the anthropological study of language. Linguistics, or the study of languages, is an older discipline than anthropology, but the early linguists concentrated on the study of languages that had been written for a long time—languages such as English, which existed in written form for nearly a thousand years. Anthropological linguists began to do fieldwork in places where the language was not yet written. This meant that anthropologists could

not consult a dictionary or grammar to help them learn the language. Instead, they first had to construct a dictionary and grammar. Then they could study the structure and history of the language.

Like biological anthropologists, linguists study changes that have taken place over time as well as contemporary variation. **Historical linguistics** is the study of how languages change over time and how they may be related. **Descriptive** or **structural linguistics** is the study of how contemporary languages differ, especially in their construction. **Sociolinguistics** is the study of cultural and subcultural patterns of speaking in different social contexts.

In contrast with human paleontologists and archaeologists, who have physical remains to help them reconstruct change over time, historical linguists deal only with languages—and usually unwritten ones. (Remember that writing is only about 5,000 years old, and only a few languages have been written.) Because unwritten languages are transmitted orally, the historical evidence dies with the speakers. Linguists interested in reconstructing the history of unwritten languages must begin in the present, with comparisons of contemporary languages. On the basis of these comparisons, they draw inferences about the kinds of change in language that may have occurred in the past and that may account for similarities and differences observed in the present. Historical linguists might typically ask, for example, whether two or more contemporary languages diverged from a common ancestral language. And if so, how far back in time they began to differ?

Unlike historical linguists, descriptive (structural) linguists are concerned with discovering and recording the principles that determine how sounds and words are put together in speech. For example, a structural description of a particular language might tell us that the sounds *t* and *k* are interchangeable in a word without causing a difference in meaning. In American Samoa, one could say *Tutuila* or *Kukuila* to name the largest island, and everyone, except perhaps newly arrived anthropologists who knew little about the Samoan language, would understand that the same island was meant.

Sociolinguists are interested in the social aspects of language, including what people speak about, how they interact conversationally, their attitudes toward speakers of other dialects or languages, and how they speak differently in different contexts. In English, for example, we do not address everyone we meet in the same way. "Hi, Sandy" may be the customary way a person greets a friend. But we would probably feel uncomfortable addressing a doctor by her or his first name; instead, we would probably say, "Good morning, Dr. Brown." Such variations in language use, which are determined by the social status of the people being addressed, are significant for sociolinguists.

ETHNOLOGY (CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY)   The subfield of **ethnology**, now commonly called cultural anthropology, seeks to understand how and why peoples today and in the recent past differ or are similar in their customary ways of thinking and acting. They ask how and why cultures develop and change and how one aspect of culture affects others. Cultural anthropologists seek answers to a variety of questions, such as: Why is the custom of marriage nearly universal in all cultures? Why do families live with or near their kin in some societies but not in others? What changes result from the introduction of money to a previously non-monetary economy? How are relationships impacted when family members move far away to work? What happens to a society that suffers severe stress because of natural disasters or violent conflicts? Although the aim of ethnologists is largely the same as that of archaeologists, ethnologists generally use data collected through observation and interviews of living peoples.

Archaeologists try to reconstruct the cultures of past societies like those who created this "Cliff Palace" in what is today Mesa Verde National Park.

Source: Darla Hallmark/Fotolia

Historical linguistics

The study of how languages change over time.

Descriptive (structural) linguistics

The study of how languages are constructed.

Sociolinguistics

Examines how language is used in social contexts.

Ethnology

The study of how and why recent cultures differ and are similar.

Ethnographer

A person who spends some time living with, interviewing, and observing a group of people to describe their customs.

Ethnography

A description of a society's customary behaviors and ideas.

Ethnohistorian

An ethnologist who uses historical documents to study how a particular culture has changed over time.

One type of ethnologist, the **ethnographer**, usually spends a year or so living with, interviewing, and observing the people whose customs are being studied. This fieldwork provides the data for a detailed description (**ethnography**) of customary behavior and thought. Earlier ethnographers tended to strive for holistic coverage of a people's way of life. In part because those earlier ethnographies already exist for many cultures, recent ethnographers have tended to specialize or focus on narrower realms such as ritual healing or curing, interaction with the environment, effects of modernization or globalization, or gender issues. Ethnographies often go beyond description; they may address current anthropological issues or try to explain some aspect of culture.

Because many cultures have undergone extensive change in the recent past, an accurate view of them may depend on understanding what their life was like before the changes came about. **Ethnohistorians** study how the way of life of a culture has changed over time. They examine such written documents as missionary accounts, reports by traders and explorers, and government records to identify the cultural changes that have occurred. Unlike ethnographers, who rely mostly on their own observations and interviewing, ethnohistorians rely on the reports of others. They often must piece together and make sense of widely scattered, and even apparently contradictory, information.

Current Research

Researcher at Work: Timothy Bromage

When Timothy Bromage was young, his parents took him to hear a lecture by the legendary paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey. He was not sure why they had driven so far and paid so much to hear the lecture nor why they had dragged him along, but he knows that visit started him on the way to becoming a paleoanthropologist himself. Decades later, Bromage's lectures have undoubtedly inspired other young people to study the life histories of our ancient ancestors. He hopes future paleoanthropologists will also think outside the box of their discipline when they begin their research. That approach has led Bromage to major breakthroughs in his study of ancient teeth and facial bones.

In graduate school, Bromage was struck by the fact that fossils were treated as static, as if age did not make a difference. Yet humans—ancient and modern—change physically during their lives. Working with new methods and a scanning electron microscope at the University College London, Bromage found that it is possible to determine how ancient faces change as an organism matures. Different individuals die at different ages, but, in examining fossils, Bromage and his colleagues saw distinctive patterns of bone tissue forming and dissolving across the period of development. Working with specimens that were about 2 million years old, Bromage found that the hominins commonly referred to as australopithecines grew to adulthood in an apelike manner. The front parts of the skull built up tissue that grew into forward-jutting faces and jaws. Bromage found that a later group of hominins, the paranthropoids, had a pattern of facial growth that resulted in a flatter face, more like the face of a modern human than that of the australopithecines.

Bromage has also looked at patterns of enamel deposition in ancient fossil teeth using similar techniques. Early hominin teeth are important specimens in paleoanthropology because they tend to survive well-preserved, which means they can be analyzed in much the same way as the teeth of recent humans. It has been known for some time that when children grow, tooth enamel is put down daily, but every 8 or 9 days there are substantial changes

Sources: Timothy G. Bromage, New York University College of Dentistry, and Friedemann Schrenk, Senckenberg Research Institute, at their camp discussing the jaw fragment, UR 501, the oldest fossil representative of the genus Homo, which they recovered from Late Pliocene sediments in northern Malawi. Photo by Thomas Ernsting.

in tooth enamel formation. Why this happens was not well understood. But Bromage and his colleagues have discovered that these rhythmic cycles may be a kind of systemic growth spurt. Bone and tissue (muscle and organs) grow at the same time, and heart and respiration rates increase, suggesting that our bodies have a metabolic clock that makes sure that cells divide and bones grow in time to accommodate growing organs. Smaller animals have shorter cycles. Comparisons with other primates have enabled Bromage to infer some life history differences in fossil forms. Such research shows the promise of the integrative approach Bromage favors. Working across disciplines and collaboratively adds to our knowledge of human evolution as well as to health research today.

Based on Bromage 2002; Lacruz, Rossi, and Bromage 2005, 2006.

Ethnographic and ethnohistorical research are both very time-consuming, and it is rare for one person to study more than a few cultures. It is the role of the **cross-cultural researcher** (who may be a cultural anthropologist or some other kind of social scientist) to discover general patterns across cultures—that is, what characteristics are universal, which traits vary and why, and what the consequences of the variability might be. They may ask such questions as: Why is there more gender inequality in some societies than in others? Is family violence related to aggression in other areas of life? What are the effects of living in a very unpredictable environment? In testing possible answers to such questions, cross-cultural researchers use data from samples of cultures (usually described initially by ethnographers) to try to arrive at explanations or relationships that hold across cultures. Archaeologists may find the results of cross-cultural research useful for making inferences about the past, particularly if they can discover material indicators of cultural variation.

Because ethnologists may be interested in many aspects of customary behavior and thought—from economic behavior to political behavior to styles of art, music, and religion—ethnology overlaps with disciplines that concentrate on some particular aspect of human existence such as sociology, psychology, economics, political science, art, music, and comparative religion. But the distinctive feature of cultural anthropology is its interest in how all these aspects of human existence vary from society to society, in all historical periods, and in all parts of the world.

Cross-cultural researcher

An ethnologist who uses ethnographic data about many societies to test possible explanations of cultural variation to discover general patterns about cultural traits—what is universal, what is variable, why traits vary, and what the consequences of the variability might be.

Applied (Practicing) Anthropology

All knowledge may turn out to be useful. In the physical and biological sciences, it is well understood that technological breakthroughs like DNA splicing, spacecraft docking in outer space, and the development of miniscule computer chips could not have taken place without an enormous amount of basic research to uncover the laws of nature in the physical and biological worlds. If we did not understand fundamental principles, the technological achievements we are so proud of would not be possible. Researchers are often driven simply by curiosity, with no thought to where the research might lead, which is why such research is sometimes called basic research. The same is true of the social sciences. If a researcher finds out that societies with combative sports tend to have more wars, it may lead to other inquiries about the relationships between one kind of aggression and another. The knowledge acquired may ultimately lead to discovering ways to correct social problems such as family violence and war.

For much of anthropology's history as a profession, anthropologists generally worked in academic institutions. But more and more, anthropologists are increasingly working outside academia—today, probably more anthropologists work outside academia than in it.[3] Applied or practicing anthropology is explicitly intended to make anthropological knowledge useful.[4] Practicing anthropologists, as practitioners of the subdiscipline increasingly call themselves, may be trained in any or all of the fields of anthropology. In contrast to basic researchers, who are almost always employed in colleges, universities, and museums, applied anthropologists are commonly employed in settings outside traditional academia, including government agencies, international development agencies, private consulting firms, businesses, public health organizations, medical schools, law offices, community development agencies, and charitable foundations.

Biological anthropologists may be called upon to give forensic evidence in court, or they may work in public health or design clothes and equipment to fit human anatomy. Archaeologists may be involved in preserving and exhibiting artifacts for museums and in doing contract work to find and preserve cultural sites that might be damaged by construction or excavation. Linguists may work in bilingual educational training programs or on ways to improve communication. Ethnologists may work in a wide variety of applied projects ranging from community development, urban planning, health care, and agricultural improvement to personnel and organizational management and assessment of the impact of change programs on people's lives.[5]

In the past two decades, the speed of globalization has created great changes in applied or practicing anthropology. Whereas the field used to be largely the province of Western—and often colonizing—nations, it has since grown into a vital localized discipline all over

the world. In a number of countries, among them Russia, China, Mexico, Egypt, Ecuador, and Brazil, applied or practicing anthropology focused on solving practical social problems dominates over the research-driven four fields.[6]

Specialization

1.6   **Explain the ways in which anthropologists specialize within their fields of study.**

As disciplines grow, they tend to develop more and more specialties. This trend is probably inevitable since, as knowledge accumulates and methods become more advanced, there is a limit to what any one person can reasonably master. Thus, in addition to the general divisions we have outlined already, particular anthropologists tend to identify themselves with a variety of specializations. Anthropologists commonly have a geographic specialty, which may be as broad as Old World or New World or as narrow as the southwestern United States.

Global Issues

Refugees Are a Global Social Problem

The continuing turmoil in many countries throughout the world has created a flow of refugees that is much larger than ever before in world history. An estimated 140 million people became refugees in the 20th century. In 2015 alone, more than 65 million people were displaced, the highest number ever. More than half of the refugees in 2015 came from three countries—Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria. In the past, thousands of people might have had to flee persecution and war. Now that refugees number in the many millions per year, the problems of how to minimize suffering and find long-term solutions are more complex. Refugees (internally displaced persons) flee to other parts of the country, to neighboring countries, and some to countries on the other side of the world. In 2015, for example, more than a million refugees crossed the Mediterranean (often in overcrowded or inadequate boats) to reach Europe. Much of the burden of sheltering refugees falls to nearby countries. For example, nearly 5 million people have sought refuge in Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt from the Syrian conflict. Often, people are channeled into refugee camps where the United Nations and other international agencies try to find "durable" solutions. Voluntary repatriation is considered the ideal solution, but it requires that the conflict be over and that the home country is willing to protect and reintegrate those who have fled. The process, however, can be a long one, especially if conflict is protracted. Resettlement in other countries is another option, but not that many countries are willing to take in a large number of people. In 2015, almost twice as many refugees were repatriated as were resettled in other countries.

