


INVITATION TO
ANTHROPOLOGY,
Fourth Edition

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Anthropology and Culture

Much has happened in American anthropology since Boas, his students, and his contemporaries established anthropology as a professional discipline in its own right. Suffice it to say that, as you might expect, human biology and culture became the primary concern of modern anthropology in the years following World War II—and it continues to be the primary focus today. Anthropology is now a discipline concerned mostly with understanding human beings through a careful and comparative study of biological differences and similarities as well as cultural differences and similarities. Anthropologists are today broadly concerned with these differences and similarities—both past and present—on local and international scales.



The four major subfields of anthropology.

As modern anthropology flourished in the twentieth century, it began to develop into four main subdisciplines: **biological** or **physical anthropology**, **archaeology**, **linguistic anthropology**, and **cultural anthropology**. Although these subfields are split into sub-subfields and sub-sub-subfields, each of these areas today focus on a particular component of the human experience. Biological or physical anthropology focuses on human biology, archaeology centers on human technology and material culture, linguistic anthropology concentrates on language, and cultural anthropology addresses culture. Although I will focus primarily on culture throughout this book, I'd like to look briefly at the way its study fits within the overall discipline of anthropology.

FROM BIOLOGY TO CULTURE TO APPLICATION: ON THE SUBFIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Let's start with physical or biological anthropology. This field is concerned primarily with human biology. But biological anthropologists conceptualize human biology in very broad terms. From the social problem of race to the actual biological complexity of populations, from disease to health, from heredity to genetics, from bone structure to cell structure—biological anthropology does many different things. A unifying concept in biological anthropology, however, is biological change, or evolution. Through this lens, biological anthropologists seek to understand biological changes over the long and short terms. Biological anthropologists take up as subjects the evolution of the human species as well as the evolution of the latest influenza virus. Moreover, they seek to understand human biological variation within the larger framework of the biological variation found among all animals. Just where humans fit in the overall scheme of biological evolution remains an important question for deciphering how we are both similar to and different from other animals (like our closest living relatives, chimpanzees and gorillas).

Archaeology shares many of its research methods with biological anthropology (such as the archaeological dig) but diverges from the study of human biology to focus on human technology or **material culture** (i.e., materials that human beings purposefully create either as tools to adapt to their environments or as meaningful expressions of their experience). To put it simply, the key concept in archaeology is the **artifact**, an object created by humans. But the point is not about collecting artifacts, like a treasure hunter might do. Archaeologists place these artifacts within larger social contexts to *infer* and *understand* human behavior. Thus, from religion to economics, from small



Language involves much more than the spoken word. We use a variety of symbols—sounds, gestures, and body language, for example—to impart meaning when we communicate with others. Many linguistic anthropologists thus seek to understand language as a process of communication inextricably bound to social contexts. Photo by Danny Gawlowski.

villages to large cities, from weapons of war to arts and crafts, from the development of agriculture to the fall of civilizations, from human exploitation of the environment to human adaptation to the environment—archaeologists use artifacts situated in their larger social context to uncover the secrets of human society in both the past and the present.

Linguistic anthropology focuses exclusively on **language** because of its central role in defining who we are as humans. In a general sense, we depend on language like no other animal to survive. And as we use it to communicate complex ideas and concepts, language is, to be sure, at the very heart of culture. As such, it is a rich source for expressing the diversity of human experience. In a more particular sense, the whole range of an individual society's collective experience is contained in language. The word for *love* in English, for example, is translated as "respect" in another language. Knowing this helps linguistic anthropologists understand that not everyone sees the world in the same way, and our diversity of languages reflects and, many linguists say, *shapes* our uniqueness.

The idea that language not only reflects but can also shape how we think and how we act—sometimes called the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*—is an important concept for understanding differences across cultural groups. Ideas about “love” or “respect”—to continue with the same example—may index similar human feelings, but their historical use and development within particular cultural contexts help linguist anthropologists understand how certain feelings are thought about and acted upon differently. Very interesting stuff indeed.

Because language can mean both spoken and nonspoken discourse, a central concept in linguistics is **communication**: in anthropological terms, communication is the use of arbitrary symbols to impart meaning. This means that certain sounds or gestures have no inherent meaning in and of themselves: we assign meaning to them and through them impart meaning to others. For example, a belch at the dinner table is considered a rude gesture among polite company in the United States; apparently, it communicates a compliment in some other countries. Or consider how a slight nod of the head may mean yes among most Americans; the same gesture might be meaningless among non-English speakers who use other gestures to communicate an affirmative response nonverbally. It’s not the gesture of nodding or the sound of belching itself but rather the meaning *behind* the gesture or sound. Thus, from sounds and gestures to the composition of language families, from the history of words to their ongoing evolution, from the different ways men and women communicate to how power structures are transmitted through spoken language, linguistic anthropologists seek to understand the intricacies of human communication within larger social contexts (both past and present).

Finally, let’s turn to cultural anthropology. Cultural anthropology—often called **sociocultural anthropology**—shares with anthropological linguistics a focus on human communication. But its central, driving concept, culture, is much broader in scope. While we may popularly think of culture as synonymous with groups or the values and attitudes of those groups, in an anthropological sense, culture is a shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior.¹ This is a mouthful—and based on several different anthropological definitions and understandings of culture (see note 1 at the end of the chapter)—but don’t worry about apprehending exactly what I mean by this just yet. I will go into more depth later. For now, let’s say simply that culture is the lens through which we all view the world; at the same time, culture is that which produces the human differences found in our world. What makes American society different from, say, French society is culture; what makes the

feel of one town different from another is culture; what makes my family different from yours is culture. In the same sense we all share similarities in culture, like the questions surrounding the meanings of birth, marriage, inheritance, or death. This is the stuff of cultural anthropology.

From gender roles to the cultural construction of race, from music to the social construction of violence, from politics to economics, from law to the concept of freedom—cultural anthropologists study culture to understand the powerful role it has in our lives.

While biological anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic and cultural anthropology now constitute the four so-called subfields, some anthropologists identify a fifth subfield of anthropology called **applied anthropology**—the application of anthropology to human problems. Unlike the other subfields, applied anthropology is more of a perspective, an approach that is applied in all areas of anthropology, from biological anthropology and archaeology to linguistic and cultural anthropology. From forensic anthropologists (who apply biological anthropology to solve, for example, murder cases) to cultural resource-management archaeologists (who apply archaeological research to federal and state mandates to preserve the archaeological and historical record for the future) to medical anthropologists (who apply biological, linguistic, and cultural anthropology to address health problems), the work of anthropology in the public realm is indeed multifaceted.

