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Culture Counts


A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

Serena Nanda • Richard L. Warms

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FOURTH EDITION

CULTURE COUNTS

A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

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Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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Dedication

To the grandchildren:
Alexander, Adriana,
Charlotte, Kai, and Waverly.

—SN—

To the students of Texas State University,
whose questions, comments, and
occasional howls of outrage have,
since 1988, made being an anthropology
professor the best job I can imagine.

—RW—



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PREFACE

ANTHROPOLOGY is the study of all people, in all places, and at all times. Students and scholars alike are drawn to anthropology as part of the realization that our lives and experiences are limited, but human possibilities are virtually endless. We are drawn to anthropology by the incredible variability of human society and our desire to experience and understand it. We are drawn by the beauty of other lives and sometimes by the horror as well. We wrote this fourth edition of *Culture Counts* to transmit some of our sense of wonder at the endless variety of the world and to show how anthropologists have come to understand, analyze, and engage with human culture and society.

Culture Counts, fourth edition, is a brief introduction to anthropology written particularly for students in their first two years of college but is appropriate for other audiences as well. Our goal has been to write in a clean, crisp, jargon-free style that speaks to readers without speaking down to them. Each chapter is relatively brief but is packed with ethnographic examples and discussions that keep readers involved and focused. Although it is written in an extremely accessible style, *Culture Counts* sacrifices none of the intellectual rigor or sophistication of our longer work, *Cultural Anthropology*, now in its 11th edition.

We have retained the same chapters as the third edition and the internal organization of the chapters is the same as well. Each chapter begins with clearly stated student learning objectives. These are followed with an opening ethnographic situation, circumstance, history, or survey designed to engage the readers' interest and focus their attention on the central issues of the chapter. These chapter opening essays raise questions about the anthropological experience, the nature of culture, and the ways in which anthropologists understand society. Much of what follows in each chapter indicates the ways in which the themes of the opening stories are illuminated by anthropological thinking.

Each chapter includes a section called "Using Anthropology," which provides an example of the ways in which anthropologists are engaged in applying anthropology to solve practical human problems. "Using Anthropology" is designed to bring anthropology into the lives of students and to show them how anthropological knowledge and the work of anthropologists is an active force in the social, political, and economic lives of people around the world.

At the end of each chapter, a feature entitled "Bringing It Back Home" explores a current controversy, issue, or debate from an anthropological perspective. Each example is followed by critical thinking questions entitled "You Decide." The questions encourage students to apply anthropological understanding as well as their own life experiences and studies to the issue under discussion. Through these exercises, students learn to use anthropological ideas to grapple with important issues facing our own and other cultures. They learn to apply anthropology to the realities of the world.

Finally, each chapter concludes with a summary written in question-and-answer form. This helps students actively review the chapter material and encourages them to think about anthropological information and part of the solution to problems.

Design is an important feature of *Culture Counts*. One of our goals is to present students with a clear, easy-to-follow text that is uncluttered and that highlights the main source of anthropology—ethnographic data. To address the visual orientation of contemporary students, we have taken considerable care to choose visually compelling photographs and to include high-quality maps and charts that provide visual cues for content and help students remember what they have read. Each image and its accompanying explanatory caption reflects specific passages and themes in the text. Extended ethnographic examples are accompanied by maps that provide the specific geographical location of the group under discussion.

PERSPECTIVE AND THEMES

As with *Cultural Anthropology*, our main perspective in *Culture Counts* is ethnographic, and our theoretical approach is eclectic. Ethnography is the fundamental source of anthropological data, and the interest in ethnography is one of the principal reasons students take anthropology courses. Ethnographic examples have the power to engage students and encourage them to think about other cultures as well as to analyze and question their own. Ethnographic examples that illuminate cultures, situations, and histories, both past and present, are used extensively in every chapter. *Culture Counts* describes the major issues and theoretical approaches in anthropology in a balanced manner, drawing analysis, information, and insight from many different perspectives. It takes a broad, optimistic, enthusiastic approach and promotes the idea that debates within the field are signs of anthropology's continued relevance rather than problems it must overcome.

In addition, we believe that issues of power, stratification, gender, ethnicity, globalization, and change are central to understanding contemporary cultures. These topics are given chapters of their own as well as integrated in appropriate places throughout the text.