What is often not realized about refugees is that usually families strategize about who stays and who goes. Persecution is real, but it takes resources to flee. That is, those who are better off in the first place have the best chance to flee the furthest. Those family members who get out may be able to channel money to other family members back home to help them leave.

Almost all people seeking refuge are fleeing conflict. Therefore, the ultimate answer to the problem of refugees has to be to prevent those conflicts in the first place or to minimize their escalation.

Kachin women gather as children play at a camp for internally displaced people in northern Kachin state, Myanmar.
Source: Gemunu Amarasinghe/AP Images

Some researchers are predicting that a whole new type of refugee problem will soon emerge—"climate change refugees." With changes in climate, millions of people will be forced to leave their homes because of flooding or drought. The crisis is likely to be worse in developing countries that haven't been able to commit resources to adapt to climate changes. Migration may be the only choice for some nations like Tuvalu, which consists of low-lying islands in the Pacific. One estimate is that by 2050, there will be more than 200 million climate refugees. The world has not only been slow to acknowledge climate change, but little has been done to plan for it. If there will be so many climate refugees, there will need to be some analogous mechanisms for coping with and resettling these refugees, just like some have developed for refugees fleeing persecution.

Based on Van Hear 2004, 2006; UNHCR 2013; Biermann and Boas 2010.

Those who study the past (archaeologists or human paleontologists) may specialize in specific time periods. Ethnologists often specialize in specific subject matters in addition to one or two cultural areas. Just as most of the chapters in this book refer to broad subject specialties, so do some ethnologists identify themselves as economic anthropologists, political anthropologists, or psychological anthropologists. Others may identify themselves by theoretical orientations, such as cultural ecologists, anthropologists who are concerned with the relationship between culture and the physical and social environments. These specialties are not mutually exclusive, however. A cultural ecologist, for example, might be interested in the effects of the environment on economic behavior, political behavior, or childrearing.

Does specialization isolate an anthropologist from other kinds of research? Not necessarily. Some specialties have to draw on information from several fields, inside and outside anthropology. For example, medical anthropologists study the cultural and biological contexts of human health and illness. Therefore, they need to understand the economy, diet, and patterns of social interaction as well as attitudes and beliefs regarding illness and health. They may also need to draw on research in human genetics, public health, and medicine.

The Relevance of Anthropology

1.7   **Communicate the relevance of anthropology.**

Anthropology is a comparatively young discipline. Anthropologists only began to go to live with people in faraway places in the late 1800s. Compared to our knowledge of the physical laws of nature, we know much less about people, about how and why they behave as they do. That anthropology and other sciences dealing with humans began to develop only relatively recently is not a sufficient reason for our knowing less than in the physical sciences. Why, in our quest for knowledge of all kinds, did we wait so long to study ourselves? Leslie White has suggested that those phenomena most remote from us and least significant as determinants of human behavior were the first to be studied. The reason, he surmises, is that humans like to think of themselves as citadels of free will, subject to no laws of nature. Hence, White concludes, there is no need to see ourselves as objects to be explained.[7]

The idea that it is impossible to account for human behavior scientifically, either because our actions and beliefs are too individualistic and complex or because human beings are understandable only in otherworldly terms, is a self-fulfilling notion. We cannot discover principles explaining human behavior if we neither believe such principles exist nor bother to look for them. The result is ensured from the beginning; disbelief in principles of human behavior will be reinforced by the failure to find them. If we are to increase our understanding of human beings, we first have to believe it is possible to do so.

If we aim to understand humans, it is essential that we study humans in all times and places. We must study ancient humans and modern humans. We must study their cultures and their biology. How else can we understand what is true of humans generally or how they are capable of varying? If we study just our own society, we may come up only with explanations that are culture-bound, not general or applicable to most or all humans. Anthropology is useful, then, to the degree that it contributes to our understanding of human beings everywhere.

In addition, anthropology is relevant because it helps us avoid misunderstandings between peoples. If we can understand why other groups are different from ourselves, we might have less reason to condemn them for behavior that appears strange to us. We may then come to realize that many differences between peoples are products of physical and cultural adaptations to different environments. For example, someone who first finds out about the !Kung as they lived in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa in the 1950s might assume that the !Kung were "backward." (The exclamation point in the name !Kung signifies one of the clicking sounds made with the tongue by speakers of the !Kung language.) The !Kung wore little clothing, had few possessions, lived in meager shelters, and enjoyed none of our technological niceties, such as radios and computers.

But let us reflect on how a typical North American community might react if it awoke to find itself in an environment similar to that in which the !Kung lived. People would find that the arid land makes both agriculture and animal husbandry impossible, and

they might have to think about adopting a nomadic existence. They might then discard many of their material possessions so that they could travel easily to take advantage of changing water and food supplies. Because of the extreme heat and the lack of extra water for laundry, they might find it more practical to be almost naked than to wear clothes. They would undoubtedly find it impossible to build elaborate homes. For social security, they might start to share the food brought into the group. Thus, if they survived at all, they might end up looking and acting far more like the !Kung than like typical North Americans.

Physical differences, too, may be seen as results of adaptations to the environment. For example, in our society, we admire people who are tall and slim. If these same individuals were forced to live above the Arctic Circle, however, they might wish they could trade their tall, slim bodies for short, compact ones because stocky physiques conserve body heat more effectively and may therefore be more adaptive in cold climates.

Exposure to anthropology might also help to alleviate misunderstandings that arise between people of different cultural groups from subtle causes operating below the level of consciousness. For example, different cultures have different conceptions of eye contact during conversation. Whereas some people—North Americans, most Europeans, and Arabs, among them—expect to maintain eye contact during conversation, in Japanese culture the gaze is averted when interacting with a superior or venerated older person. North Americans may feel suspicious when someone does not look them in the eye when speaking. But in another culture that same direct gaze may be perceived as brazen. If our intolerance for others results in part from a lack of understanding of why peoples vary, then the knowledge that anthropologists accumulate may lessen that intolerance.[8]

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected or globalized, the importance of understanding and trying to respect cultural and physical differences becomes more and more important. Minor misunderstandings can escalate quickly into more serious problems. Even when powerful countries think they are being helpful, they may convey that other countries are inferior. They may also unknowingly promote behaviors that are not in the best interest of the people they are trying to help. At the extreme, misunderstandings can lead to violent confrontations. In today's world, going to war with modern weapons of mass destruction can kill more people than ever before.

Is understanding and respecting cultural and biological differences enough? Although education is undoubtedly useful, many anthropologists believe that more direct action is needed to solve real-world problems at both the global and local levels. At the global level, we have to deal with many types of violent conflict, climate change, degradation of the environment, growing inequality between rich and poor countries, and major threats to health. At the local level, we have to grapple with whether particular development plans are advantageous and how to improve nutrition and health of particular societies. One solution does not necessarily fit all—what is good for some may not be good for others in different circumstances. To find out if some change will be advantageous requires careful study. Many ethical issues arise. Is it ethical to try to interfere with other people's lives? Is it ethical not to, if they are suffering or ask for help?

Knowledge of our past may bring both a feeling of humility and a sense of accomplishment. If we are to attempt to deal with the problems of our world, we must be aware of our vulnerability so that we do not think that problems will solve themselves. But we also have to think enough of our accomplishments to believe that we can find solutions to problems. Much of the trouble we get into may be a result of feelings of self-importance and invulnerability—in short, our lack of humility. Knowing something about our evolutionary past may help us to understand and accept our place in the biological world. Just as for any other form of life, there is no guarantee that any particular human population, or even the entire human species, will perpetuate itself indefinitely. The earth changes, the environment changes, and humanity itself changes. What survives and flourishes in the present might not do so in the future.

Yet our vulnerability should not make us feel powerless. We have many reasons to feel confident about the future. Consider what we have accomplished so far. By means of tools and weapons fashioned from sticks and stones, we were able to hunt animals larger

and more powerful than ourselves. We discovered how to make fire, and we learned to use it to keep ourselves warm and to cook our food. As we domesticated plants and animals, we gained greater control over our food supply and were able to establish more permanent settlements. We mined and smelted ores to fashion more durable tools. We built cities and irrigation systems, monuments and ships. We made it possible to travel from one continent to another in a single day. We conquered some illnesses and pro- longed human life.

In short, human beings and their cultures have changed considerably over the course of history. Human populations have often been able to adapt to changing circumstances. Let us hope that humans continue to adapt to the challenges of the present and future.

Summary and Review

What Is Anthropology?

1.1 **Explain the general definition and purpose of anthropology.**

- Anthropology is a discipline of curiosity about human beings that seeks to understand both universals and differences in human populations.

- Anthropology seeks answers to biological and cultural questions about humans for both academic and practical purposes.

- Anthropology is distinct from other disciplines concerned with human beings in its scope, its holistic approach, and its distinctive curiosity.

The Scope of Anthropology

1.2 **Describe the scope of anthropology.**

- The field of anthropology has a broad scope, both geographically and historically.

- Anthropologists are interested in all varieties of people in every part of the world.

- Anthropologists are interested in people of all periods, from millions of years ago to the present.

- The broad scope of anthropology is required to confirm that any suggested generalization about human beings, any explanation of some characteristic of human culture or biology, is applicable to many times and places of human existence—not just a limited group.

The Holistic Approach

1.3 **Explain the holistic approach.**

- Anthropologists study the many aspects of human experience as an integrated whole.

- Anthropologists look for patterns of traits and attempt to explain them.

Anthropological Curiosity

1.4 **Explain anthropology's distinctive curiosity.**

- Anthropology's distinctiveness lies principally in the kind of curiosity it arouses.

- Anthropologists tend to focus on typical characteristics of the human populations they study rather than on individual variation or variation in small groups.

- Because anthropologists view human groups holistically, their curiosity may lead them to find patterns of relationships between seemingly unrelated characteristics.

Fields of Anthropology

1.5 **Differentiate among the five major fields of anthropology.**

- Anthropology comprises two broad classifications of subject matter: biological (physical) anthropology and cultural anthropology.

- Biological anthropology poses questions about the emergence of humans and their later evolution (paleontology) and about how and why contemporary human populations vary biologically (human variation).

- Cultural anthropology is the study of how and why cultures in the past and present vary or are similar in terms of the ways that a particular population or society thinks and behaves.

- Cultural anthropology includes three subfields: archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology (often called cultural anthropology).
- A fifth subfield, applied or practicing anthropology, cuts across all four subfields.
- The purpose of applied (or practicing) anthropology is explicitly to make anthropological knowledge useful. Practicing anthropologists may be trained in any or all of the fields of anthropology.

Specialization

1.6 **Explain ways in which anthropologists specialize within their fields of study.**

- Anthropologists specialize by focusing on a geographic area; a period of time; particular subject matter such as economics, politics, or psychology; or particular theoretical orientations.
- Anthropologists might have more than one specialization.

The Relevance of Anthropology

1.7 **Communicate the relevance of anthropology.**

- Anthropology is a young discipline, beginning in the late 1800s. Initially, especially among Westerners, there was resistance to the idea of accounting for human behavior scientifically.
- Anthropology considers both culture and biology of humans in all times and places. Anthropology is useful to the degree that it contributes to our understanding of human beings everywhere.
- In addition, anthropology is relevant because it helps to avoid misunderstandings between peoples. If those in one culture can understand why other groups are different from them, they might have less reason to condemn others for behavior that appears strange.
- As the world becomes increasingly interconnected or globalized, the importance of understanding and trying to respect cultural and physical differences becomes more and more important.

Think on it

Source: THEPALMER/E+/Getty Images

1. Why study **anthropology**? What are its goals, and how is it useful?
2. How does anthropology differ from other **fields** you have encountered that deal with humans? (Compare with psychology, sociology, political science, history, or biology, among others.)
3. Compare the two anthropologists featured in this chapter. What do their **stories** have in common?
4. How might the **knowledge** gained from anthropology be both humbling and empowering?

Chapter 2
Culture and Culture Change

Source: Smith Photographers/Blend Images/Alamy Stock Photo

⌄ Learning Objectives

2.1 Discuss the concept of culture as used in anthropology, its salient properties, and controversies surrounding the concept of culture.