ANTHROPOLOGY HERE AND NOW

A well-established application of anthropological knowledge to human problems is forensic anthropology, in which anthropologists may apply anthropological knowledge to legal cases that involve the identification of human remains. Much of what we know about identifying human remains has been the direct result of research carried out at so-called body farms, places where human decomposition is studied and documented. One of the most widely known locations is the Forensic Anthropology Center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. You can learn more about the center and its various and ongoing studies of human decomposition at fac.utk.edu.

HOLISM AND COMPARATIVISM

How do anthropologists make sense of all of this varied information about humans? Doesn't a focus limited only to biology or culture leave us with an incomplete picture of the human experience in all of its complexities? Indeed, could Boas have formulated his critique of social evolution and race without understanding humans in both biological and cultural terms?

To be sure, anthropology is an extremely broad and far-reaching discipline. But two main concepts organize the subfields into a larger whole: **holism** and **comparativism**. First, holism. *Holism* is a perspective that emphasizes the whole rather than just the parts. In general, the *holistic perspective*—as it is also called—pushes an understanding of the big picture that can often be lost by focusing solely on details. Thus, in anthropology, holism encourages us to understand humans as both biological and cultural beings, as living in both the past and the present. Elucidating the relationships in all that is human is especially important to holism.

Holism, of course, is inherent to anthropology. But, as a driving concept behind both the theory and practice of the field, holism reminds us that regardless of whether we are biological, archaeological, linguistic, or cultural anthropologists, anthropology is ultimately concerned with understanding the human condition in *all* its complexities. As such, anthropologists realize that there are a number of ways to understand these human complexities, from literature and art to science and mathematics. Indeed, literature, art, science, and mathematics are each a distinct area of study that leads us to understand human beings in a unique way. Taken together, they give us a greater understanding of the whole.

Anthropology, then, continues to be heavily influenced by the sciences (biology, physics, chemistry) as well as the humanities (history, literature, music). For example, while biological and archaeological anthropology can heavily depend on the scientific method, linguistic and cultural anthropology can heavily depend on the interpretive method (which is also common in fields like historical and literary studies). There are thus anthropologists who consider themselves scientists and anthropologists who consider themselves artisans, or both. But regardless of our individual methodologies or interests, most anthropologists realize that, ultimately, we are part of a much larger disciplinary project. Anthropology is indeed much broader than the sciences or humanities taken by themselves.

While holism is the philosophical construct that underlies anthropology, a broadly based approach called comparativism makes the holistic perspective possible. *Comparativism* is, simply, the search for similarities and differences between and among human beings in all of their biological and cultural complexities. On some levels, we do this all the time. We regularly compare ourselves with others, with other religions, or with other ways of life; consequently, we define for ourselves how we are similar and different from others. But in anthropology, comparativism is the use of diverse information from all the subfields (both biologically and culturally based) from many different populations to make generalizations about the complexity of human beings. Thus, in anthropology, to “compare” is to understand the general trends that make human life what it is, from evolution to language to society. Without comparison, we become lost in the details. And, in the end, comparativism is the method that makes holism possible.²

Anthropology, the subfields, applied anthropology, holism, comparativism—I know this is a lot to think about. But what does it all mean? These organizing concepts are important because they constitute the conceptual tools that anthropologists use to critique simplistic notions of human diversity—a critique begun by those like Boas and carried out by succeeding generations of anthropologists. Anthropology, the subfields, applied anthropology, holism, and comparativism are thus core concepts that anthropologists use to build a more complex understanding of human biology and culture.

DEFINING CULTURE

So what is culture, anthropologically speaking? Among anthropologists, culture has a different meaning from the way that “culture” is used in everyday English. When we think of culture, what comes immediately to mind might include various traditions, customs, beliefs, ceremonies, foods, or the kinds of clothes people wear.

This idea of culture comes closest to one of the first culture definitions used by anthropologists. It was written in 1871 by an early British anthropologist named Edward Burnett Tylor. Tylor wrote, “Culture . . . taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”³ For Tylor, the differences between human societies could be identified by their differences in customs, morals, or beliefs.

Although he developed his definition of culture to elaborate the stages of social evolution (he used culture synonymously with civilization, for example), Tylor's definition helped to hint early on that behavior, or knowledge, or customs, or habits were primarily learned rather than inscribed in our biology.

With Boas and modern anthropology, Tylor's definition of culture took on new meaning outside the framework of social evolution—a meaning close to the idea of culture most often used in English today. This definition was one that anthropologists employed for many years; it was common in introductory textbooks until the 1950s and 1960s and in some continues even today. And for good reason. To be sure, we can recognize differences between ancient Greeks (who often buried their dead) and ancient Parsees (a people of southeast Asia who once exposed their dead to the elements), differences between the Bedouin (a Middle Eastern people whose men may have multiple wives) and the Pahari (a people in northwest Nepal whose women may have multiple husbands), differences between Southern Baptists (who live mostly in the southern United States and often encourage witnessing to the “unsaved”) and Primitive Baptists (who also live mostly in the southern United States but often discourage witnessing to the unsaved), and so forth. We can say that these observable differences rest in differences in culture.

Tylor's definition of culture, however, emphasizes things and expressions. This is to say that, whether we are identifying different burial customs, marriage practices, or beliefs, we are identifying the by-products or *artifacts* of culture, not culture itself. And this is where things get a little more complicated.

An old Buddhist saying reminds us, “The finger that points at the moon is not the moon.” That saying is relevant here. It means that we should not be fooled into thinking that the messenger is the message or that the means that point us to an end are the end itself. In the same way, we should not be fooled into thinking that the by-products or artifacts of culture are culture itself. Instead, they point us to deeper human meanings. For many anthropologists, then, culture is the *meaning behind* that which humans produce. Morals, beliefs, customs, or laws are things; the significance that humans *give* these things is meaning. For example, the American flag is not American culture, but its negotiated meanings are—that is, the American flag can be said to point us to a deeper national conversation about what it means to be American. Of course, this is something over which people discuss, debate, and argue. And this is the point: American culture is not static; it is not a thing or

a group of things. It is a complex system of meaning created and maintained by people. And the same can be said for all systems or networks of interacting people who inscribe meaning on experience.

Let me put this a little more succinctly by returning to the culture definition that I offered earlier. In an anthropological sense, *culture* is a shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior. At this point, I'd like to focus on different parts of this definition to elaborate just what I mean here. Let's start with a *shared and negotiated system of meaning*.