Each chapter is organized so that the main ideas, secondary ideas, important terms and definitions, and ethnographic material stand out clearly. Although we have a deep appreciation for classic ethnography and cite it frequently, each chapter also presents current work in anthropology and includes many references to books and essays published in the past five years.

Culture Counts, fourth edition, continues the collaboration between Serena Nanda and Richard Warms. Warms's specialties in West Africa, anthropological theory, and social and economic anthropology complement Nanda's specialties in India, gender, law, and cultural anthropology. The results are synergistic. Our experiences, readings, discussions, and debates, as well as feedback from reviewers and professors who have adopted our books, have led to the production of a book that reflects the energy and passion of anthropology.

Both Nanda and Warms have extensive experience in writing textbooks for university audiences. In addition to *Cultural Anthropology*, now in its 11th edition, Nanda, with Jill Norgren, is the author of *American Cultural Pluralism and Law*, now in its third edition, and *Gender Diversity: Cross-cultural Variations*, now in its second edition. Nanda is also the editor of the gender section of the new *International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality* (ed. By Anne Bolin and Patricia Whelehan). Warms, with R. Jon McGee, is author of

Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History, now in its sixth edition. Warms and McGee are also the editors of *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology: An Encyclopedia*. Warms, McGee, and James Garber have also written *Sacred Realms: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion*, second edition. Collaborative writing continues to be an exciting intellectual adventure for us, and we believe that the ethnographic storytelling approach of this book will promote students' growth as well.

NEW IN THIS EDITION

We have made a number of significant changes and additions to this fourth edition, based partly on recent developments in the field of anthropology and partly on the valuable feedback we have received from our adopters and reviewers. Some substantial changes include:

- △ A greater number of photos, directly tied to the text narrative, as well as an increased number of maps, tables, charts, and graphs.
- △ New chapter opening stories, including “Working with Young Offenders in Brazil,” “Arctic Cultures and Climate Change,” “Wealth and Power of the Ashanti State,” “Wealth and Poverty: Global Perspectives,” and “The Contradictions of Globalization.”
- △ New Bringing It Home chapter features include “UX (User Experience),” “Discrimination Against Trans People in the United States,” “Fundamentalism and Religious Change,” and “Religion, Art, and Censorship.”

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter 1, “What is Anthropology and Why Should I Care?” has substantial updates in the “Biological Anthropology” section. The “Linguistic Anthropology” section has been updated to include new technology. The “Using Anthropology: Forensic Anthropology” section has been updated to include examples of mass murder and genocide. The organization of the section discussing the reasons for studying anthropology has been improved and new archaeological data about human violence has been added.

In Chapter 2, “Culture Counts,” has increased coverage of medical anthropology, focusing on the differentiation of disease and illness. The coverage of the legalization of marijuana has been updated and the photography program has been expanded and revised.

Chapter 3, “Doing Cultural Anthropology,” has a new opening ethnography about working with young offenders in Brazil. New information has been added to emphasize the distinction between cultural and moral relativism and the section on power and voice in anthropology has been rewritten. An updated and expanded “Using Anthropology” section focuses on Polly Wiessner and her work with the Enga in Papua New Guinea. The “Bringing It Back Home” section has been updated to include the Islamic State and Boko Haram.

Chapter 4, “Communication,” has been revised to increase coverage of political speech and of the “Northern Cities Shift.” The “Bringing It Back Home: English Only” section has been substantially updated and now includes new coverage of the “three-generation rule.”

Chapter 5, “Making a Living,” has an edited and revised chapter opening story, which is now called “Arctic Cultures and Climate Change.” The “Human Adaptation and Environment” section has been substantially rewritten and reorganized. There is additional coverage of pastoralism and the case study of “Musha: A Peasant Agricultural Village in Egypt” has been expanded.

Chapter 6, “Economics,” includes improvements to the organization of the section “Organizing Labor,” and a new subsection on households and kin groups in small-scale society. There has been a significant rewrite of the section “Specialization in Complex Societies” (with a new quote from Adam Smith), and there is a new “Using Anthropology” section about Ukraine, which includes events of the past three years. All statistics in the chapter are updated, and there is a new “Bringing It Back Home” section about UX (User Experience).