2.2 Describe direct and indirect cultural constraints and how they relate to norms.

2.3 Identify attitudes that hinder the study of cultures.

2.4 Critically assess the concept of cultural relativism.

2.5 Describe the methods by which anthropologists describe cultures.

2.6 Explain why culture is integrated, patterned, and cumulative.

2.7 Describe and give examples of how cultures change through discovery and invention, diffusion, and acculturation.

2.8 Relate culture change to the process of adaptation to a changing environment.

2.9 Evaluate the problems and opportunities posed by globalization.

2.10 Describe and give examples of ethnogenesis, or the emergence of new cultures.

2.11 Characterize what anthropologists predict about future cultural diversity.

Perhaps all of us consider ourselves to be unique, with a set of opinions, preferences, habits, and quirks distinct from anyone else's. Indeed, all individuals are unique, and yet most people also share a set of preferences, beliefs, and habits that characterize the society in which they live. People who live in North America, for example, are likely to feel that eating dog meat is wrong, believe that bacteria or viruses cause illness, and habitually sleep on a bed that consists of a mattress supported on some kind of base. Such shared ideas and behaviors are part of what anthropologists mean when they refer to *culture.* Most people rarely question their shared assumptions and traits until they encounter others who have quite different beliefs and customs. Thus, North Americans may never consider the possibility of eating dog meat until they learn it is commonly eaten in some societies. (Likewise, people in some other societies may be equally repelled or consider taboo some kinds of meat that North Americans eat.) North Americans may realize their belief in germs is cultural once they see that people in some societies believe witchcraft or evil spirits cause illness. They may understand that sleeping on a bed is a custom when they learn people in many societies sleep on the floor or on the ground and, indeed, cook and converse sitting on the floor or ground. When people start to compare and contrast other cultures with their own to learn how they are different, they are beginning to think anthropologically. In fact, anthropology began as a profession when Europeans began to explore and move to faraway places, and they were confronted with the striking facts of cultural variation.

Anthropologists also want to understand how and why cultures change. Most of us are aware that "times have changed," especially when we compare our lives with those of our parents. Some of the most dramatic changes have occurred in women's roles and in attitudes about sex and marriage. Advances in technology have also led to cultural changes that could not have been foreseen. Culture change is not unusual; throughout history, humans have replaced or altered customary behaviors and attitudes as their needs changed. Just as no individual is immortal, no particular cultural pattern is impervious to change. Culture change may be gradual or rapid. Within the last 600 years or so, the pace of change has accelerated, largely because of contact between different societies. Exploration, colonization, trade, and more recently multinational business, the Internet, and social media have led to an economic and cultural interconnectedness among the world's cultures that we call globalization. Anthropologists want to assess not only the impact of these changes on cultures but what they mean for the future of cultural diversity.

Defining Culture

2.1 **Discuss the concept of culture as used in anthropology, its salient properties, and controversies surrounding the concept of culture.**

In everyday usage, the word *culture* had long referred to a desirable quality we can acquire by attending a sufficient number of plays and concerts and visiting art museums and galleries. But today the anthropological meaning of the term may be more common. People now routinely refer to a particular society's culture, such as American culture, a subgroup's culture, such as Chinese American, or a transcultural phenomenon, such as "youth culture" and "online culture." In each case, *culture* refers, as Ralph Linton explained, "to the total way of life," from the most mundane activities, such as washing dishes, to the more profound aspects of life, such as raising a child. From the point of view of the social scientist, then, "every human being is cultured, in the sense of participating in some culture or other."[1]

Linton emphasized common habits and behaviors in what he considered culture, but the totality of life also includes not just what people do but also how they commonly think and feel. As we define it here, **culture** is the set of learned behaviors and ideas (including beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals) that are characteristic of a particular society or other social group. Behaviors can also produce products or *material culture*—things such as houses, musical instruments, and tools that are the products of customary behavior. In anthropology, all aspects of culture are important.

Although groups from families to societies share cultural traits, anthropologists have traditionally been concerned with the cultural characteristics of *societies.* Many

Culture

The set of learned behaviors and ideas (including beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals) that are characteristic of a particular society or other social group.

anthropologists define a **society** as a group of people who occupy a particular territory and speak a common language not generally understood by neighboring peoples. By this definition, societies may or may not correspond to countries. There are many countries—particularly newer ones—that have within their boundaries different peoples speaking mutually unintelligible languages. By our definition of society, such countries are composed of many different societies and therefore many cultures. Also, by our definition of society, some societies may include more than one country. For example, we would have to say that Canada and the United States form a single society because the two groups generally speak English, live next to each other, and share many common ideas and behaviors. That is why we refer to "North American culture." The terms *society* and *culture* are not synonymous. Society refers to a group of people; culture refers to the learned and shared behaviors, ideas, characteristic of those people. As we will discuss shortly, we also have to be careful to describe culture as of a particular time period; what is characteristic of one time may not be characteristic of another.

Culture Is Commonly Shared

If only one person thinks or does a certain thing, that thought or action represents a personal habit, not a pattern of culture. For a thought or action to be considered cultural, some social group must commonly share it. We usually share many behaviors and ideas with our families and friends. We commonly share cultural characteristics with those whose ethnic or regional origins, religious affiliations, and occupations are the same as or similar to our own. We share certain practices and ideas with most people in our society. We also share some cultural traits with people beyond our society who have similar interests (such as rules for international sporting events) or similar roots (as do the various English-speaking nations).

When we talk about the commonly shared customs of a society, which constitute the traditional and central concern of cultural anthropology, we are referring to a culture. When we talk about the commonly shared customs of a group within a society, which are a central concern of sociologists and increasingly of concern to anthropologists, we are referring to a **subculture**. When we study the commonly shared customs of some group that includes different societies, we usually qualify the term; for example, we may call or refer to the cultural characteristics of societies in or derived from Europe as Western culture, or the presumed cultural characteristics of poor people the world over as the *culture of poverty*.

Even when anthropologists refer to something as cultural, there is always individual variation, and not everyone in a society shares a particular cultural characteristic of that society. It is cultural in North American society, for example, for adults to live apart from their parents. But not all adults in the society do so, nor do all adults wish to do so. The custom is considered cultural because most adults practice it. In every society studied by anthropologists—in the simplest as well as the most complex—individuals do not all think and act the same.[2] Indeed, individual variation is a major source of new culture.[3]

Culture Is Learned

Not all things shared generally by a group are cultural. Typical hair color is not cultural, nor is the act of eating. For something to be considered cultural, it must be learned as well as shared. A typical hair color (unless dyed) is not cultural because it is genetically determined. Humans eat because they must; but what and when and how they eat are learned and vary from culture to culture. That food preferences are cultural is especially apparent in which meats a society believes are acceptable to eat. In 2013, the discovery in Europe that ground meat sold as beef also contained horsemeat was greeted with horror. The British, perhaps because they have a high regard for the horse and view horses as pets—that is, with particular familiarity—were especially horrified.[4] Yet horsemeat is considered a delicacy in some parts of Europe and Central Asia. North Americans may be slightly less repelled by the idea of horsemeat, but they generally react with the same horror to eating dog meat.

Guinea pigs, another American household pet, are a common meat in the Andes dating back to the Incas and have recently been introduced in a few Peruvian restaurants in the United States.[5] Is there less aversion to eating guinea pigs than dogs? It appears that there

Society

A group of people who occupy a particular territory and speak a common language not generally understood by neighboring peoples. By this definition, societies do not necessarily correspond to countries.

Subculture

The shared customs of a subgroup within a society.

may be, perhaps because dogs have been domesticated for a very long time and are often "part of the family." There is a culture somewhere that avoids every kind of meat North Americans commonly eat. Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu cultures reject pork meat because of religious laws, although why their religions have a pork taboo is still a matter of debate. Many Cushitic-speaking pastoral groups in northeastern Africa reject fish and disapprove of neighboring groups that eat seafood. Meanwhile, some sub-Saharan pastoralists and some cultures in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands keep cocks to wake them in the morning and raise chickens for spiritual rites, such as sacrifice and divination, but will not eat the fowl or its eggs. Hindus are generally vegetarian but are especially repelled by the idea of eating beef, for they view the cow as sacred.[6] What accounts for these food preferences and aversions? We know some of the reasons given: religious taboos, age-old superstitions or myths, unfamiliarity, or too much familiarity. And scholars debate their historical and psychological roots. We only know for sure that they are cultural and therefore learned behaviors.

To some extent, all animals exhibit learned behaviors, some of which most individuals in a population may share and may therefore be considered cultural. But different animal species vary in the degree to which their shared behaviors are learned or instinctive. The sociable ants, for instance, despite all their patterned social behavior, do not appear to have much, if any, culture. They divide their labor, construct their nests, form their raiding columns, and carry off their dead—all without having been taught to do so and without imitating the behavior of other ants. Our closest biological relatives, the monkeys and the apes, not only learn a wide variety of behaviors on their own, they also learn from each other. Some of their learned responses are as basic as those involved in maternal care; others are as frivolous as the taste for candy. Frans de Waal reviewed seven long-term studies of chimpanzees and identified at least 39 behaviors that were clearly learned from others.[7] If shared and socially learned, these behaviors could be described as cultural.

The proportion of an animal's life span occupied by childhood roughly reflects the degree to which the animal depends on learned behavior for survival. Monkeys and apes have relatively long childhoods compared to other animals. Humans have by far the longest childhood of any animal, reflecting our great dependence on learned behavior. Although humans may acquire much learned behavior by trial and error and imitation, as do monkeys and apes, most human ideas and behaviors are learned from others. Much of it is probably acquired with the aid of spoken, symbolic language. Using language, a human parent can describe a snake and tell a child that a snake is dangerous and should be avoided. If symbolic language did not exist, the parent would have to wait until the child actually saw a snake and then, through example, show the child that such a creature is to be avoided. Without language, we probably could not transmit or receive information so efficiently and rapidly, and thus would not be heir to so rich and varied a culture.

To sum up, we may say that something is cultural if it is a learned behavior or idea (belief, attitude, value, ideal) that the members of a society or other social group generally share.

Controversies About the Concept of Culture

Not all anthropologists define culture as we do here. We have included learned and shared behaviors as well as ideas. Cognitive anthropologists are most likely to say that culture refers not to behaviors but to the rules and ideas behind them, and that culture therefore resides in people's heads.[8] Although every individual will have slightly different constructs based in part on their own unique experiences, many people in a society share many of the same experiences, and therefore they will share many ideas. It is those shared ideas that cognitive anthropologists describe as culture. Whether or not you include behavior as part of culture, both views of culture assume that there will be individual variation, and it is up to the anthropologist to discern the shared nature of culture. Individual variation is the source of new culture.

Another view of culture is that it is an entity, a force, that profoundly affects the individuals who live within its influence. The most extreme version of this view, one that

was more acceptable in the past, holds that culture has a "life" of its own that could be studied without much regard for individuals at all.[9] People are born blank slates, it is argued, and culture puts its stamp on each generation. There are a number of problems with viewing culture as having a life of its own. First, where does it reside exactly? Second, if individuals do not matter, what are the mechanisms of culture change?

People sometimes behave differently when they are in social groups rather than alone. Violent mob behavior is an extreme but telling example. People who would never dream of behaving badly sometimes find themselves doing so to go along with a group. Taking part in a collective ritual that gives a person a feeling of "oneness" is another example of how group behavior can be transformative. If people do or feel things in groups that they would not do alone, we need to look at behavior, as well as the rules or ideas in people's heads, in describing a culture. Therefore, in contrast to many cognitive anthropologists, we define culture as including both behavior and the products of behavior.

Cultural Constraints

2.2   **Describe direct and indirect cultural constraints and how they relate to norms.**

The noted French sociologist Émile Durkheim stressed that culture is something outside us that exerts a strong coercive power on us and constrains our actions and beliefs. Because we generally conform to our culture, we are not always aware of being constrained by its standards and rules for acceptable behavior.[10] Social scientists refer to these standards or rules as **norms**. Some recent research suggests that people may in fact be biased toward normative information. When a group of undergraduates were asked to read texts about Tikopians, whose culture they knew little about, they were more likely to remember a fact if it was presented as "traditional," "practiced by everyone," or a "custom."[11] The importance of a norm usually can be judged by how members of a society respond when it is violated.

Norms

Standards or rules about what is acceptable behavior.

Cultural constraints are of two basic types, *direct* and *indirect.* Naturally, the direct constraints are the more obvious. For example, if you have a loud argument in a restaurant, you are likely to attract disapproval, an indirect constraint, but if the argument turns into a physical fight, you may be arrested for disturbing the peace, which is a direct constraint.