Culture as a Shared and Negotiated System of Meaning

To begin with, a system refers to a group of interacting or interrelated parts that operate in relation to one another. In reference to culture, those parts are (of course) people. For these *human* parts to interrelate as a meaningful system, however, there must be a broad base of shared (but not necessarily equally agreed-on) meanings. At any point where people can communicate and negotiate these shared meanings, culture is at work. When we speak of American culture, for instance, we reference a system of interacting people who share, within certain limits, a common experience. But that experience, of course, can be widely diverse. In the context of American society (read, “system”), diverse people thus interact with each other on many different levels and in many different contexts, where they communicate and negotiate to varying degrees an American experience and in turn engender American culture. We can say the same for the workings of Japanese culture, New York City culture, or even “university culture.” Conversely, we can say that the interrelated parts—the people—are not the culture. The interrelated parts are, in broad terms, human societies, which, as a necessary condition for culture, give rise to various “systems of meaning.”

This is not to say, however, that these various systems of meaning that we call “culture” are necessarily circumscribed by clear boundaries, like geographical or political borders. Indeed, they overlap, intersect with, and compete with one another. Thus, culture is better understood as a process. The parts that make up the system—people—are not puppets or stick figures; people like you and me constantly negotiate meaning with ourselves and others. The ever-changing culture of the Internet is a good example (and an equally good analogy for culture).



Although a symbol like the American flag (seen here in a Hispanic nightclub in Evansville, Indiana) represents the United States, it in no way captures the full range of diversity within American culture. Indeed, this symbol means different things for different people. Photo by Danny Gawlowski.

So, just as we can talk about American or Japanese culture or university culture or Internet culture, we can also talk about something as particular as family culture. Although clear cultural differences between families emerge between those living in, say, Brazil and Korea, different families *within* a society also have their own systems of meaning that make them unique and different from one another. In my own family, for example, telling stories was always an important part of dinnertime conversation, which often lasted for hours. My parents were farmers as children, and because this kind of dinnertime conversation was so important in their childhood, they carried the tradition with them when they left the farm. Telling stories is, of course, not unusual, but the particular stories that were told related to a particular experience that we shared, a system of meaning that we constructed and reconstructed each time we had dinner (especially when we argued about the details or meaning of a story). Today, when we gather, in many ways these stories make us who we are; they are our collective memory or, in an

anthropological sense, our collective (and negotiated, debated, and contested) system of meaning—in a word, our culture.

Just as we can talk about something as familiar as family culture, we can also talk about culture that is less familiar. Take the peculiar and exotic culture of stock car racing. Yes, the culture of stock car racing. Here's one that I just do not understand. Although I have had folks explain it to me more than once, I have never fully understood why people would watch cars go around and around and around a track. You get my point—it makes little sense to me, but it is culture nonetheless: stock car racing has a system of shared and negotiated meanings. I'm not quite sure what it is, but it exists.

I used to say the same thing, incidentally, about demolition derbies. I could never understand why people would want to watch drivers destroy their cars—that is, until I went to a demolition derby (which included a *combine* demolition derby) in the rural Midwest. I could not keep my eyes off of it. There was just something about watching these old cars—and then these old combines—completely destroy one another. Once again, I'm not exactly sure what the shared meanings are, but they exist, and so does the culture of demolition derbies.



A combine demolition derby in the rural Midwest. Photo by author.

All of this is to say that culture—as a shared and negotiated system of meaning—permeates every aspect of our lives. Whether we are talking about families, American flags, universities, or cars (driven fast or destroyed), each involves a system of meaning. The goal in the anthropological study of culture is to uncover the shared and negotiated systems of meaning behind something like a demolition derby. But as I have already suggested, anthropologists also try to understand that such a system of meaning exists in conjunction with other systems of meaning. Indeed, as humans we enter and exit through a multitude of these systems each day, often without even thinking about it. While we can talk about family, stock car racing, or demolition derby culture, these systems exist within a larger American culture, which, in turn, exists within a larger world culture.

Culture as Informed by Knowledge

Each of these systems is *informed by knowledge*. In a general sense, knowledge is the process of learning and discovery; knowledge is understanding gained through experience; knowledge is grasping something in the mind with certainty. But in a particular sense (once again, in the context of my culture definition discussed here), knowledge exists in the *minds* of any people who share and negotiate culture. In our families, for instance, we share, communicate, and negotiate knowledge about “being” parents, “being” children, or “being” siblings. It’s in our minds. We use this knowledge to interpret each family experience and to generate acceptable behavior within this context. Of course, we use this knowledge in conjunction with a larger and broader range of sophisticated knowledge to interact in a variety of other meaningful systems besides the cultures of our families.

When speaking a particular language, to present another example, we use a complicated knowledge to generate and interpret sounds—to write and interpret the symbols that we call letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs. We use this same range of knowledge to place words together in a prescribed grammar and syntax and to create and re-create new sounds, words, and expressions. The word *hello*, for instance, was apparently created along with the telephone. Alexander Graham Bell proposed that people use *Ahoy!* to answer the phone, but Thomas Edison’s choice of *hello* caught on. Today, we use the word not only to answer the telephone but also to greet someone face to face in everyday interaction.⁴

Yes, here we have culture—a system of meaning informed by shared knowledge that we use whenever we are on the phone. We use this knowledge, of course, without even thinking about it. Indeed, we are deeply cultural beings. In our minds, cultural knowledge is both unconscious and conscious. On the one hand, much of the knowledge we have and use is implicit and unspoken; people are usually unaware of this knowledge and do not communicate it verbally. The rules of language are perfect examples. When we use *hello* to answer the phone, we don’t think about where *hello* comes from or what it means; we take it completely for granted. On the other hand, much of our cultural knowledge also exists explicitly on a conscious level: it is shared knowledge that people are usually aware of and can talk about. Cultural traditions or rules are perfect examples. When we go to a formal dinner, for instance, we consciously know and talk about the fact that it is inappropriate to show up in shorts and a T-shirt. (“You’re not going to wear *that*, are you?” my wife would ask.)

Of course, conscious and unconscious knowledge work together; they represent opposite ends of the same continuum. That is, that which we take for granted can and may move into the arena of conscious knowledge and vice versa. At one time people were very much aware of the strangeness of the new telephone word *hello* and talked to one another about its use. But over time, it entered into the realm of unconscious knowledge. Today, people use *hello* on the phone and in face-to-face interaction as though it has always existed.

Culture as Learned

Understanding that systems of meaning are informed by knowledge, we must also understand that this knowledge is primarily learned. To learn something literally means to acquire knowledge. In reference to culture, the process of learning necessarily implies that the vast majority of cultural knowledge is not inherited or inscribed in our biology. This is important—we are not *born* with culture. We learn it. Although all humans have the biological capacity for language, for example, the many different languages we all speak are learned through experience, study, practice, and trial and error. This is the stuff of learning, and it is something that all culture has in common. So while all people may not share the same language, we all share the language-learning process.

Even our common human biology is affected by cultural knowledge that we impose on our biology. In America, we tend to marry within so-called racial groups, thus reproducing certain observable characteristics, like skin color. We also learn to see ourselves as part of a racial group with associated behaviors, we learn to recognize and reproduce the boundaries between these racial groups, and we learn perceptions that define our interpretation of our own and other racial groups' behavior.