Chapter 7, “Political Organization,” begins with a new feature about wealth and power in the Ashanti State. It includes an updated section on chieftainships, reflecting the ways these were changed by globalization. There are also updates to the “State and Social Stratification” section that reflect the current refugee crisis and problems of the denial of citizenship. The “Bringing It Back Home” section on the U.S./Mexico border fence has been substantially revised.

Although the structure of Chapter 8, “Stratification: Class, Caste, Race, and Ethnicity” remains unchanged, large sections of the chapter have been thoroughly rewritten. There is a new opening story: “Wealth and Poverty: Global Perspectives.” The section on “The American Class System” is almost entirely new. There has been a major revision of “Using Anthropology: Homelessness and Social Activism” and a thorough rewrite of “Race and Racial Stratification in the United States.” The section on “Ethnic Stratification in the United States” has been thoroughly updated.

Chapter 9 on “Marriage, Family, and Kinship” includes a new “Using Anthropology” section examining domestic violence and the culture defense. The section on arranged marriage has been expanded to incorporate changes taking place among female Indian garment workers. The “Bringing It Back Home: Caring for the Elderly” section has been expanded.

Chapter 10, “Sex and Gender,” includes a new section on gender hierarchies in wealthy nations and a new “Bringing It Back Home” essay about discrimination against trans people in the United States.

Chapter 11, “Religion,” has been slightly scaled down to match the size of the other chapters. It includes significant revisions of the section on “Shamans” and the section on “Witches and Sorcerers.” There is a new ethnography that features the work of Charles Price on the Rastafarians and a new “Bringing It Back Home” section that explores fundamentalism and religious change.

Chapter 12, “Creative Expression: Anthropology and the Arts,” includes several new features. There is a new section on Frida Khalo that highlights the relationship between art and politics. Another new section focuses on marketing indigenous arts, and a new “Bringing It Back Home” examines the connections between art, religion and censorship.

Chapter 13, “Power, Conquest, and a World System,” has been updated to provide more emphasis on the Americas. There is new information on the role of disease in the colonization of the Americas. A new passage examines the historic role of the United Nations in relation to national self-determination. The “Bringing It Back Home” on the limits of tolerance has been updated to include information about the refugee and terror crises of 2015–2016.

Chapter 14, “Culture, Change, and Globalization,” has been updated and expanded to provide more information on the great contemporary migrations now taking place throughout the Middle East

and Europe. There is a new opening ethnography about the contradictions of globalization. There is a new section on families adapting to globalization as well as substantial updates to the sections on sweatshop labor and political instability. All of the statistical information has been updated to the most recent available.

TEACHING FEATURES AND STUDY AIDS

Each chapter includes outstanding pedagogical features to help students identify, learn, and remember key concepts and data. Several learning aids help students better understand and retain the chapter's information, as follows:

- ▲ Full-color opening photos with captions placed at the beginning of each chapter.
- ▲ Student Learning Objectives provide clearly stated, measurable goals for student learning.
- ▲ Each chapter opens with an essay that focuses on an ethnographic situation, circumstance, or history designed to capture students' interest and launch them into the chapter.
- ▲ Each chapter concludes with a brief essay (“Bringing It Back Home”) and questions (“You Decide”) that encourage the application of anthropological thinking to a current controversy, issue, or debate. The questions can be used as assignments or to promote classroom discussion.
- ▲ Summaries are arranged as numbered questions and answers at the end of each chapter and recap critical ideas to aid with study and review.
- ▲ Key terms are listed alphabetically at the end of each chapter, for quick review.
- ▲ A running glossary of key terms is found in the margins of the pages where the terms are introduced.
- ▲ References for every source cited within the text are listed alphabetically at the end of the book.

SUPPLEMENTS

Instructor Resources

- ▲ **Online Instructor's Manual with Lesson Plans.** The manual includes learning objectives, a detailed chapter outline, key terms, film and media suggestions, discussion questions, in-class activities, and Anthropology Connections.
- ▲ **Downloadable Word Test Bank.** The enhanced test bank includes a variety of questions per chapter—a combination of multiple-choice, true-false, completion, essay, and critical thinking formats, with a full answer key. The test bank is coded to the learning objectives that appear in the main text, and identifies where in the text (by section) the answer appears. Finally, each question in the test bank has been carefully reviewed by experienced anthropology instructors for quality, accuracy, and content coverage so instructors can be sure they are working with an assessment and grading resource of the highest caliber.