Although indirect forms of cultural constraint are less obvious than direct ones, they are usually no less effective. Durkheim illustrated this point when he wrote, "I am not obliged to speak French with my fellow-countrymen, nor to use the legal currency, but I cannot possibly do otherwise. If I tried to escape this necessity, my attempt would fail miserably."[12] In other words, if Durkheim had decided he would rather speak Icelandic than French, nobody would have tried to stop him. But hardly anyone would have understood him either. And although he would not have been put into prison for trying to buy groceries with Icelandic money, he would have had difficulty convincing the local merchants to sell him food.

In a series of classic experiments on conformity, Solomon Asch revealed how strong social pressure can be. Asch coached the majority of a group of college students to give deliberately incorrect answers to questions involving visual stimuli. A "critical subject," the one student in the room who was not so coached, had no idea that the other participants would purposely misinterpret the evidence presented to them. Asch found that, in one-third of the experiments, the critical subjects consistently gave incorrect answers, seemingly allowing their own correct perceptions to be distorted by the obviously incorrect statements of the others. In another 40 percent of the experiments, the critical subject yielded to the opinion of the group some of the time.[13] These studies have been replicated in the United States and elsewhere. Some societies, particularly those stressing the collectivity of the group, show higher conformity effects. However, while overall conformity has gone down over time, most studies show some effect of conformity.[14] Most individuals still do not give in to the wishes of the majority, but a recent study using MRIs has shown that perceptions can actually be altered if participants consciously alter their answers to conform to others.[15] The effect may be short-lived though. Follow-up research suggests that the alteration of perception may only last three days.[16]

Attitudes That Hinder the Study of Cultures

2.3 **Identify attitudes that hinder the study of cultures.**

Many of the Europeans who first traveled to faraway places were shocked and offended by customs they observed, which is not surprising. People commonly feel that their own behaviors and attitudes are the correct ones and that people who do not share those patterns are immoral or inferior.[17] For example, most North Americans would react negatively to child betrothal, a kind of arranged marriage, but not question their own practice of dating a series of potential partners before selecting one. When we judge other cultures solely in terms of our own culture we are being **ethnocentric**—that is, we hold an attitude called **ethnocentrism**.

Ethnocentric

Refers to judgment of other cultures solely in terms of one's own culture.

Ethnocentrism

The attitude that other societies' customs and ideas can be judged in the context of one's own culture.

Our own customs and ideas may appear bizarre or barbaric to an observer from another society. Hindus in India, for example, would consider our custom of eating beef disgusting. In their culture, the cow is a sacred animal and may not be slaughtered for food. In many societies, a baby is almost constantly carried by someone, in someone's lap, or asleep next to others.[18] People in such societies may think it is cruel of us to leave babies alone for long periods of time, often in devices that resemble cages (cribs and playpens). Even our most ordinary customs—the daily rituals we take for granted—might seem thoroughly absurd when viewed from an outside perspective. An observer of our society might justifiably take notes on certain strange behaviors that seem quite ordinary to us, as the following description shows:

> The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about the care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures. In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy-mouth man opens the client's mouth and, using the above-mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these ministrations is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth man year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay.[19]

Societies vary in their acceptance of an elderly person living apart from family. In the United States and in the UK, it is fairly common for an elderly person to live alone or in a facility with nonfamily members. But in societies where the elderly, such as this great grandmother in central Poland, regularly live with family, having the elderly live alone may be viewed quite negatively.
Source: Skjold Photographs/The Image Works; De Visu/Fotolia

We are likely to protest that to understand the behaviors of a particular society—in this case, our own—the observer must try to find out what the people in that society say about why they do things. For example, the observer might find out that periodic visits to the "holy-mouth man" are for medical, not magical, purposes. Indeed, the observer, after some questioning, might discover that the "mouth-rite" has no sacred or religious connotations whatsoever. Actually, Horace Miner, the author of the passage on the "daily rite ritual," was not a foreigner. An American, he described the "ritual" the way he did to show how the behaviors involved might be interpreted by an outside observer.

Ethnocentrism hinders our understanding of the customs of other people and, at the same time, keeps us from understanding our own customs. If we think that everything we do is best, we are not likely to ask why we do what we do or why "they" do what "they" do.

We may not always glorify our own culture. Other ways of life may sometimes seem more appealing. Whenever we are weary of the complexities of civilization, we may long for a way of life that is "closer to nature" or "simpler" than our own. For instance, a young North American whose parent is holding two or three jobs just to provide the family with bare necessities might briefly be attracted to the lifestyle of the !Kung of the Kalahari Desert in the 1950s. The !Kung shared their food and therefore were often free to engage in leisure activities during the greater part of the day. They obtained all their food by men hunting animals and women gathering wild plants. Because they had no facilities for refrigeration, sharing a large freshly killed animal was clearly more sensible than hoarding meat that would soon rot. Moreover, the sharing provided a kind of social security system for the !Kung. If a hunter was unable to catch an animal on a certain day, he could obtain food for himself and his family from someone else in his band. Then, at some later date, the game he caught would provide food for the family of another, unsuccessful hunter. This system of sharing also ensured that people too young or too old to help with collecting food would still be fed.

Could we learn from the !Kung? Perhaps we could in some respects, but we must not glorify their way of life either or think that their way of life might be easily imported into our own society. Other aspects of !Kung life would not appeal to many North Americans. For example, when the nomadic !Kung decided to move their camps, they had to carry all the family possessions, substantial amounts of food and water, and all young children below age 4 or 5. This is a sizable burden to carry for any distance. The nomadic !Kung traveled about 1,500 miles in a single year and, understandably, families had few possessions.[20]

Both ethnocentrism and its opposite, the glorification of other cultures, hinder effective anthropological study.

Cultural Relativism

2.4   **Critically assess the concept of cultural relativism.**

Early thinkers on human evolution tended to think of Western cultures as being at the highest or most progressive stage of evolution. Not only were these ideas based on poor evidence of the details of world ethnography, they also seemed to be ethnocentric glorifications of Western culture. The influential anthropologist Franz Boas and many of his students—such as Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovits, and Margaret Mead—-rejected the view that cultures progressed through stages of civilization.[21] They stressed that the early evolutionists did not sufficiently understand the details of the cultures they theorized about, nor the context in which these customs appeared. Challenging the attitude that Western cultures were obviously superior, the Boasians insisted that a society's customs and ideas should be described objectively and understood in the context of that society's problems and opportunities. This approach is known as **cultural relativism**. Does cultural relativism mean that the actions of another society, or of our own, should not be judged? Does our insistence on objectivity mean that anthropologists should not make moral judgments about the cultural phenomena they observe and try to explain? Does it mean that anthropologists should not try to bring about change? Not necessarily.

Although the concept of cultural relativism remains an important anthropological tenet, today many anthropologists make a distinction between keeping an open mind when studying other cultures and being morally relativistic—that is, suspending all judgment about behaviors they believe to be wrong. What if, for example, a culture practices slavery, violence

Cultural relativism

The attitude that a society's customs and ideas should be viewed within the context of that society's problems and opportunities.

against women, torture, or genocide? If the strong doctrine of relativism is adhered to, then these cultural practices are not to be judged, and we should not try to eliminate them. A more measured form of cultural relativism asserts that anthropologists should strive for objectivity in describing a people and should be wary of superficial or quick judgment in their attempts to understand the reasons for cultural behavior. Tolerance should be the basic mode unless there is strong reason to behave otherwise.[22] As Michael Brown concludes, cultural relativism is less a comprehensive theory than a useful rule of thumb that keeps anthropologists alert to perspectives in other cultures that might challenge their own cultural beliefs about what is true.[23]

Human Rights and Relativism

The news increasingly reports behaviors that Western countries consider to be violations of human rights. Examples range from jailing people for expressing certain political ideas to ethnic massacre. But faced with criticism from the West, people in other parts of the world are saying that the West should not dictate its ideas about human rights to other countries. Indeed, many countries say they have different codes of ethics. Are the Western countries ethnocentric by taking their own cultural ideas and applying them to the rest of the world? Should we instead rely on the strong version of the concept of cultural relativism, considering each culture on its own terms? If we do that, it may not be possible to create a universal standard of human rights.

What we do know is that all cultures have ethical standards, but they do not emphasize the same things. For example, some cultures emphasize individual political rights; others emphasize political order. Some cultures emphasize protection of individual property; others emphasize the sharing or equitable distribution of resources. People in the United States may have freedom to dissent, but they can be deprived of health insurance or food if they lack the money to buy them. Cultures also vary markedly in the degree to which they have equal rights for minorities and women. In some societies, women are killed when a husband dies or when they disobey a father or brother.

Some anthropologists argue strongly against cultural relativism. For example, Elizabeth Zechenter says that cultural relativists claim there are no universal principles of morality but insist on tolerance for all cultures. If tolerance is one universal principle, why shouldn't there be others? In addition, she points out that the concept of cultural relativism is often used to justify traditions desired by the dominant and powerful in a society. She points to a case in 1996, in Algeria, where two teenage girls were raped and murdered because they violated the fundamentalist edict against attending school. Are those girls any less a part of the culture than the fundamentalists? Would it make any difference if most Algerian women supported the murders? Would that make it right? Zechenter does not believe that international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, impose uniformity among diverse cultures. Rather, they seek to create a floor below which no society is supposed to fall.[24]

Can the concept of cultural relativism be reconciled with the concept of an international code of human rights? Probably not completely. Paul Rosenblatt recognizes the dilemma but nonetheless thinks that something has to be done to stop torture and "ethnic cleansing," among other practices. He makes the case that "to the extent that it is easier to persuade people whose viewpoints and values one understands, relativism can be a tool for change … a relativist's awareness of the values and understanding of the elite makes it easier to know what arguments would be persuasive. For example, in a society in which the group rather than the individual has great primacy, it might be persuasive to show how respect for individual rights benefits the group."[25]

Describing a Culture

2.5 **Describe the methods by which anthropologists describe cultures.**

If all individuals are unique and all cultures have some internal variation, how do anthropologists discover what may be cultural? Understanding what is cultural involves two parts—separating what is shared from what is individually variable, and understanding whether common behaviors and ideas are learned.

If an anthropologist observes dancing in mainstream North American culture, she or he will note that dancing commonly involves a pair, usually a male and female, but group dances such as the rave shown here are particularly popular among young people. Yet usually individuals or couples will not simply imitate those around them but will create different patterns of movements and steps.

Source: John Lund/Blend Images/Getty Images

To understand better how an anthropologist might make sense of diverse behaviors, let us examine the diversity at a professional football game in the United States. When people attend a football game, various members of the crowd behave differently while "The Star-Spangled Banner" is being played. As they stand and listen, some people remove their hats; a child munches popcorn; a veteran of the armed forces stands at attention; a teenager searches the crowd for a friend; and the coaches take a final opportunity to fire up their team. Yet, despite these individual variations, most of the people at the game respond in a basically similar manner: Nearly everyone stands silently, facing the flag. Moreover, if you go to several football games, you will observe that many aspects of the event are notably similar. Although the plays will vary from game to game, the rules of the game are never different, and although the colors of the uniforms differ by teams, the players never appear on the field dressed in swimsuits.

Although the variations in individual reactions to a given stimulus are theoretically limitless, in fact they tend to fall within easily recognizable limits. A child listening to the anthem may continue to eat popcorn but will probably not do a rain dance. Similarly, the coaches are unlikely to react to that same stimulus by running onto the field and embracing the singer. Variations in behavior, then, are confined within socially acceptable limits, and part of the anthropologists' goals is to find out what those limits are. They may note, for example, that some limitations on behavior have a practical purpose: A spectator who disrupts the game by wandering onto the field would be required to leave. Other limitations are purely traditional. In our society, it is considered proper for a man to remove his overcoat if he becomes overheated, but others would undoubtedly frown upon his removing his trousers even if the weather were quite warm. Using observation and interviewing, anthropologists discover the customs and the ranges of acceptable behavior that characterize the society under study.

Distance between people conversing varies cross-culturally. The faces of the Rajput Indian men on the top are much closer than the faces of the American women on the bottom.