Another powerful example of how we learn to impose cultural knowledge on biology is eating. All humans face the biological need to nourish their bodies with food. But *when* to eat (such as after sundown during Ramadan) or *how* we eat (such as the custom of talking during dinner in much of the United States or remaining silent during a meal, which is the custom in some Native American communities) or *what* we eat (whether it is curdled milk [cheese] or insects) is each intimately tied to what we learn through a limited range of experience. Even the idea that a particular food or drink tastes good or bad is acquired: although tasting involves a biological reaction, our minds learn to cast that biological reaction in a certain way, associating pleasant or unpleasant sensations with certain foods or drinks.

In the same way that we learn to mold basic biological needs, we also learn to forge our vision of the world around us. Morality, or that which we consider to be right and wrong, is an example. We *learn* that burying our dead to dispose of them is right and correct, or we learn, as was the custom in some ancient cultures, that eating our dead to reintegrate them into our own living bodies is the right and proper thing to do. We *learn* that it is morally right to have one spouse, or we *learn*, as is also the custom in some groups, that it is right and responsible to take your spouse's unmarried siblings as spouses. We *learn* that it is morally wrong to kill another human being, or we *learn* that it is acceptable to kill another human being during war.

All of this learning—whatever its form—must take place within a system of meaning. Because we learn from others, learning is an active social process that people put into practice all the time. Anthropologists often call this process of learning culture **enculturation**. Enculturation often refers to the passing of cultural knowledge to children, but enculturation is a constant and ongoing process; indeed, it goes on throughout our lives. Very recently, both children and adults have learned how to use computers, for example; our society now takes them so much for granted that we can barely imagine our



Enculturation is an incredibly powerful process. Photo by Danny Gawlowski.

lives without them. When learning what's cool and what's not, we are being enculturated. **When** we learn the grammar, syntax, and meanings of a new language, we are being enculturated. Indeed, you are being enculturated as I impart to you the language of anthropology.

Culture as Practice

In order to serve the workings of “culture”—that is, as a shared and negotiated system of meaning—people must put this learned knowledge into practice. We put this knowledge into practice by *interpreting our own and others' experience* in everyday social interaction, which in turn we use to shape our actions (i.e., *generate behavior*). Still a tall order? Let's begin with the experience part of this equation.

Every human life is composed of experience; indeed, constant encounters with the world around us carry us from birth to death. These encounters with the natural and cultural environment are what we call experiences. These experiences are not completely raw encounters—they don't happen in a vacuum. From the time we are born, all new experiences are viewed through the lens of previous experiences. And those previous experiences help to de-

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YouTube, of course, is a repository of experience where people the world over share and negotiate meaning on a daily basis. The ever-evolving culture of YouTube is one of the topics of study for an anthropologist whom *Wired* magazine has called “the explainer”: Michael Wesch (Kansas State University), who has several well-known and award-winning YouTube videos himself. Check out his webpage at www.michaelwesch.com.

CHECK IT OUT!

termine how the new experience will be shaped, interpreted, and understood.⁵ When, for example, I went to my first demolition derby, I approached it with a set of prejudices and assumptions. I had encountered and experienced it only on television, and watching it from that distance it seemed to me irresponsible and careless. Understand that I came from a Southern Baptist “waste-not, want-not” background in which destroying things for the sake of having fun was beyond wasteful—it was sinful. Although I have not considered myself a Baptist since I was a teenager, the experience of having been reared as such shaped my encounter with the demolition derby, regardless of whether I liked it. But my one experience of witnessing demolition firsthand changed my perception from judgment to curiosity. That experience forced me to rethink how I viewed the derby. Now when I encounter a demolition derby, I see it in a new way. I cannot say I completely understand it, but I can appreciate it differently.

This is a simplified example, but I mention it here to point out that so much of our knowledge about the world around us is derived from our experience. We then use that knowledge (learned either consciously or unconsciously) to interpret every successive experience. What’s more, these new experiences are framed not only by our own previous experiences but also by the larger experience (or, simply put, history) of the particular groups in which we interact. Think about it. In this vast system of meaning we share, our personal experiences intermingle with the personal experiences of others

in a much larger system of meaning that transpires in everyday social interaction, which, of course, occurs on a number of levels.⁶

Furthermore, in the context of this culture definition, “interpreting experience” refers to both the way we interpret the experience of self within a particular culture and how we encounter and experience others. When, for example, we decide that eating insects is gross, that marrying more than one spouse is wrong, or that demolition derbies are sinful, we are viewing these cultural practices through the lens of our experiences, through our own enculturation into particular groups. And this is exactly how culture works: we learn and share knowledge that we use to interpret our own experiences as well as the experiences of others. (I’ll return to this issue a little later.)

Now, on to the behavior part. In the context of my culture definition, *behavior* means to act or conduct oneself in a specified way. Of course, knowledge shapes those actions, but beyond this, our systems of meaning become enacted, embodied, and practiced through behavior, which we in turn negotiate with others in the context of society. When we pick up the phone and say hello, we are putting a particular system of meaning into action—that is, we are acting out knowledge that exists in our minds. When someone dies and we follow a prescribed way of disposing of the body, we (the living, that is) are enacting systems of meaning—extending that which is in our minds into the actions of our very bodies, over and over again, shaping and reshaping the process from generation to generation.

I am, of course, using behavior in a much wider sense than a simple reaction to a stimulus. When talking about the anthropological concept of culture, behavior implies a far broader range of actions and practices. Indeed, behavior is what makes experience real; it forges culture into the diversity of human activities found in the world.

Because all human behavior exists within a larger system of meaning, a particular human action carries no meaning in and of itself. Behavior always arises in a specific context. Anthropologists James P. Spradley and David McCurdy put it this way: “Culture is . . . the system of knowledge by which people design their own actions and interpret the behaviors of others. It tells an American that eating with one’s mouth closed is proper, while an Indian, from south Asia, knows that to be polite one must chew with one’s mouth open. There is nothing preordained about cultural categories; they are arbitrary. The same act can have different meanings in various cultures. For

example, when adolescent Hindu boys walk holding hands, it signifies friendship, while to Americans the same act may suggest homosexuality.⁷

Reading Spradley and McCurdy's words, other examples come to mind. When we cross our fingers and hold them next to our head in the United States, we are often expressing hope. Yet the same action in parts of highland New Guinea can imply something altogether different: it is an insult having sexual connotations.⁸ For many Americans, when we look straight into the eyes of someone while we are talking to them, it means that we are listening; it is the polite thing to do. To look away while you are talking might suggest you are trying to hide something. But in some Native American communities, looking straight into the eyes of someone while talking to them would be considered rude.