- ▲ **Cengage Learning Testing.** Powered by Cognero, the accompanying assessment tool is a flexible, online system that allows you to:
- import, edit, and manipulate test bank content from the text's test bank or elsewhere, including your own favorite test questions;
 - create ideal assessments with your choice of 15 question types (including true/false, multiple-choice, opinion scale/Likert, and essay);
 - create multiple test versions in an instant using drop-down menus and familiar, intuitive tools that take you through content creation and management with ease;
 - deliver tests from your LMS, your classroom, or wherever you want—plus, import and export content into other systems as needed.
- ▲ **Online PowerPoint Lectures.** Helping you make your lectures more engaging while effectively reaching your visually oriented students, these handy Microsoft PowerPoint® slides outline the chapters of the main text in a classroom-ready presentation. The PowerPoint slides reflect the content and organization of the new edition of the text and feature some additional examples and Quick Quizzes.

Student Resources

- ▲ ***Globalization and Change in Fifteen Cultures: Born in One World, Living in Another*, edited by George Spindler and Janice E. Stockard.** In this volume, 15 case study authors write about culture change in today's diverse settings around the world. Each original article provides insight into the dynamics and meanings of change, as well as the effects of globalization at the local level. (978-0-534-63648-7)
- ▲ ***Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by George Spindler and Janice E. Stockard.** Select from more than 60 classic and contemporary ethnographies representing geographic and topical diversity. Newer case studies focus on culture change and culture continuity, reflecting the globalization of the world, and include a legacy edition of Napoleon Chagnon's *Ynomamö*, and a fourth edition of Richard Lee's *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*. Recent publications include *Shadowed Lives*, by Leo Chavez.
- ▲ ***Case Studies on Contemporary Social Issues*, edited by John A. Young.** Framed around social issues, these new contemporary case studies are globally comparative and represent the cutting-edge work of anthropologists today. Recent publications include *Slaughterhouse Blues*, by Donald Stull and Michael Broadway, and *Seeking Food Rights: Nation, Inequality and Repression in Uzbekistan*, by Nancy Rosenberger.



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Jialiang Gao

1

WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Although most anthropologists study a single problem, together they are interested in the total range of human activity. Here, colorfully dressed women from the Miao ethnic minority pose on a narrow mountain trail in Guizhou, China. What questions would you ask about them?

Source: peace-on-earth.org

AFTER YOU HAVE READ THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- ▲ Define anthropology and explain how it differs from other academic disciplines.
- ▲ List the major subdisciplines of anthropology.
- ▲ Explain some of the ways that anthropology is applied both for careers and for general understanding.
- ▲ Discuss and explain the ideas of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.
- ▲ Describe anthropology's position on race.
- ▲ Describe some of the key reasons for studying anthropology.

THE NACIREMA



ANTHROPOLOGISTS have become so familiar with the diversity of ways different peoples behave in similar situations that they are not surprised by even the most exotic customs. However, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema are so unusual that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go. The Nacirema are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and Tarahumare of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy, but Naciremans spend a considerable portion of the day in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as dominant concerns in the ethos of the people.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and has a natural tendency to debility and disease. People's only hope is to avert these through the use of ritual and ceremony, and every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The rituals associated with the shrine are secret and are discussed with children only when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest built into the wall in which are kept the many charms and magical potions no native believes he could live without. Beneath the charm box is a small fountain. Each day, every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the fountain, and proceeds with a brief rite of purification. The holy waters are secured from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Each day, Naciremans perform a complex set of rituals devoted to the mouth. Were it not for these rituals, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them.

In addition to daily mouth rites, 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

uses these tools to scrape, prod, and cut particularly sensitive areas of the mouth. Magical materials believed to arrest decay and draw fluids are inserted in the mouth. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy-mouth-man, as he jabs an awl into an exposed nerve, to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved in these practices. And indeed much of the population shows definite masochistic tendencies. For example, a portion of the daily body ritual performed only by men involves scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument.

Nacirema medicine men have an imposing temple, or *latipsoh*, in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can be performed only at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the priests who perform miracles but also a permanent group of vestal maidens who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costume.

The *latipsoh* ceremonies are so harsh that it is surprising that sick adults are not only willing but also eager to undergo the protracted ritual purification, if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of the temple will not admit a client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained admission and survived the ceremonies, the guardians continue to demand gifts, sometimes pursuing clients to their homes and businesses.