Source: Jeremy Horner/Corbis/VCG/Getty Images; Rido/Fotolia

Similarly, anthropologists interested in describing courtship and marriage in our society would encounter a variety of behaviors. Dating couples vary in where they go (coffee shops, movies, restaurants, bowling alleys), what behaviors they engage in on dates, and how long they date before they split up or move on to more serious relationships. If they decide to marry, ceremonies may be simple or elaborate and involve either religious or secular rituals. Despite this variability, the anthropologists would begin to detect certain regularities in courting practices. Although couples may do many different things on their first and subsequent dates, they nearly always arrange the dates by themselves; they try to avoid their parents when on dates; they often manage to find themselves alone at the end of a date; they put their lips together frequently; and so forth. After a series of more and more closely spaced encounters, a man and a woman may decide to declare themselves publicly as a couple, either by announcing that they are engaged or by revealing that they are living together or intend to do so. Finally, if the two of them decide to marry, they must in some way have their union recorded by the civil authorities.

In our society, a person who wishes to marry cannot completely disregard the customary patterns of courtship. If a man saw a woman on the street and decided he wanted to marry her, he could conceivably choose a quicker and more direct form of action than the usual dating procedure. He could get on a horse, ride to the woman's home, snatch her up in his arms, and gallop away with her. In Sicily, until the last few decades, such a couple would have been considered legally married, even if the woman had never met the man before or had no intention of marrying. But in North American society, any man who acted in such a fashion would be arrested and jailed for kidnapping and would probably have his sanity challenged. Although individual behaviors may vary, most social behavior falls within culturally acceptable limits.

In the course of observing and interviewing, anthropologists also try to distinguish actual behavior from the ideas about how people in particular situations ought to feel and behave. In everyday terms, we speak of these ideas as *ideals;* in anthropology, we refer to them as *ideal cultural traits.* Ideal cultural traits may differ from actual behavior because the ideal is based on the way society used to be. (Consider the ideal of "free enterprise," that industry should be totally free of governmental regulation.) Other ideals may never have been actual patterns and may represent merely what people would like to see as correct behavior. Consider the idealized belief, long cherished in North America, that everybody is "equal before the law," that everybody should be treated in the same way by the police and courts. Of course, we know that this is not always true. The rich, for example, may receive less jail time and be sent to nicer prisons. Nevertheless, the ideal is still part of our culture; most of us continue to believe that the law should be applied equally to all.

When dealing with customs that are overt or highly visible within a society—for example, the custom of sending children to school—an investigator can determine the existence of such practices by direct observation and by interviewing a few knowledgeable people. But when dealing with a domain of behavior that may include many individual variations, or when the people studied are unaware of their pattern of behavior and cannot answer questions about it, the anthropologist may need to collect information from a larger sample of individuals to establish the cultural trait.

One example of a cultural trait that most people in a society are not aware of is how far apart people stand when they are having a conversation. Yet there is considerable reason to believe that unconscious cultural rules govern such behavior. These rules become obvious when we interact with people who have different rules. We may experience considerable discomfort when another person stands too close (indicating too much intimacy) or too far (indicating unfriendliness). Often, we interpret that behavior as individual behavior

without realizing that the person is actually following his or her cultural rules. Within Europe, for example, there seems to be a gradient from north to south. Northern Europeans tend to stand further apart, and southern Europeans stand closer.[26]

If we wanted to arrive at the cultural rule for conversational distance between casual acquaintances, we could study a sample of individuals from a society and determine the *modal response,* or *mode.* The mode is a statistical term that refers to the most frequently encountered response in a given series of responses. So, for the North American pattern of casual conversational distance, we would plot the actual distance for many observed pairs of people. Some pairs may be 2 feet apart, some 2.5, and some 4 feet apart. If we count the number of times every particular distance is observed, these counts provide what we call a *frequency distribution.* The distance with the highest frequency is the *modal pattern.* Very often, the frequency distribution takes the form of a *bell-shaped curve,* as shown in Figure 2.1. There, the characteristic measured is plotted on the horizontal axis (in this case, the distance between conversational pairs), and the number of times each distance is observed (its frequency) is plotted on the vertical axis. If we were to plot how a sample of North American casual conversational pairs is distributed, we would probably get a bell-shaped curve that peaks at around 3 feet.[27] Is it any wonder, then, that we sometimes speak of keeping others "at arm's length"?

Although we may be able to discover by interviews and observation that a behavior, thought, or feeling is widely shared within a society, how do we establish that something commonly shared is learned, and therefore cultural? Establishing that something is or is not learned may be difficult. Because children are not reared apart from adult caretakers, the behaviors they exhibit as part of their genetic inheritance are not clearly separated from those they learn from others around them. We suspect that particular behaviors and ideas are largely learned if they vary from society to society. We also suspect genetic influences when particular behaviors or ideas are found in all societies. For example, children the world over seem to acquire language at about the same age and progress through similar stages. These facts suggest that human children have certain genetic capacities for language acquisition. However, the particular languages spoken by people in different societies show considerable variability. This variability suggests that particular languages have to be learned. Similarly, if the courtship patterns of one society differ markedly from those of another, we can be fairly certain that those courtship patterns are learned and therefore cultural.

Figure 2.1 Frequency Distribution Curve
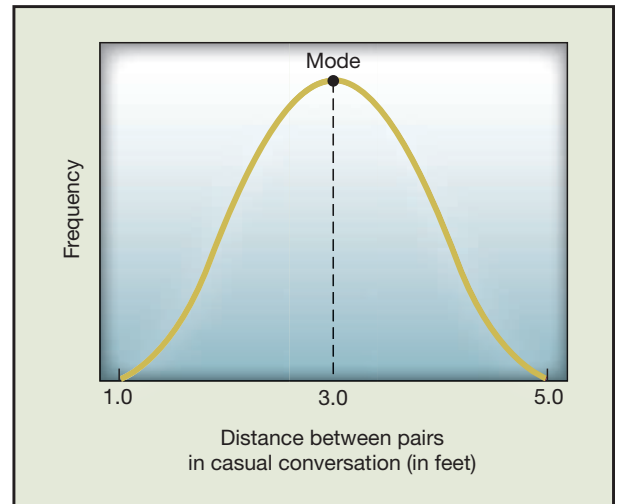
Culture Is Patterned

2.6   **Explain why culture is integrated, patterned, and cumulative.**

Anthropologists have always known that culture is not a hodgepodge of unrelated behaviors and ideas—that a culture is mostly integrated. In saying that a culture is mostly integrated, we mean that the elements or traits that make up that culture are not just a random assortment of customs but are mostly adjusted to or consistent with one another.

A culture may also tend to be integrated for psychological reasons. The ideas of a culture are stored in the brains of individuals. Research in social psychology has suggested that people tend to modify beliefs or behaviors that are not cognitively or conceptually consistent with other information.[28] We do not expect cultures to be completely integrated, just as we do not expect individuals to be completely consistent. But if a tendency toward cognitive consistency is found in humans, we might expect that at least some aspects of a culture would tend to be integrated for that reason alone. How this pressure for consistency works is not hard to imagine. Children, for example, seem to be very good at remembering all the things their parents say. If they ask for something and the parents say no, they may say, "But you said I could yesterday." Such pressure to be consistent may even make parents change their minds! Of course, not everything one wants to do is consistent with the rest of one's desires, but there surely is pressure from within and without to make it so.

Humans are also capable of rational decision making; they can usually figure out that certain things are not easy to do because of other things they do. For example, if a society has a long postpartum sex taboo (a custom in which couples abstain from sex for a year or more after the birth of a baby), we might expect that most people in the society could figure out that it would be easier to observe the taboo if husband and wife did not sleep in the same bed. Or, if people drive on the left side of the road, as in England, it is easier and less dangerous to drive a car with a steering wheel on the right because that placement allows you to judge more accurately how close you are to cars coming at you from the opposite direction.

Consistency or integration of culture traits may also be produced by less conscious psychological processes. People may generalize (transfer) their experiences from one area of life to another. For example, where children are taught that it is wrong to express anger toward family and friends, it turns out that folktales parallel the childrearing; anger and aggression in the folktales tend to be directed only toward strangers, not toward family and friends. It seems as if the expression of anger is too frightening to be expressed close to home, even in folktales.

Adaptation to the environment is another major reason for traits to be patterned. Customs that diminish the survival chances of a society are not likely to persist. Either the people clinging to those customs will become extinct, taking the customs with them, or the customs will be replaced, thereby possibly helping the people to survive. By either process, **maladaptive customs**—those that diminish the chances of survival and reproduction—are likely to disappear. The customs of a society that enhance survival and reproductive success are **adaptive customs** and are likely to persist. Hence, we assume that if a society has survived long enough to be described in the annals of anthropology (the "ethnographic record"), much, if not most, of its cultural repertoire is adaptive, or was at one time.

When we say that a custom is adaptive, however, we mean it is adaptive only with respect to a specific physical and social environment. What may be adaptive in one environment may not be adaptive in another. Therefore, when we ask why a society may have a particular custom, we really are asking if that custom makes sense as an adaptation to that society's particular environmental conditions. If certain customs are more adaptive in particular settings, then those "bundles" of traits will generally be found together under similar conditions. For example, the !Kung, as we have mentioned, subsisted by hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants. Because wild game is mobile and different plants mature at different times, a nomadic way of life may be an adaptive strategy. Because this food-getting strategy cannot support that many people in one area, small social groups make more sense than large communities. Since people move frequently, it is also probably more adaptive to have few material possessions. These cultural traits usually occur together when people depend on hunting and gathering for their food.

Maladaptive customs

Cultural traits that diminish the chances of survival and reproduction in a particular environment.

Adaptive customs

Cultural traits that enhance survival and reproductive success in a particular environment.

Culture Is Cumulative

Nonhuman animals have learned and shared behaviors that may be characterized as cultural behaviors, but none of these observed behaviors match the extent of cultural behaviors in humans, nor the complicated technology that humans are capable of producing. One group may make a seaworthy sailing ship, another a rocket that can traverse space. But neither of these advances would likely have been possible without the gradual accumulation of knowledge through generations and by learning from others in different places.[29] Even in small hunting and gathering bands of about 25–50 people, interaction with people in other bands is high. For example, it is estimated that a hunter will have hunted with more than 300 other men over the course of their lifetimes.[30] Furthermore, for knowledge to accumulate, humans must actively transmit and reproduce this knowledge.[31] Cumulative culture does not just have to involve material inventions. For example, medical knowledge has generally improved over time with successive generations. The key to the cumulative nature of culture is that subsequent steps depend on previous steps, and no individual is likely to figure out a solution without previous knowledge of others. Experiments with groups of chimpanzees and nursery school children asked to solve multistage tasks found that nursery school children were far more likely to reach the last stage apparently because they were more likely to imitate, instruct, and help each other.[32] While knowledge can accumulate, it

can also decline with a shift in circumstances. Research has shown that tool complexity declines with declines in population size, density, and increased social isolation.[33]

Culture Is Imperfectly Patterned

Not all aspects of culture are consistent, nor is a society forced to adapt its culture to changing environmental circumstances. Even in the face of changed circumstances, people may choose not to change their customs. The Tapirapé of central Brazil, for example, did not alter their custom of limiting the number of births even though they had suffered severe population losses after contact with Europeans and their diseases. The Tapirapé population fell to fewer than 100 people from more than 1,000. They were on the way to extinction, yet they continued to value small families. Not only did they believe that a woman should have no more than three children, but they took specific steps to achieve this limitation. They practiced infanticide if twins were born, if the third child was of the same sex as the first two children, and if the possible fathers broke certain taboos during pregnancy or in the child's infancy.[34]

Of course, it is also possible that a people will behave maladaptively, even if they try to alter their behavior. After all, although people may alter their behavior according to what they perceive will be helpful to them, what they perceive to be helpful may not prove to be adaptive. The tendency for a culture to be integrated or patterned, then, may be cognitively and emotionally, as well as adaptively, induced.