These brief examples illustrate how actions and practices can have different connotations in different social contexts and in different systems of meaning. It is not the action itself that has meaning; it is the context within which that action occurs. This is what is meant by *arbitrary*. And, to reiterate the point one last time, *human behavior does not carry meaning in and of itself*. Any particular human action exists within larger systems of meaning, and we call those systems of meaning "culture."

While the examples that I have used are individual and eclectic, behavior in the cultural sense can also imply composites of traits or patterns that are repeated throughout a particular society or culture, traits like aesthetics, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs—the "things" of culture that Tylor originally identified as culture itself. And here we come full circle—but we arrive at a different place from the point that initiated my discussion of culture. While Tylor's "things" are cultural artifacts, they are not *merely* things. Because people ascribe meaning to these things and interpret and reinterpret them across time and space, they can both reflect and shape culture. Think of the movie and television industries, for example, which are very fond of asserting that their media merely (and *only*) "reflect" American culture. Frankly, this is nonsense. In a world where corporations spend billions on ad campaigns because they know they affect people's buying behavior, the expressions generated by movies and television also have an enormous impact on the contours of our lives. From the way we remember our pasts (think about all those World War II movies you watched growing up) to the way we define and

stereotype others (think of all those movies about "Indians") to the way we admire and emulate the rich and famous (think of all those talk shows)—over and over again, we integrate these expressions into our negotiated systems of meaning.⁹ Indeed, the artifacts of American culture—as in any culture—are not *just* things. The movie and television industry is just one example. *All* of us are born and enculturated into previously existing composites of traits like aesthetics, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs that, in turn, compel us to act, think, and behave in specific prescribed ways. In a word, these composites of traits carry **power**: the far-reaching process of influence (that can be expressed directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly), which mediates how and what we learn, the knowledge we use to interpret experience and generate behavior, and even how we interact with one another. Just *how* we integrate these composites of traits into our individual lives and negotiate individual meanings with larger, complex cultural systems is a problem in which many anthropologists have great interest.¹⁰



Human behavior does not carry meaning in and of itself. Any particular human action exists within larger systems of meaning that we call culture. Photo by Danny Gawlowski.



Now you should more fully understand what culture, in an anthropological sense, is. It does include the things that humans produce (as in Tylor's definition), but ultimately these things or artifacts are always couched in a *shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior*. This definition of culture should make more sense at this point. Are you still having a hard time putting your finger on just what culture is? Are you getting that uncomfortable feeling that culture may be messy and unwieldy? Congratulations! You have arrived. Culture is nebulous rather than absolute, chaotic rather than harmonious, dynamic rather than idle, ubiquitous rather than esoteric, complex rather than simple. It is, because people are.

STUDYING CULTURE

Given that culture is nebulous, chaotic, dynamic, ubiquitous, and complex, how do anthropologists actually know what they know about culture? What are the conceptual tools they use to go about *understanding* the culture concept in all of its complexities? More important, what are the conceptual tools that we need to appreciate the power of culture in human life?

First and foremost, the concepts of culture, holism, and comparativism all work together. You will recall that holism is a perspective that emphasizes the whole rather than the parts. When it comes to culture, holism emphasizes understanding how the parts of culture work together to create a larger system of meaning. The interrelations among a society's history, politics, and economics are examples. We can't really understand one part, history, without understanding the other parts, politics and economics. This is holism, plain and simple. In the study of culture, to focus only on economics, for example, is to miss larger patterns. Anthropologist James L. Peacock puts it this way: "To think holistically is to see parts as wholes, to try to grasp the broader contexts and frameworks within which people behave and experience. One such framework is culture. Anthropology is concerned not only with holistically analyzing the place of humans in society and in nature but also, and especially, with the way humans construct cultural frameworks in order to render their lives meaningful."¹¹

Take the study of American culture. To understand such a complex system, we would want to take into account the history and development of this individual nation-state, its economics and politics, as well as its individual traditions, values, or customs *and* how they interact with one another as a system, which of course includes the American people themselves. If we wanted to understand a smaller part of American culture, like religion, we would want to take into account all the components of religious belief in America—from Catholicism to Protestantism, from Islam to Judaism, from fundamentalism to atheism. We would also want to take into account how religious belief is negotiated in this country, its deeper meanings to American identity, and how it spills over into other realms of American experience, like politics. Still further, if we wanted to focus on the culture of one particular religion in the United States or even the culture of a particular church, once again we would want to take into account its every part and *how it interacts* with other parts as a system.

Here's another example. Since the time I was an undergraduate, I have had an interest in **ethnomusicology**, an area of study that combines aspects of both musicology and anthropology to understand the role and meaning of music cross-culturally. Ethnomusicologists don't just study music, however. As a group, ethnomusicologists try to understand in a holistic way the larger human complexities of music, which is a cultural universal—that is, all human groups practice an expression that they separate from that which is spoken, an expression that we call in English "music." Ethnomusicologists (and other social scientists who study music) try to understand how musical expression in each case spills over into other areas of human activity and meaning. They do, because it always does.

Over and over again, music expresses and shapes deeper meanings about, for example, national, regional, or ethnic identity (think about the national anthems of modern nation-states); music expresses and shapes solidarity (think about the use of "We Shall Overcome" in the civil rights movement); music expresses and shapes political agendas (think about the use of pop songs in U.S. election campaigns); music expresses and shapes protest and rebellion (think about punk music of the 1970s and 1980s); music expresses and shapes religious belief (think about the fact that people use music in almost every religious tradition); music expresses and shapes the buying and

selling of commodities (think about advertising); music expresses and shapes human emotion (think about the use of music in the movie and television industry); and music even expresses and shapes how we think about ourselves (think of the radio stations you listen to or the music collections you own). In each case, if we focused only on the sound of music itself, we would miss its significance and power in other realms of human life and meaning. To understand music, then, we must understand the larger contexts in which music expresses and shapes human activity.

To look for such connections between parts is holism. Yet, as might be apparent, holism is an insurmountable goal in many respects; it can seem completely overwhelming, especially when we consider that almost every human system is part of another larger system, which is in turn part of a still larger system. We could very well take the study of music or American culture to the point of infinity. With this in mind, you may very well ask: Can we ever grasp the wholeness of culture? Can we ever understand every component of a system as complex as American or world culture? Indeed, when we consider that understanding all the subtle nuances of a single individual is nearly impossible, how can we presume to know as much about an entire group or society? Anthropologist James L. Peacock answers: “Holism is an important but impossible ideal. You cannot see everywhere or think everything. You must select and emphasize. To do this, you must categorize and make distinctions. Only in this way can you analyze and understand.”¹²

Anthropologists thus approach culture with the philosophy of and struggle for holism but realize that ultimately one must focus on parts, parts that—when compared to other parts—point us in the direction of understanding larger human issues. Hence, anthropologists often study a particular church to make inferences about the role of religion in human life, or they study one kind of music to understand music’s role within a particular society, or they study a small group of women in a rural village to understand larger issues of gender in human life. In each case, an individual study enters into conversation with other anthropological studies that, when taken together, have something to offer our understandings of religion, music, or gender, respectively.