Supplicants entering the temple are first stripped of all their clothes. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost. A man whose own wife has never seen him in an excretory act suddenly finds himself naked and assisted by a vestal maiden while he performs his natural functions into a sacred vessel. Female clients find their naked bodies are subjected to the scrutiny, manipulation, and prodding of the medicine men. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill the patients, in no way decreases the people's faith in the medicine men.

In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices of the Nacirema that have their base in native esthetics but depend on the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large. General dissatisfaction with breast shape is symbolized by the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation. A few women afflicted with almost inhuman hypermammary development are so idolized that they make a handsome living by simply going from village to village and permitting the natives to stare at them for a fee.

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has shown them to be a magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens they have imposed upon themselves. But even exotic customs such as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight that Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the most important 20th-century anthropologists, provided when he wrote: “Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of civilization.”

The essay you’ve just read is adapted from a classic piece of American anthropology by Horace Miner (1912–1993). Despite being more than half a century old, it has lost none of its bite. The essay is good because it plays upon two critical themes that continue to draw people to anthropology: our quest to gain knowledge and to understand people who are vastly different from ourselves and our desire to know ourselves and our own culture better.

Miner’s essay draws you in as you read about the strange and bizarre customs of people who at first appear utterly different from yourself. You’re not only titillated by the details of exotic practices but also comforted by the scientific writing style that seems to assure you that somehow this all makes sense. At some point in your reading, you probably realized that Miner is, in fact, describing American customs as they might be seen from the point of view of an unknowing but perhaps quite perceptive observer. Your first reaction might be to chuckle at the narrator’s misunderstandings and treat the essay as an example of just how wrong an outside observer might be about a culture. But if you’re a reflective person, you might have also wondered if the narrator hadn’t turned up some fairly penetrating insights about the nature of our society. Clearly, the narrator has misunderstood some of the ways Americans think about bathrooms, dentists, and hospitals. But is the narrator so far off in describing the American attitude toward disease, decay, and death? Finally, if you caught the joke early enough, you might have pondered the meaning of the quote that ends the essay: Have we really “advanced to the higher stages of civilization?” What does that mean anyway?

Miner’s essay deals with some of the critical questions and desires at the heart of anthropology: How do we understand other people and actions that seem different, odd, or strange? Why do people do what they do? And, perhaps more profoundly, how do we go about describing other

people's cultural worlds, and how do we know if these descriptions are accurate? We will return to these issues in many places in this book. But first, a brief definition and description of anthropology: **Anthropology** is the scientific and humanistic study of human beings. It encompasses the evolutionary history of humanity, physical variation among humans, the study of past societies, and the comparative study of current-day human societies and cultures.

A **society** is a group of people who depend on one another for survival or well-being. **Culture** is the way members of a society adapt to their environment and give meaning to their lives. It includes ideas, beliefs, and values as well as behaviors.

Some critical goals of anthropology are to describe, analyze, and explain different cultures, to show how groups live in different physical, economic, and social environments, and to show how their members give meaning to their lives. Anthropology attempts to comprehend the entire human experience. Through human paleontology, it describes the evolutionary development of our species. Through archaeology, it reaches from current-day societies to those of the distant past. Through primatology, it extends beyond humans to encompass the animals most closely related to us.

Human beings almost everywhere are **ethnocentric** (see Figure 1.1). That is, they consider their own behavior not only right but also natural. We often want other people to behave just like we do, and we feel troubled, insulted, or outraged when they do not. Indeed, part of our reaction to the Nacirema essay stems from the fact that the Naciremans seem to

Anthropology: The scientific and humanistic study of human beings encompassing the evolutionary history of humanity, physical variation among humans, the study of past societies, and the comparative study of current-day human societies and cultures.

Society: A group of people who depend on one another for survival or well-being as well as the relationships among such people, including their statuses and roles.

Culture: The learned behaviors and symbols that allow people to live in groups; the primary means by which humans adapt to their environment; the ways of life characteristic of a particular human society.

Ethnocentrism (ethnocentric): Judging other cultures from the perspective of one's own culture. The notion that one's own culture is more beautiful, rational, and nearer to perfection than any other.