How and Why Cultures Change

2.7   **Describe and give examples of how cultures change through discovery and invention, diffusion, and acculturation.**

When you examine the history of a society, it is obvious that its culture has changed over time. Some of the shared behaviors and ideas common at one time are modified or replaced at another time. That is why, in describing a culture, it is important to understand that a description pertains to a particular time period. (Moreover, in many large societies, the description may only be appropriate for a particular subgroup.) For example, the !Kung of the 1950s were mostly dependent on the collection of wild plants and animals and moved their campsites frequently, but later they became more sedentary to engage in wage labor. Whether we focus on some aspect of past behavior or on contemporary behavior depends on what question we want to answer. If we want to maximize our understanding of cultural variation, such as variation in religious belief and practice, it may be important to focus on the earliest descriptions of a group before they were converted to a major world religion. On the other hand, if we want to understand why a people adopted a new religion or how they altered their religion or resisted change in the face of pressure, we need to examine the changes that occurred over time.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss how and why cultures change and briefly review some of the widespread changes that have occurred in recent times. In general, the impetus for change may come from within the society or from without. From within, the unconscious or conscious pressure for consistency will produce culture change if enough people adjust old behavior and thinking to new. And change can also occur if people try to invent better ways of doing things. Michael Chibnik suggests that people who confront a new problem conduct mental or small "experiments" to decide how to behave. These experiments may give rise to new cultural traits.[35] A good deal of culture change may be stimulated by changes in the external environment. For example, if people move into an arid region, they will either have to give up farming or develop a system of irrigation. Recently, observed changes in climate, including increased intensity of storms and the warming of the oceans, have prompted more people to push for less reliance on fossil fuels. In the modern world, changes in the social environment are probably more frequent stimuli for culture change than changes in the physical environment. Many North Americans, for example, started to think seriously about changes in their diets with increasing reports of the deleterious health consequences of obesity. On a much larger scale, a significant amount of the radical and rapid culture change that has occurred in the last few hundred years has been due to

the imperial expansion of Western societies into other areas of the world. Native Americans, for instance, were forced to alter their lifestyles drastically when they were driven off their lands and confined to reservations.

DISCOVERY AND INVENTION   Discoveries and inventions, which may originate inside or outside a society, are ultimately the sources of all culture change. But they do not necessarily lead to change. If an invention or discovery is ignored, no change in culture results. Only when society accepts an invention or discovery and uses it regularly can we begin to speak of culture change.

The new thing discovered or invented, the innovation, may be an object—the wheel, the plow, the computer—or it may involve behavior and ideas—buying and selling, democracy, monogamy. According to Ralph Linton, a discovery is any addition to knowledge, and an invention is a new application of knowledge.[36] Thus, a person might discover that children can be persuaded to eat nourishing food if the food is associated with an imaginary character that appeals to them. Someone else might then exploit that discovery by inventing a cartoon character named Popeye who acquires miraculous strength by devouring cans of spinach.

UNCONSCIOUS INVENTION   Societies have various types of inventions. One type is the consequence of setting a specific goal, such as eliminating tuberculosis or placing a person on the moon. Another type emerges less intentionally. This second process of invention is often referred to as *accidental juxtaposition* or *unconscious invention.* Linton suggested that some inventions, especially those of prehistoric days, were probably the consequences of literally dozens of tiny initiatives by "unconscious" inventors. These inventors made their small contributions, perhaps over many hundreds of years, without being aware of the part they were playing in bringing one invention, such as the wheel or a better form of hand ax, to completion.[37] Consider the example of children playing on a fallen log, which rolls as they walk and balance on it, coupled with the need at a given moment to move a slab of granite from a cave face. The children's play could have suggested the use of logs as rollers and thereby set in motion a series of developments that culminated in the wheel.

In reconstructing the process of invention in prehistoric times, however, we should be careful not to look back on our ancestors with a smugness generated by our more highly developed technology. We have become accustomed to turning to the science sections of our magazines and newspapers and finding, almost daily, reports of miraculous new discoveries and inventions. From our point of view, it is difficult to imagine such a simple invention as the wheel taking so many centuries to come into being. We are tempted to surmise that early humans were less intelligent than we are. But the capacity of the human brain has been the same for perhaps 100,000 years; there is no evidence that the inventors of the wheel were any less intelligent than we are.

INTENTIONAL INNOVATION   Some discoveries and inventions arise out of deliberate attempts to produce a new idea or object. It may seem that such innovations are obvious responses to perceived needs. For example, during the Industrial Revolution, there was a great demand for inventions that would increase productivity. James Hargreaves, in 18th-century England, is an example of an inventor who responded to an existing demand. Textile manufacturers were clamoring for such large quantities of spun yarn that cottage laborers, working with foot-operated spinning wheels, could not meet the demand. Hargreaves, realizing that prestige and financial rewards would come to the person who invented a method of spinning large quantities of yarn in a short time, set about the task and developed the spinning jenny.

But perceived needs and the economic rewards that may be given to the innovator do not explain why only some people innovate. We know relatively little about why some people are more innovative than others. The ability to innovate may depend in part on such individual characteristics as high intelligence and creativity, and creativity may be influenced by social conditions.

A study of innovation among Ashanti artist carvers in Ghana suggests that creativity is more likely in some socioeconomic groups than in others.[38] Some carvers produced only traditional designs; others departed from tradition and produced "new" styles of carving. Two groups were found to innovate the most—the wealthiest and the poorest carvers. These two groups of carvers may tolerate risk more than the middle socioeconomic group. Innovative carving entails some risk because it may take more time and it may not sell. Wealthy carvers can afford the risk, and they may gain some prestige as well as income if their innovation is appreciated. The poor are not doing well anyway, and they have little to lose by trying something new.

Current Research

How Much Can Government Change Culture? A Look at China

Governments can try to change a culture by legal decree backed up by force, as China has tried to do since the revolution in 1949. Initially, the communist government imposed collectivization and tried to promote the ethic of economic equality. But large-scale management turned out to be problematic and collectivization appeared to discourage hard productive work. Perhaps recognizing the failure of this policy, the government decided to abandon collectives in 1979 and move back to more family control of production.

In trying to bring about change, the environment also has to be considered. What environment works for one form of subsistence might not work for others. A study by Burton Pasternak, a U.S. anthropologist, and colleagues from Canada and China studied four communities of Han who were encouraged to

Source: Reza/Webistan

move outside the Great Wall to colonize the Inner Mongolian frontier (Inner Mongolia is part of China). Han farmers who crossed the Great Wall were searching for a better life. Though many found the climate and soil conditions too difficult and returned home, others adjusted to the grasslands and remained. Some Han continued to depend on farming on the fringes of the grasslands. Others farther out on the grasslands became herders. The Han who switched to herding are now in many respects more like the native Mongol herders than like Han or Mongol farmers. The gender division of labor among the Han pastoralists became much sharper than among the Han farmers because men are often far away with the herds. Pastoralist children, not that useful in herding because mistakes can be very costly, are more likely than farm children to stay in school for a long time. Perhaps because of the greater usefulness of children on the farm, Han farm families have more children than Han pastoralists. But both groups have more than the prescribed one child per family. Herdsmen are less likely than farmers to need cooperative labor, so Han pastoralists are more likely to live as an independent family apart from kin than as an extended family, which was traditional.

The Chinese Revolution also attempted to promote gender equality. In one of its first actions in 1950, the new government abolished child betrothal, forced marriage, and the payment of money for a bride. Women were given equal rights in family property, the right to keep their family name, and the right to ask for a divorce. But there was a backlash, largely from the more conservative peasantry and the Marriage

Reform Law was abandoned 3 years later. Nonetheless, gender norms have changed somewhat. William Jankowiak and Xuan Li have compared recent gender stereotypes with earlier ones in the 1980s. There is still considerable stereotyping, but some gender lines have become blurred and females appear to be respected somewhat more than in the 80s. Earlier, gender stereotypes, at least for educated males, emphasized male superiority, particularly with regard to intelligence and confidence. On the negative side, males were viewed as crude. Females were considered less smart and more fragile than males. On the positive side, females were considered more nurturing. Nowadays, perhaps because of greater female success in school, intelligence and confidence are no longer seen as gender-linked qualities. But males are still seen as more ambitious, powerful, and crude; females as quiet, gentle, and anxious. China's one-child policy, particularly in urban areas, may have pushed parents to want their child (male or female) to excel in school and succeed at work. Only about 25 percent of females were in college in the 1980s compared with about 50 percent in recent times. Thus, government policy may have played more of an indirect role in changing stereotypes than directly mandating a change towards more gender equality.

Can governments change culture? As the China examples indicate—not as much as they would like.

Based on Davis and Harrell 1993; Pasternak 2003; Jankowiak and Xuan Li 2014; Hu 2016.

Some societies encourage innovativeness more than others, and this can vary substantially over time. Patricia Greenfield and her colleagues describe the changes in weaving in a Mayan community in the Zinacantán region of Chiapas, Mexico.[39] In 1969 and 1970, innovation was not valued. Rather, tradition was; there was the old "true way" to do everything, including how one dressed. There were only four simple weaving patterns, and virtually all males wore ponchos with the same pattern. By 1991, virtually no poncho was the same and the villagers had developed elaborate brocaded and embroidered designs. In a period of 20 years, innovation had increased dramatically. Two other things had also changed. The economy was more commercialized; textiles as well as other items were now bought and sold. Weaving was taught in a less directed way. Whereas mothers used to give their daughters highly structured instruction, often with "four hands" on the loom, they were later allowed to learn more by themselves, by trial and error. The result was more abstract and varied designs.

WHO ADOPTS INNOVATIONS? Once someone discovers or invents something, there is still the question of whether others will adopt the innovation. Many researchers have studied the characteristics of "early adopters." Such individuals tend to be educated, high in social status, upwardly mobile, and, if they are property owners, have large farms and businesses. The individuals who most need technological improvements—those who are less well off— are generally the last to adopt innovations. The theory is that only the wealthy can afford to take the substantial risks associated with new ways of doing things. In periods of rapid technological change, therefore, the gap between rich and poor is likely to widen because the rich adopt innovations sooner, and benefit more from them, than the poor.[40]

Does this imply that the likelihood of adopting innovations is a simple function of how much wealth a possible adopter possesses? Not necessarily. Frank Cancian reviewed several studies and found that upper-middle-class individuals show more conservatism than lower-middle-class individuals. Cancian suggested that, when the risks are unknown, lower-middle-class individuals are more receptive to innovation because they have less to lose. Later on, when the risks are better known—that is, as more people adopt the innovation—the upper-middle class catches up to the lower-middle class.[41] In general, people are more likely to adopt a behavior as it becomes more common.[42]

The speed with which an innovation is adopted may depend partly on how new behaviors and ideas are typically transmitted—or taught—in a society. If children learn most of what they know from their parents or from a relatively small number of elders, then innovation will be slow to spread throughout the society, and culture change is likely to be slow. Innovations may catch on more rapidly if individuals are exposed to various teachers and other "leaders" who can influence many in a relatively short time, and the more peers we have, the more we might learn from them.[43] Perhaps this is why the pace of change appears to be so fast today. In societies like North America, and increasingly in the industrializing world, it is likely that people learn in schools from teachers, from leaders in their specialties, and from peers.

COSTS AND BENEFITS An innovation that is technologically superior is not necessarily going to be adopted since it comes with costs as well as benefits for both individuals and large-scale industries. Take the computer keyboard. The keyboard used most often on computers today is called the QWERTY keyboard (named after the first letters that appear on the left side of keyboard). This curious ordering of the letters was actually invented to slow typing speed down! Early typewriters had mechanical keys that jammed if the typist went too fast.[44] Since computer keyboards do not have that problem, keys arranged for faster typing would probably be better and have, indeed, been invented. Yet they have not caught on, perhaps because people are reluctant to take the time or make the effort to change.

In large-scale industries, technological innovations may be very costly to implement. A new product or process may require a manufacturing or service facility to be revamped and workers to be retrained. Before a change is made, the costs of doing so are weighed against the potential benefits. If the market is expected to be large for a new product, the product is more likely to be produced. If the market is judged small, the benefits may not be sufficient inducement to change. Companies may also judge the value of an innovation by whether competitors could copy it. If the new innovation can be copied easily, the inventing company may not find the investment worthwhile. Although the market

may be large, the inventing company may not be able to hold onto market share if other companies could produce the product quickly without having to invest in research and development.[45]

Diffusion

The source of new cultural elements in a society may also be another society. The process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group is called **diffusion**. Borrowing sometimes enables a group to bypass stages or mistakes in the development of a process or institution. For example, Germany was able to accelerate its program of industrialization in the 19th century through technological borrowing because it could avoid some of the errors its English and Belgian competitors had made. Japan's industrialization followed the same pattern. Indeed, in recent years, some of the earliest industrialized countries have fallen behind their imitators in certain areas of production, such as automobiles, televisions, cameras, and computers.

Diffusion
The process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group.