Each of these studies, which focus on the particular, points us in the direction of holism, which in turn points us to a deeper understanding of culture. But just like the saying “The finger that points at the moon is not the moon,” we realize its incompleteness—that we are always *in the process* of understanding culture.

ANTHROPOLOGY HERE AND NOW

Anthropologists may study the particular to gain insight into larger human issues. Take, for example, the work of cultural anthropologist Celeste Ray (University of the South), who studies Irish holy wells: sacred springs or waterholes associated with cures for particular illnesses, often dedicated to unofficial Irish saints, many of whom were local holy women. Ray suggests that well-side rituals have something to tell us, not only about Irish religious praxis, but also about the endurance of local and regional beliefs and practices within internationally embraced faiths. You can learn more about Ray’s research from *National Geographic* (which includes an audio interview with Ray) at newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/tag/celeste-ray.

CHECK IT OUT!

This does not mean that anthropologists, or anyone for that matter, can *never* attain a clear understanding of culture. It is as James Peacock says: “[C]ulture is not a physical thing but an attitude, a way of viewing the world. We can describe indications of a certain cultural pattern—people hurrying or loitering as clues to their assumptions about time, for example—but culture itself is an abstraction that we make based on such indications. There is nothing wrong with an abstraction so long as we recognize it for what it is.”¹³

In this way, holism reminds us that the very concept of culture is an abstraction; it is *not a thing*, as I have already established. Yet Peacock implores us to remember that culture, although an abstraction, “can nonetheless have reality and power in experience.”¹⁴ This is why anthropologists often focus on the particular, on small communities, or on a few people—sites where culture is embodied, enacted, experienced, and in turn negotiated—on an intimate human level.¹⁵

Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois, for example, lived and studied with over two dozen crack dealers in East Harlem for five years. By studying the particular among a very few in a small community, Bourgois was able to point us toward an understanding of the way worldwide economic patterns are articulated in the lives of users and dealers in an underground economy, how

the use of violence becomes meaningful to success in the illegal drug trade, and how dealers respond to and shape larger drug markets. When reading Bourgois's work, we realize that the users and dealers he describes are a very small component of a much larger culture of illegal drug use and trade. Yet we also realize that Bourgois's study does *point us in the direction of understanding the larger culture of illegal drug use and trade*.¹⁶ Each anthropological study is like this. Although focusing on one particular *part*, it points us to broader discussions.

This is where comparativism comes in. In order for the part to have relevance in a broader conversation about culture, we must compare. Recall that in the general study of anthropology, *comparativism* means to search for similarities and differences between and among human beings in all their biological and cultural complexities. In the study of culture, this approach concentrates on comparing varied cultural descriptions from around the world to make generalizations about human beings and the role of culture in human life. In the study of culture, this comparative perspective is called **ethnology** (which is sometimes used synonymously with *cultural anthropology*). Thus, while anthropologists may study an individual culture—like families in Japanese society or Protestant churches in the southern United States—their ultimate purpose is to advance a deeper understanding of larger cultural issues. These issues might include race and ethnicity; religion; politics and economics; kinship, marriage, and family; ecology; gender; or the nature of violence, conflict, and peace. These understandings in turn help to address such questions as the following: Why do people differ? What can we learn about others and ourselves by studying the wide range of culture? Why do we find universals in all societies—like religion or music or taboos against incest? Why is marriage found everywhere? Why do people create social hierarchies—between the rich and poor, for example—over and over again? Exploring these questions through the framework of ethnology means taking into account all that we know about culture.

This means that in the study of culture the particular is always struggling against the general and vice versa. On the one hand, while we may emphasize how culture is different from one group to the next, it is important to understand that all culture shares similarities (like the common problems presented by the food quest). On the other hand, while we may recognize that all culture has common elements, it is important to recognize that culture

also has unique qualities (consider the ways people define “good” and “bad” food). Thus, in order to understand culture both particularly and generally, we must try to understand culture in all its complexities. We struggle to see parts in larger cultural contexts (holism), and we push for understanding the comprehensive role of culture in people's lives without losing sight of its particular expression in human experience (ethnology).

With that said, however, I am reminded of my earlier discussion about the role and limits of experience in the definition of culture. Holism and ethnology are difficult to recognize in the first place because people characteristically generalize and compare on the basis of their own experience. They often see the parts and connections they *want* to see. As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once said, “Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.” Indeed, many people the world over believe their own religion to be the *right* religion, or they say that the music of other people all sounds alike, or they think that all people are essentially the same or, at the other extreme, that nobody is like them. Departing down the road of culture requires that we look at two more concepts that, when fully understood and properly balanced, make holism and ethnology possible: ethnocentrism and cultural relativity.

Let's take an extended look at these two concepts. **Ethnocentrism** is the tendency to view the world from the basis of one's own experience. On a very fundamental human level, we cannot help but be ethnocentric. It is a fact of every human life. Our experience is limited, and what exists outside the limits of that experience is foreign and strange (like, for me, the culture of stock car racing). But more than this, the cultural knowledge, customs, traditions, values, and ideas with which we are enculturated have enormous power in defining how we will continue to encounter, experience, and understand the world around us. Often we are completely unconscious that the way we live and experience the world fashions our ethnocentrism. Indeed, ethnocentrism is so basic to our being that we may not even realize just how powerful it can be. Many Americans, for example, are often unaware of how culturally specific “notions of beauty” shape their views of themselves and others. And those views can have powerful implications: studies have illustrated that these notions of beauty can affect things like popularity, employment and hiring decisions, and even student evaluations of their professors. In one interesting study, researchers found that “attractive professors consistently outscore



Culturally specific notions of beauty shape how we perceive and enact personal beauty. Photo by Danny Gawlowski.

their less comely colleagues by a significant margin on student evaluations of teaching.¹⁷ Of course, the physical qualities that make some professors “attractive” and others “less comely” are neither universal nor uniform; our attributions of attractiveness are rooted in ethnocentrism, shaped by very powerful cultural, often unconscious, ideas about what constitutes beauty.

Realizing the power of ethnocentrism is the first step toward understanding the bias that we carry in our studies of culture. No one can be completely bias free. But everyone can, first, recognize that they are ethnocentric and, second, seek ways to understand culture outside their own view of the world. Put another way, we must shift ethnocentrism from the unconscious to the conscious realm of knowledge.