Figure 1.1 Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is superior to any other. This famous photograph, taken in 1937 by Margaret Bourke-White, draws attention to the contrast between the sentiment on the billboard and the people waiting in a bread line beneath. Note that the passengers in the car are white but all the people waiting for food are black.

do things that, to us, seem neither right nor natural. However, as the essay suggests, the range of human behavior is truly enormous. For example, should you give your infant bottled formula, or should you breast-feed not only your own child but, like the Efe of Zaire, those of your friends and neighbors as well (Peacock 1991:352)? Is it right that emotional love should precede sexual relations? Or should sexual relations precede love, as is normal for the Manganian of the Pacific (Marshall 1971)? If a child dies, should we bury it, or, as Wari' elders say was proper, should it be eaten (Conklin 1995)? And what about sex? Are boys naturally made into men through receipt of semen from older men, as the Sambians claim (Herdt 1987)? For anthropologists, these examples suggest that what is right or natural for human beings is not easily determined and that attempts to understand human nature and theories of human behavior cannot be based simply on our own cultural assumptions. To accurately reflect humanity, they also must be based on studies of human groups whose goals, values, views of reality, and environmental adaptations are very different from our own. We can achieve an accurate understanding of humanity only by realizing that other groups of people who behave differently from us and have different understandings also consider the things they do and the ways they understand the world to be normal and natural.

One job of anthropology is to understand what actions and ideas mean within their contexts and to place these within the broader framework of human society, environment, and history. Anthropologists refer to the practice of attempting to understand cultures within their contexts as **cultural relativism**. It is important to understand that practicing cultural relativism does not mean that anthropologists believe all cultural traditions to be good or to be of equal worth. Anthropologists do not believe that all cultural traditions should be honored or preserved. People around the world, and indeed in our own society, do terrible things. Slavery, human sacrifice, and torture are all cultural practices. Anthropologists do not defend such customs on the basis of cultural relativism. However, anthropologists do believe that we need to understand even those practices that horrify us. Anthropologists study how they developed, how they work in society, and how they are experienced by the people who live them. And, sometimes, how they might be changed. Both ethnocentrism and cultural relativism are examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Anthropologists bring a holistic approach to understanding and explaining. To say anthropology is **holistic** means that it combines the study of human biology, history, and the learned and shared patterns of human behavior and thought we call *culture* in order to analyze human groups. Holism separates anthropology from other academic disciplines, which generally focus on one factor—biology, psychology, physiology, or society—as the explanation for human behavior.

Cultural relativism: The idea that cultures should be analyzed with reference to their own histories and values rather than according to the values of another culture.

Holism (holistic): In anthropology, an approach that considers the study of culture, history, language, and biology essential to a complete understanding of human society.

Because anthropologists use this holistic approach, they are interested in the total range of human activity. Most anthropologists specialize in a single field and a single problem, but together, they study the small dramas of daily living as well as spectacular social events. They study the ways in which mothers hold their babies or sons address their fathers. They want to know not only how a group gets its food but also the rules for eating it. Anthropologists are interested in how people in human societies think about time and space and how they see and name colors. They are interested in health and illness and the significance of physical variation as well as many other things. Anthropologists study these things not only in other societies but in our own as well. Anthropologists maintain that culture, social organization, history, and human biology are tightly interrelated. Although we can never know absolutely everything about any group of people, the more we know about the many different facets of a society, the clearer the picture we are able to draw and the greater the depth of our understanding.

SPECIALIZATION IN ANTHROPOLOGY

In the United States, anthropology has traditionally included four separate subdisciplines: biological (or physical) anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology, and cultural anthropology. In this section, we briefly describe each of them.

Biological or Physical Anthropology

People live in a broad range of ecological and social conditions. Our ability to survive and prosper in many different circumstances is based on the enormous flexibility of cultural behavior. The capacity for culture, however, is grounded in the biological history and physical makeup of our species. Humans are biocultural beings; that is, our lives involve both biological and cultural dimensions. Therefore, to understand fully what it is to be human, we need a sense of how the biological aspects of human adaptation came about and how they both influence and are influenced by human cultural behavior.

Biological (or physical) anthropology is the study of humankind from a biological perspective. It focuses primarily on the aspects of humanity that are genetically inherited. Biological anthropology includes numerous subfields, such as the analysis of skeletons; the study of human nutrition; the statistical study of human populations; the study of patterns of disease; and the study of primates, animals that are closely related to humans.