Diffusion has far-reaching effects. In a well-known passage, Linton conveyed how integral diffusion is to our lives, even while we are largely ignorant about it. Considering the first few hours in the day of an American man in the 1930s, Linton tells us he

> … awakens in a bed built on a pattern which originated in the Near East but which was modified in northern Europe before it was transmitted to America. He throws back covers made from cotton, domesticated in India, or linen, domesticated in the Near East, or silk, the use of which was discovered in China. All of these materials have been spun and woven by processes invented in the Near East…. He takes off his pajamas, a garment invented in India, and washes with soap invented by the ancient Gauls. He then shaves, a masochistic rite which seems to have derived from either Sumer or ancient Egypt.
>
> Before going out for breakfast he glances through the window, made of glass invented in Egypt, and if it is raining puts on overshoes made of rubber discovered by the Central American Indians and takes an umbrella, invented in southeastern Asia…
>
> On his way to breakfast he stops to buy a paper paying for it with coins, an ancient Lydian invention…. His plate is made of a form of pottery invented in China. His knife is of steel, an alloy first made in southern India, his fork a medieval Italian invention, and his spoon a derivative of a Roman original…. After his fruit (African watermelon) and first coffee (an Abyssinian plant), … he may have the egg of a species of bird domesticated in Indo-China, or thin strips of the flesh of an animal domesticated in eastern Asia which have been salted and smoked by a process developed in northern Europe….
>
> While smoking (an American Indian habit), he reads the news of the day, imprinted in characters invented by the ancient Semites upon a material invented in China by a process invented in Germany. As he absorbs the accounts of foreign troubles he will, if he is a good conservative citizen, thank a Hebrew deity in an Indo-European language that he is 100 percent American.[46]

PATTERNS OF DIFFUSION   The three basic patterns of diffusion are direct contact, intermediate contact, and stimulus diffusion.

1. *Direct contact.* Elements of a society's culture may first be taken up by neighboring societies and then gradually spread farther and farther afield. The spread of the use of paper (a sheet of interlaced fibers) is a good example of extensive diffusion by direct contact. The invention of paper is attributed to the Chinese Ts'ai Lun in 105 C.E. Within 50 years, paper was being made in many places in central China. Although the art of papermaking was kept secret for about 500 years, it was distributed as a commodity to much of the Arab world through the markets at Samarkand. But when Samarkand was attacked by the Chinese in 751 C.E., a Chinese prisoner of war was forced to set up a paper mill. Paper manufacture soon spread to the rest of the Arab world; it was first manufactured in Baghdad in 793 C.E., Egypt about 900 C.E., and Morocco about 1100 C.E. Papermaking was introduced as a commodity in Europe by Arab trade through Italian ports in the 12th century. The Moors built the first European paper mill in Spain about 1150.

The technical knowledge then spread throughout Europe, with mills being built in Italy in 1276, France in 1348, Germany in 1390, and England in 1494.[47] In general, the pattern of accepting the borrowed invention was the same in all cases: Paper was first imported as a luxury, then in ever-expanding quantities as a staple product. Finally, and usually within one to three centuries, local manufacture began.

2. *Intermediate contact.* Diffusion by intermediate contact occurs through the agency of third parties. Frequently, traders carry a cultural trait from the society that originated it to another group. For example, Phoenician traders introduced the ancient Greeks to the first alphabet, which the Phoenicians had themselves received from the Ugarit, another Semitic culture. At times, soldiers serve as intermediaries in spreading a culture trait. European crusaders, such as the Knights Templar and the Knights of St. John, acted as intermediaries in two ways: They carried Christian culture to Muslim societies of North Africa and brought Arab culture back to Europe. In the 19th century, Western missionaries in all parts of the world encouraged natives to wear Western clothing. Hence, in Africa, the Pacific Islands, and elsewhere, native peoples can be found wearing shorts, suit jackets, shirts, ties, and other typically Western articles of clothing.

3. *Stimulus diffusion.* In stimulus diffusion, knowledge of a trait belonging to another culture stimulates the invention or development of a local equivalent. A classic example of stimulus diffusion is the Cherokee syllabic writing system created by a Native American named Sequoya so that his people could write down their language. Sequoya got the idea from his contact with Europeans. Yet he did not adopt the English writing system; indeed, he did not even learn to write English. What he did was utilize some English alphabetic symbols, alter others, and invent new ones. All the symbols he used represented Cherokee syllables and in no way echoed English alphabetic usage. In other words, Sequoya took English alphabetic ideas and gave them a new Cherokee form. The stimulus originated with Europeans; the result was singularly Cherokee.

THE SELECTIVE NATURE OF DIFFUSION   It is tempting to think that the dynamics of diffusion are like a stone sending concentric ripples over still water, but that would oversimplify the way diffusion actually occurs. Not all cultural traits are borrowed as readily as the ones we have mentioned, nor do they usually expand in neat, ever-widening circles. Rather, diffusion is a selective process. The Japanese, for instance, accepted much from Chinese culture, but they also rejected many traits. Rhymed tonal poetry, civil service examinations, and foot binding, which the Chinese favored, were never adopted in Japan. The poetry form was unsuited to the structure of the Japanese language; the examinations were unnecessary in view of the entrenched power of the Japanese aristocracy; and foot binding was repugnant to a people who abhorred body mutilation of any sort.

Not only would we expect societies to reject items from other societies that they find repellent, we would also expect them to reject ideas and technology that do not satisfy some psychological, social, or cultural need. After all, people are not sponges; they do not automatically soak up the things around them. If they did, the amount of cultural variation in the world would be extremely small, which is clearly not the case. Diffusion is also selective because the extent to which cultural traits can be communicated differs. Elements of material culture, such as mechanical processes and techniques, and overt practices, such as physical sports, are relatively easy to demonstrate. Consequently, they are accepted or rejected on their merits. When we move beyond the material world, however, we encounter real difficulties, which Linton (again) aptly described:

> Although it is quite possible to describe such an element of culture as the ideal pattern for marriage … it is much less complete than a description of basketmaking.… The most thorough verbalization has difficulty in conveying the series of associations and conditioned emotional responses which are attached to this pattern [marriage] and which gave it meaning and vitality within our own society.… This is even more true of those concepts which … find no direct expression in behavior aside from verbalization. There is a story of an educated Japanese who after a long discussion on the nature of the Trinity with a European friend … burst out with: "Oh, I see now, it is a committee."[48]

A Masai man in Kenya can call home or around the world from the plains of Kenya.

Source: Joseph Van Os/The Image Bank/Getty Images

Finally, diffusion is selective because the overt form of a particular trait, rather than its function or meaning, frequently seems to determine how the trait will be received. For example, an enthusiasm for women to have bobbed hair (short haircuts) swept through much of North America in the 1920s but never caught on among the Native Americans of northwestern California. To many women of European ancestry, short hair was a symbolic statement of freedom. To Native American women, who traditionally cut their hair short when in mourning, it was a reminder of death.[49]

In the process of diffusion, then, we can identify a number of different patterns. We know that cultural borrowing is selective rather than automatic, and we can describe how a particular borrowed trait has been modified by the recipient culture. But our current knowledge does not allow us to specify when one or another of these outcomes will occur, under what conditions diffusion will occur, and why it occurs the way it does.

Acculturation

On the surface, the process of change called *acculturation* seems to include much of what we have discussed under the label of diffusion because acculturation refers to the changes that occur when different cultural groups come into intensive contact. As in diffusion, the source of new cultural items is the other society. Earlier uses of the term acculturation often ignored the importance of unequal power in the two contacting societies.[50] But as John Bodley makes clear, the more powerful society often used force in a variety of ways that effectively coerced the less powerful to change. More recent use of the term acculturation incorporates the power differential.[51] Thus, **acculturation** can be seen as a process of extensive cultural borrowing in the context of superordinate-subordinate relations between societies. There is probably always some borrowing both ways, but generally the subordinate or less powerful society borrows the most.

External pressure for culture change can take various forms. In its most direct and extreme form—military force used for conquest or colonialization—the dominant group usually prevails. Sometimes the use of force or the threat of force is explicitly used to bring about culture change in the other group. In the Spanish conquest of Mexico, for example, the conquerors forced many of the native groups to accept Catholicism. But extermination of large numbers of people through military campaigns can have profound effects on the ability of a people to maintain their way of life, whether or not there are explicit attempts to

Acculturation

The process of extensive borrowing of aspects of culture in the context of superordinate-subordinate relations between societies; usually occurs as the result of external pressure or force.

change that way of life. Although such direct force is not always exerted in conquest situations, dominated peoples often have little choice but to change. Examples of such indirectly forced change abound in the history of Native Americans in the United States. Although the federal government made few direct attempts to force people to adopt American culture, it did drive many native groups from their lands, thereby obliging them to give up many aspects of their traditional ways of life. To survive, they had no choice but to adopt many of the dominant society's traits. When Native American children were required to go to schools, which taught the dominant society's values, the process was accelerated.

A subordinate society may acculturate to a dominant society even in the absence of direct or indirect force. Perceiving that members of the dominant society enjoy more secure living conditions, the dominated people may identify with the dominant culture in the hope that they will be able to share some of its benefits by doing so. Or they may elect to adopt cultural elements from the dominant society because they perceive that the new element has advantages. For example, in Arctic areas, many Inuit and Saami groups seemed eager to replace dog sleds with snowmobiles without any coercion.[52] There is evidence that the Inuit weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the snowmobile versus the dog sled and that its adoption was gradual. Similarly, rifles and motorboats were seen as a major technological improvement, increasing the success rate in hunting and sea mammal hunting, but the Inuit did not completely abandon their former ways of hunting. In fact, these new technologies facilitated the ability of the Inuit to continue their kinship-based networks for collective action and food sharing that would have otherwise been under stress.[53] More recently, the Inuit have adopted GPS devices for navigating and VHS radios for weather reports as aids for hunting. However, while this technology is often helpful, it has caused some problems when fewer hunters learn traditional knowledge for reading the land and weather. After all, batteries can fail. Also, some hunters relying on technology become overly confident and get themselves into more dangerous situations.[54]

Acculturation processes vary considerably depending upon the wishes of the more powerful society, the attitudes of the less powerful, and whether there is any choice. More powerful societies do not always want individuals from another culture to assimilate or "melt into" the dominant culture completely; instead, they may prefer and even actively promote a *multicultural* society. Multiculturalism can be voluntary or may arise out of deliberate segregation. Then, too, even though the less powerful group may be pressured to acquire some of the dominant group's cultural traits, they may resist or even reject those cultural elements, at least for a considerable length of time.

Many millions of people, however, never had a chance to acculturate after contact with Europeans. They simply died, sometimes directly at the hands of the conquerors, but probably more often as a result of the new diseases the Europeans inadvertently brought with them. Depopulation because of measles, smallpox, and tuberculosis was particularly common in North and South America and on the islands of the Pacific. Those areas had previously been isolated from contact with Europeans and from the diseases of that continuous landmass we call the Old World—Europe, Asia, and Africa.[55] The story of Ishi, the last surviving member of a group of Native Americans in California called the Yahi, is a moving testimonial to the frequently tragic effect of contact with Europeans. In the space of 22 years, the Yahi population was reduced from several hundred to near zero. The historical record on this episode of depopulation suggests that European Americans murdered 30 to 50 Yahi for every European American murdered, but perhaps 60 percent of the Yahi died in the 10 years following their initial exposure to European diseases.[56]

Nowadays, many powerful nations—and not just Western ones—may seem to be acting in more humanitarian ways to improve the life of previously subjugated as well as other "developing" peoples. For better or worse, these programs, however, are still forms of external pressure. The tactic used may be persuasion rather than force, but most of the programs are nonetheless designed to bring about acculturation in the direction of the dominant societies' cultures. For example, the introduction of formal schooling cannot help but instill new values that may contradict traditional cultural patterns. Even health care programs may alter traditional ways of life by undermining the authority of shamans and other leaders and by increasing population beyond the number that can be supported in traditional ways. Confinement to reservations or other kinds of direct force are not the only ways a dominant society can bring about acculturation.

Applied Anthropology

Development Programs and Culture Change: A Bedouin Case Study

Most governments of the world today want to "develop" their countries. They want to increase their crop yields and their exports, build major roads and irrigation projects, and industrialize. However, many development schemes have failed in part because they do not adequately consider the cultures of the people whose lives they affect. Governments, as well as international agencies that lend money, increasingly turn for advice to anthropologists to help plan and evaluate projects. While governments may not fully appreciate traditional ways of life, anthropologists understand that people are unlikely to accept a change if it does not integrate well with other aspects of their culture.

In many countries of the Middle East, governments have pressured nomadic Bedouin peoples to settle down. Yet government settlement schemes, by force or with enticements, have also often failed. The Bedouin way of life is essentially at odds with nation states, in which land is increasingly privately owned or converted for industrial uses (such as oil production) and resources are regulated. But Bedouin require vast stretches of grassland and a water source for their herds, resources that were traditionally available to them as members of kinship-based groups that maintained grazing rights over large territories.