Unchecked, ethnocentrism can prevent us from understanding the larger questions of culture. Unconscious ethnocentrism can inform our conscious judgments of other peoples and other cultural practices. Ethnocentrism often tells us that our view of the world is right and that other ways of looking at the world are wrong or weird. When, for example, we hear of other people who eat, say, dogs as food, we cringe. For many of us, dogs are little people in furry suits, and to eat one is tantamount to cannibalism. We cannot stand

back from our own ideas about who and what dogs are. We are not interested in why other people may not view dogs in the same way, and so we jump to conclusions, as did many social evolutionists: anyone who would eat dogs must be, in our minds, savage.

But let’s look more deeply into what eating dogs might mean to others. Cheyenne-Arapaho—a Native American group living in western Oklahoma—are known to eat dogs sometimes. Paradoxically, many Cheyenne-Arapaho view their dogs like other Americans, as little people in furry suits. Nevertheless, once a year, some Cheyenne-Arapaho choose to ritually, as a group, eat dogs.

Cheyenne-Arapaho today tell an old story about a time when they were starving to death, and their dogs came forward and told the people that they would give their lives for food so that the Cheyenne-Arapaho might live. Today, each year, at their annual sun dances, the Cheyenne-Arapaho thus ritually eat a dog to remind them of this event—that their dogs paid the ultimate price. Dogs, then, were and are much more than little people in furry suits. Seen in this light, it appears to be a very different thing when we step outside of our ethnocentrism, doesn’t it?¹⁸

Unchecked ethnocentrism can get in the way of understanding other people and other cultural practices. Indeed, when ethnocentrism is taken to the extremes of overt prejudice, racism, bigotry, or hatred—as it so often is—we miss not only the deeper intricacies of culture but also the commonality of human experience. And, as a result, we ourselves become more set apart and less human.

How do we overcome our own ethnocentrism, an ethnocentrism that is so intrinsic to the human experience? When we consider the reasons some Cheyenne-Arapaho might eat dogs from *their* perspective, we are using the conceptual tool of cultural relativity. Cultural relativity is the second part of the conceptual foundation that allows us to study culture through the frameworks of holism and ethnology.

Cultural relativity, you will recall from my discussion of Boas, is the idea that each society or culture must be understood on its own terms. It does not mean that we necessarily agree with every cultural practice that we come across; it means that if we really want to *understand* how culture works, we must look at culture from the viewpoints of those who create, maintain, and experience it, not from our own.

Take, for example, Bourgois's work with inner-city drug dealers. Bourgois did not condone the selling of drugs or the brute violence on which the culture of dealing illegal drugs often rests. Instead, Bourgois approached the drug dealers through the framework of cultural relativity rather than judgment so that he could understand how the culture of selling crack really works. After five years of living and studying on the street, Bourgois began to understand drug dealers as people struggling to survive on the margins of American society. He wrote that the drug dealers had "not passively accepted their structural victimization. On the contrary, by embroiling themselves in the underground economy and proudly embracing street culture, they are seeking an alternative to their social marginalization."¹⁹

While Bourgois came to these understandings through cultural relativity without succumbing to ethnocentrism, he also directly witnessed overt acts of violence. Understanding this "culture of terror" was critical to understanding how this component of street culture worked; it also reinforced Bourgois's conviction that the illegal drug trade and its accompanying attributes of violence were deeply detrimental to American society. While the drug dealers had found ways to survive in the inner city, they also had "become the actual agents administering their own destruction and their community's suffering."²⁰

ANTHROPOLOGY HERE AND NOW

You can learn more about Philippe Bourgois's work—including his latest studies of homelessness and drug addiction—at philippebourgois.net.

CHECK IT OUT!

Bourgois's intimate five-year study would not have been possible without the use of cultural relativity. Yet, like ethnocentrism, cultural relativity can also be taken to extremes. Some might be tempted to just say we can make no judgments about others or their cultural practices. Hypothetically, it would be nice if we didn't have to make judgments about other people. Yet what do we do with the knowledge of *actual* human behavior in our world? What do

we do with the ongoing human practices of violence, slavery, genocide, or the exploitation of others? Take, for example, violence against women. Rape, sexual assault, harassment, or the international trafficking of women sold into prostitution rings are hard facts of both local and international culture.²¹ To simply sit back and say, "Well, that's the culture and we really shouldn't judge or seek to change it," is to take cultural relativity to an extreme.

Let's take another difficult example: **genocide**, the extermination of one group of people by another. Genocide is a dark underside of many, many societies around the world. We may be most familiar with Nazi Germany, but the practice is not by any means unusual human behavior, past or present; unfortunately, it has cropped up throughout human history and is still relatively common among human beings.

In the twentieth century alone, which includes well-known genocides such as Nazi Germany (six million), Stalin's Soviet Union (ten million), and Khmer Rouge Cambodia (two and a half million), estimates of those who perished as a result of genocide range as high as twenty-eight million. But consider the figures of genocides from just 1950 to 2000. From 1955 to 1972, the Sudanese army eradicated five hundred thousand southern Sudanese people. In 1971, in Bangladesh, the East Pakistan army murdered about three million people. In 1972, in Burundi, Tutsis killed around two hundred thousand Hutus, and in Rwanda, in the course of a few months in 1994 alone, Hutus exterminated well over five hundred thousand Tutsis. Think about that last example: five hundred thousand people murdered in the course of a few months. In 1994, five hundred thousand people would have comprised a small to midsize U.S. city, like Nashville. Imagine that, over the course of a few months, the people living in Nashville were gone. Vanished. Wiped off the face of the earth. While, in all, the Tutsis and Hutus would, by the end of the century, account for the deaths of well over a million people, this peculiar human phenomenon has spared no particular region of the world. From North and South America to Eurasia to Africa, genocide is a phenomenon that all humans share in their collective past.²²

While anthropologists study this phenomenon to gain better understandings of the culture of violence, it does not mean that we can sit back and say, "Well, it's their culture, and we shouldn't judge or seek to change it." In the study of genocide and its relation to the culture of violence, the real questions become these: How do we address this kind of human

violence on a worldwide level? Is it natural or cultural? If it is socially and culturally constructed, how can we work to change people's attitudes about each other? While recognizing the complexities of human differences, how can we build bridges of understanding between people?

These kinds of questions are becoming all the more important as we move toward the global village. People are being forced to answer for actions like genocide in forums such as the World Court at The Hague. Here, different groups of people come together and decide that, for example, slavery should not be tolerated regardless of its role in a particular society or culture. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares in its fourth article that "[n]o one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."²³ Yet slavery still exists in our world, from forced labor in China to the ongoing slave trade in Sudan.