Biological (or physical) anthropology: The subdiscipline of anthropology that focuses on the study of people from a biological perspective, primarily on aspects of humankind that are genetically inherited.

Biological anthropology is probably best known for the study of human evolution. Paleoanthropologists search for the origins of humanity, using the fossil record to trace the history of human evolution. They study the remains of the earliest human forms, as well as those ancestral to humans and related to humans.

Another subspecialty of biological anthropology, called human variation, is concerned with physiological differences among humans. Anthropologists who study human variation map physiological differences among modern human groups and attempt to explain the sources of this diversity.

Our unique evolutionary history resulted in the development of a biological structure, the human brain, capable of inventing, learning, and using cultural adaptations. Cultural adaptation, in turn has affected human biology. For example, in *Catching Fire* (2009), Richard Wrangham argues that an aspect of culture, the ability to control fire and use it to cook food, led to dramatic biological and social changes in human ancestors. Cooked food was more digestible than raw, and this resulted in changes in human anatomy (far shorter digestive tracts than our closest primate relations). Cooking food required changes in social organization that led to much greater cooperation between males and females than is found among non-human primates. Wrangham thus shows that human beings are not simply social and cultural “software” running on biological “hardware.” Rather, the cultural and the biological are intimately related and ultimately inseparable. Human evolution is both a biological and a cultural process.

In addition to studying humans and their ancestors, biological anthropologists study nonhuman primates as well. These are members of the biological order that includes monkeys, apes, and humans. We study monkeys and apes for the clues that their chemistry, physiology, morphology (physical structure), and behavior provide about our own species. At one time, primates were studied mainly in the artificial settings of laboratories and zoos, but now much of the work of biological anthropologists involves studying these animals in the wild. Jane Goodall, who works with chimpanzees in Tanzania is among the best known anthropologists. Other well-known primatologists include Sarah Hrdy and Jill Preutz.

Linguistic Anthropology

Language is the primary means by which people communicate with one another. Although most creatures communicate, human speech is more complex and creative, and it is used more extensively than the communication systems of other animals. Language is an essential part of what it means to be human and a basic part of all cultures. **Linguistic anthropology** is concerned with understanding language and its relation to culture.

Linguistic anthropology:
The study of language and its relation to culture.

Language is an amazing thing we take for granted. When we speak, we use our bodies—our lungs, vocal cords, mouth, tongue, and lips—to produce noise of varying tones and pitches. And, somehow, when we do this, if we speak the same language, we are able to communicate with one another. Linguistic anthropologists want to understand how language is structured, how it is learned, and how this communication takes place.

Language is a key way that we transmit culture. Thus, studying language helps us understand culture. For example, people generally talk about the people, places, and objects that are important to them. Therefore, the vocabularies of spoken language may give us clues to important aspects of culture. Knowing the words that people use for things may help us to glimpse how they understand the world.

Language involves much more than words. When we speak, we perform. If we tell a story, we don't simply recite the words. We emphasize some things. We add inflection that can turn a serious phrase comic or a comic phrase serious. We give our own special tilt to a story, even if we are just reading a book out loud. Linguistic anthropologists are interested in the ways in which people perform language—in the ways they change and modify the meanings of their words.

All languages change. Historical linguists work to discover the ways in which languages have changed and the ways in which languages are related to each other. Understanding linguistic change and the relationships between languages helps us to work out the past of the people who speak them. Knowing, for example, the relationships among various Native American languages give us insight into the histories and migrations of those who speak them.

The technological changes of the past two decades have opened a new world of communications. The widespread use of cell phones, email, texting, and social networking sites such as Facebook create entirely new ways of communicating, changing both the occasions on which people communicate and the language they use. For example, 50 years ago, people who lived at great distances from each other communicated relatively rarely. The mail was often slow, and phone calls were expensive. Now, such people may communicate many times daily, texting each other, speaking on the phone and interacting with each other using tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Online and mobile games such as Warcraft, Minecraft, Words with Friends, and many others allow real-time interaction across vast distances. Cell phones in particular have become extremely important in poorer nations. For example, in 1998, there were no cell phones in Botswana. But by 2006, there were more than 800,000, enough for half the total population and more than six times the number of landlines. By 2008, virtually the entire population had cell phones (Aker and Mbiti 2010). A 2014 Pew Research Center