Although there are many Bedouin groups in the Middle East and North Africa, they share key cultural traits. They are, as anthropologist Dawn Chatty points out, at once tribal, nomadic, and pastoral. And these three traits are a large part of a Bedouin's identity. When government-built settlements have been created to replace the Bedouin tent, the tribe has often continued its pastoral life near the settlement until overgrazing left a human-made desert or the water supply ran out. The nomadic Bedouin would then abandon such settlements to seek other grazable land and water, and they would again pitch their familiar tents.

In the 1980s, Dawn Chatty was asked by the government of the Middle Eastern country of Oman to help design a project to extend basic social services to the Bedouin without coercing them to alter their way of life. It isn't often that governments fund in-depth studies to try to understand the needs of the people being affected, but Chatty was able to persuade the Oman government that such a study was necessary as a first step. With United Nations funding, she evaluated the needs of the Harasiis pastoralists, a Bedouin group in Oman. Because the government wanted some action right away, the project soon incorporated a mobile health unit that could begin a program of primary care as well as immunization against measles, whooping cough, and polio. After a period of evaluation, the project team also recommended an annual distribution of tents, the establishment of

The Bedouin still often erect tents in fixed housing settlements as shown in this Israeli Negev settlement.
Source: HG/Magnum Photos

dormitories so that children could live at schools, a new system of water delivery, and veterinary and marketing assistance.

The government was receptive to some of the recommendations of Chatty's group, but not to the distribution of tents that had been funded by the UN. Soon a "tribal" complex was built for the Harasiis. It included offices for their government representative, a medical clinic, a school, a mosque, a "reverse osmosis" water plant, a police station, and villas for government employees. But the complex was never occupied. It appears that the Harasiis would continue to pursue their nomadic way of life. Yet the Bedouin are not reluctant to change in all respects. As Chatty chronicles, many readily gave up relying on camels for transport in favor of trucks. Trucks are a modern adaptation, yet they still allow mobility. Now the Bedouin are able to get water from wells and transport water to their animals by truck. The adoption of trucks led to other changes. Since small animals can be more readily transported to new pastures by truck, many Bedouin have given up their dependence on camels and shifted to sheep and goat herding. Because money is required to buy trucks and pay for gasoline and repairs, Bedouin spend more time working for wages in temporary jobs. Aside from such adaptations from within, though, they have resisted enforced change. As for Chatty, she views her experience philosophically. She, like other applied anthropologists, has learned a great deal about the environmental and political conditions that impact the world's more marginalized cultures. And she continues to believe that it is her job to push for what Michael Cernea called "putting people first."

Based on Cernea 1991; Chatty 1996, 2006, 2013; Strachan 2011.

The process of acculturation also applies to immigrants, most of whom, at least nowadays, choose to leave one country for another. Immigrants are almost always a minority in the new country and therefore are in a subordinate position. If the immigrant's culture changes, it is almost always in the direction of the dominant culture. Immigrant groups vary considerably in the degree and speed with which they adopt the new culture and the social roles of the new society in which they live. An important area of research is explaining the variation in acculturation and assimilation. Assimilation is a concept very similar to acculturation, but *assimilation* is a term more often used by sociologists to describe the process by which individuals acquire the social roles and culture of the dominant group.

Revolution

Revolution

A usually violent replacement of a society's rulers.

Certainly, the most drastic and rapid way a culture can change is as a result of **revolution**—replacement, usually violent, of a society's rulers. Historical records and our daily newspapers indicate that people frequently rebel against established authority. Rebellions, if they occur, almost always occur in state societies where there is a distinct ruling elite. They take the form of struggles between rulers and ruled, between conquerors and conquered, or between representatives of an external colonial power and segments of the native society. Rebels do not always succeed in overthrowing their rulers, so rebellions do not always result in revolutions. And even successful rebellions do not always result in culture change; the individual rulers may change, but customs or institutions may not. The sources of revolution may be mostly internal, as in the French Revolution, or partly external, as in the Russian-supported 1948 revolution in Czechoslovakia and the United States-supported 1973 revolution against President Allende in Chile.

The American War of Independence was a colonial rebellion against the greatest imperial power of the 18th century, Great Britain. The 13 colonies owed at least a part of their success in the war to aid from France, which had been waging its own "Seven Years' War" against the British, and more indirectly from Spain, which would also declare war on the greater imperial power. Actually, the American war was closely following what we would now call a world war. In the 19th century and continuing into the middle and later years of the 20th century, there would be many other wars of independence against imperial powers in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. We don't always remember that the American rebellion was the first anti-imperialist war in modern times and the model for many that followed. Just like many of the most recent liberation movements, the American rebellion was also part of a larger worldwide war involving people from many rival nations. A total of 30,000 German-speaking soldiers fought, for pay, on the British side; an army and navy from France fought on the American side. There were volunteers from other European countries, including Denmark, Holland, Poland, and Russia.

As in many revolutions, those who were urging revolution were considered "radicals." At a now-famous debate in Virginia in 1775, delegates from each colony met at a Continental Congress. Patrick Henry put forward a resolution to prepare for defense against the British armed forces. The motion barely passed, by a vote of 65 to 60. Henry's speech is now a part of American folklore. He rose to declare that it was insane not to oppose the British and that he was not afraid to test the strength of the colonies against Great Britain. Others might hesitate, he said, but he would have "liberty or death." The radicals who supported Henry's resolution included many aristocratic landowners, two of whom, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, became the first and third occupants of the highest political office in what became the United States of America.[57]

Not all peoples who are suppressed, conquered, or colonialized eventually rebel against established authority. Why this is so, and why rebellions and revolts are not always successful in bringing about culture change, are still open questions. But some possible answers have been investigated. The historian Crane Brinton examined the classic revolutions of the past, including the American, French, and Russian revolutions, and suggested a set of conditions that may give rise to rebellion and revolution:

1. *Loss of prestige of established authority,* often as a result of the failure of foreign policy, financial difficulties, dismissals of popular ministers, or alteration of popular policies. France in the 18th century lost three major international conflicts, with disastrous results

for its diplomatic standing and internal finances. Russian society was close to military and economic collapse in 1917, after 3 years of World War I.

2. *Threat to recent economic improvement.* In France, as in Russia, those sections of the population (professional classes and urban workers) whose economic fortunes had only shortly before taken an upward swing were "radicalized" by unexpected setbacks, such as steeply rising food prices and unemployment. The same may be said for the American colonies on the brink of their rebellion against Great Britain.

3. *Indecisiveness of government,* as exemplified by lack of consistent policy, which gives the impression of being controlled by, rather than in control of, events. The frivolous arrogance of Louis XVI's regime and the bungling of George III's prime minister, Lord North, with respect to the problems of the American colonies are examples.

4. *Loss of support of the intellectual class.* Such a loss deprived the prerevolutionary governments of France and Russia of any avowed philosophical support and led to their unpopularity with the literate public.[58]

The classic revolutions of the past occurred in countries that were industrialized only incipiently at best. For the most part, the same is true of the rebellions and revolutions in recent years; they have occurred mostly in countries we call "developing." The evidence from a worldwide survey of developing countries suggests that rebellions have tended to occur where the ruling classes depended mostly on the produce or income from land and therefore were resistant to demands for reform from the rural classes that worked the land. In such agricultural economies, the rulers are not likely to yield political power or give greater economic returns to the workers because to do so would eliminate the basis (landownership) of the rulers' wealth and power.[59]

Some political scientists have a broader definition of revolution and argue that not all great revolutions occur on the battlefield, nor are they all inspired by public rebellions. Some, like the cultural revolution Ataturk brought to Turkey in 1919, for example, are largely the work of charismatic leaders.[60] Ataturk's government was responsible for molding a formerly imperial Muslim nation into a democracy and separating church (or mosque) and state. In retrospect, it was a monumental achievement since the role of clerics in government and the definition of democracy have remained ambiguous in much of the Middle East.

Starting in winter of 2010, the world witnessed a remarkable series of popular uprisings known collectively as the Arab Spring that has affected nearly every Muslim nation. Protests and revolts are not that unusual, but what makes these so different is the degree to which they diffused across a broad region.[61] It all began in the winter of 2010, when a street vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire after the police confiscated his fruit and vegetable cart. He had been an educated man, as more and more young Tunisians have been in the last few decades, but was unable to find other work in a country that had a 30 percent unemployment rate. His story was met with widespread and persistent protests, and, with world watching and listening through social media, Tunisia's president fled to Saudi Arabia less than 2 months later, and the Tunisian people were promised a free and democratic election. Within months, similar public protests toppled the leaders of Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The leaders of nearly every Muslim nation have been affected by the uprising, and many of those who are still in power have promised reforms, reorganized their governments, or promised to leave when their current terms of office end.[62] This is not to say that outcomes were identical. They were not. In Morocco and Jordan, for example, protests were fairly modest and did not last long. In Saudi Arabia and Oman, there were only scattered riots. But in some of

Anti-government protesters during a 2011 rally in Morocco that became part of what is known as the Arab Spring movement.

Source: Abdeljalil Bounhar/AP Images

the countries, such as Libya and Syria, turmoil and bloodshed are still ongoing. Scholars have tried to understand not only the possible causes, but the differential outcomes. Why did some dictators fall? Some of the conditions mentioned are economic stress, particularly the inability of urban, educated young people to get work consistent with their abilities, and worsening (but not extreme) inequality. A severe drought in Syria between 2006–2010 in the wheat-growing regions may have been an important factor in the crisis there.[63] Some have even suggested that severe drought in China in 2011 had an effect on Syria, since China had to import so much wheat that the world price on wheat doubled.[64] Will the protests ultimately lead to more democratization as many of the protesters wanted? [65] It is too soon to know whether these uprisings will lead to the desired cultural change. The goal in each nation appears to be a democratically elected government and the end of oppressive regimes.

Finally, a particularly interesting question is why revolutions sometimes, perhaps even usually, fail to measure up to the high hopes of those who initiate them. When rebellions succeed in replacing the ruling elite, the result is often the institution of a military dictatorship even more restrictive and repressive than the government that existed before. The new ruling establishment may merely substitute one set of repressions for another rather than bring any real change to the nation. On the other hand, some revolutions have resulted in fairly drastic overhauls of societies.

The idea of revolution has been one of the central myths and inspirations of many groups both in the past and in the present. The colonial empire building of countries, such as England and France, created a worldwide situation in which rebellion became nearly inevitable. In numerous technologically underdeveloped lands, which have been exploited by more powerful countries for their natural resources and cheap labor, a deep resentment has often developed against the foreign ruling classes or their local clients. Where the ruling classes, native or foreign, refuse to be responsive to those feelings, rebellion becomes the only alternative. In many areas, it has become a way of life.

Culture Change and Adaptation

2.8 **Relate culture change to the process of adaptation to a changing environment.**

We have discussed the fact that culture is patterned, and that adaptation to the environment is one reason why certain culture traits are clustered, because more than one trait is likely to be *adaptive* in a particular environment. We make the assumption that most of the customary behaviors of a culture are probably *adaptive*, or at least not maladaptive, in that environment. Even though customs are learned and not genetically inherited, cultural adaptation may resemble biological adaptation in one major respect. The frequency of certain genetic alternatives is likely to increase over time if those genetic traits increase their carriers' chances of survival and reproduction. Similarly, the frequency of a new learned behavior will increase over time and become customary in a population if the people with that behavior are most likely to survive and reproduce.

One of the most important differences between cultural evolution and genetic evolution is that individuals often can decide whether or not to accept and follow the way their parents behave or think, whereas they cannot decide whether or not to inherit certain genes. When enough individuals change their behavior and beliefs, we say that the culture has changed. Therefore, it is possible for culture change to occur much more rapidly than genetic change.

A dramatic example of intentional cultural change was the adoption and later elimination of the custom of *sepaade* among the Rendille, a pastoral population that herds camels, goats, and sheep in the desert in northern Kenya. According to the *sepaade* tradition, some women had to wait to marry until all their brothers were married. These women could well have been over 40 by the time they married. The Rendille say this tradition was a result of intense warfare between the Rendille and the Borana during the mid-19th century. Attacked by Borana on horseback, the male warriors had to leave their camels unattended, and the frightened camels fled. The daughters of one male age-set were appointed to look after the camels, and the *sepaade* tradition developed. In 1998, long after warfare with the Borana ceased, the elders decided to free the *sepaade* from their obligation to postpone their own marriages. Interviews with the Rendille in the 1990s revealed that many individuals