Of course, people have always negotiated their own moralities with other people. But, unlike the past, groups today are having to negotiate what they might consider natural and right (such as enslaving others) with those who consider it wrong on an international scale. As anthropologist Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban writes, "The exchange of ideas across cultures is already fostering a growing acceptance of the universal nature of some human rights, regardless of cultural differences."²⁴

Ethnocentrism and cultural relativity, then, can be incredibly complicated to balance, both in the study of culture and in the negotiation of culture on a worldwide level. Coming to understand the complexities of ethnocentrism and cultural relativity is a vital and ongoing process, one that is informing and shaping not only the study of culture but also the cultural knowledge of human survival itself.

SUMMING UP: LESSONS FROM DEFINING AND STUDYING CULTURE

So what do we do with our understanding of culture? Culture's role in human life is enormous. Yet popular ideas about culture are often limited to traditions, customs, or habits. Although these "things" are indeed part of culture, they are only a small part of a larger equation that can lead us to understanding human beings in all their complexities. And because human beings are complicated, so, too, is culture. Living in today's complex world thus means that we are increasingly called on to understand culture in much more complicated ways—from our daily interactions with others to the relationships



The uncritical acceptance of cultural relativity may actually hinder our common efforts to address complex, multifaceted global problems. Indeed, all the world's citizens increasingly find themselves having to evaluate their cultural practices in light of our rapidly changing and ever more integrated world. Nelson Mandela (center), for example, has argued that addressing Africa's AIDS epidemic is more than just educating the public; people must also change conventional cultural practices that augment the spread of this infectious disease. Photo by author.

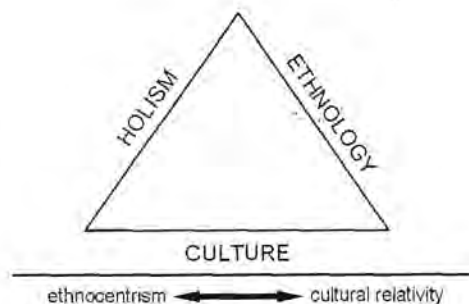
between nation-states on the world stage. Not until we understand culture in its broader framework can we approach complex human problems and reach for their complex solutions. Understanding the power of culture can thus offer us a powerful tool for understanding and creating change in our own lives and in our own communities.

With this said, let's briefly review. You'll recall that culture is a shared and negotiated system of meaning informed by knowledge that people learn and put into practice by interpreting experience and generating behavior. To put this another way, remember the following:

- Culture is a system of meaning (the system is made up of parts—that is, people).

- Culture is shared and negotiated among and between people.
- Culture consists of knowledge.
- Culture is learned through enculturation.
- In practice (i.e., in everyday social interaction), culture frames experience (and vice versa).
- In practice (i.e., in everyday social interaction), culture generates behavior (and vice versa).

A model for understanding the complexities of culture.



Remember that understanding the actual complexities of culture proceeds through a philosophical lens that balances culture with holism and ethnology (i.e., comparativism as applied to the study of culture), which, in turn, rests on the ever-evolving balancing act between ethnocentrism and cultural relativity. This is where understanding culture in an anthropological sense resides. Although anthropologists use a philosophical model, they also apply a distinct methodology for approaching the study of culture. This methodology is called ethnography, and it is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. This culture definition (and my following discussion of culture in the section “Defining Culture”) is based on several sources. My focus on culture as a negotiated system of meaning is informed by Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), and *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). My focus on cultural knowledge is revised from James P.

Spradley, ed., in *Culture and Cognition: Rules, Maps, and Plans* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972), 6–18, and especially *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), in which Spradley states, “[C]ulture . . . [is the] acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior” (5). This perspective has precedence with Ward Goodenough’s writings—see, for example, “Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics,” in *Report of the Seventh Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study*, ed. P. L. Garvin (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics, no. 9, 1957), and *Culture, Language, and Society* (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1981). My departure from the rules of culture and elaboration of experience and practice of culture (especially in the discussion that follows) is informed primarily by Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), which I pose here within the context of an introductory discussion. See also Michael Jackson, ed., *Things As They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

2. For a deeper discussion of these issues, see James L. Peacock, *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially 1–47.
3. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1958 [1871]).
4. “You Say Hello, I Say Ahoy,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, March 19, 1999.
5. See Edward M. Bruner, “Experience and Its Expressions,” in Turner and Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*, 3–30.
6. *Ibid.*
7. James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, eds., *Culture and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 8th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 4–5.
8. Paul Wohlt, personal communication, 2000.
9. A plethora of studies have explored how media affects behavior—much of it conducted by the advertising industry. For clearly written and provocative discussions about the relationships of the movie and television industry to culture, see, for example, Sissela Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading,

MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998); Conrad Philip Kottak, *Prime-Time Society: An Anthropological Analysis of Television and Culture* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990); and Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999). For discussions that take up the effect of the television and movie industry within even larger frameworks of business and economics, see, for example, Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

10. I am, of course, referring to the complex and far-reaching study of culture and power. Anthropologists have drawn inspiration from a number of different theorists, including Max Weber (see, for example, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1947 (1925)]), Émile Durkheim (see *The Rules of the Sociological Method* [New York: Free Press, 1938 (1895)]), Karl Marx (see *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* [London: Sonnenschein, 1887 (1867–1894)]), Antonio Gramsci (see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971]), Michel Foucault (see *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1980]), and Pierre Bourdieu (see *Language and Symbolic Power* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991]), among many others.

Anthropologists have thus elaborated power in a diversity of ways, including as the physical domination of one person or group over another (via Weber), as inscribed in social institutions (via Durkheim), as originating in modes of production (via Marx), as emergent in the rise of hegemony (via Gramsci), as a discursive process in the social construction of reality (via Foucault), or as a deeply symbolic practice (via Bourdieu).

11. Peacock, *The Anthropological Lens*, 17.

12. *Ibid.*, 19–20.

13. *Ibid.*, 20.

14. *Ibid.*, 23.

15. For a deeper discussion, see Peacock, *The Anthropological Lens*, 11ff.

16. See Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

17. Gabriela A. Montell, “Do Good Looks Equal Good Evaluations?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 15, 2003.

18. Eugene Blackbear Jr., “Ceremonial Aspects of the Sun Dance and Sweat Lodge Rituals as They Relate to Contemporary Wellness” (paper presented at “Affects on Wellness: A Holistic Approach,” Indian Health Service, Anadarko, Oklahoma, October 27, 1993).

19. Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*, 143.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See United Nations Population Fund, *The State of World Population 2000* (New York: United Nations Population Fund), especially chapter 3, “Violence against Women and Girls: A Human Rights and Health Priority.”

22. Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press, 1992); Israel W. Charny, ed., *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); Isidor Wallimann and Michael N. Dobkowski, eds., *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

23. United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), December 10, 1948.

24. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, “Cultural Relativism and Universal Rights,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, B1–B2, June 9, 1995.