

# Major subfields of anthropology

[Science](#), [Anthropology](#)



Major Subfields of Anthropology Introduction Anthropology is the holistic study of humankind. The discipline observes the human conditions both in cultural and biological aspects. Anthropologists study human beings and human societies from all possible angles to provide a well- rounded perspective of the human condition. There are four subfields of anthropology: Linguistic anthropology, Cultural anthropology, Physical anthropology and Archaeology. This paper will discuss the subfields of anthropology, describing each in detail and in terms of their subject matter.

Discussion Linguistic anthropology is the study of languages, how they vary, and how culture and language interrelate. Linguistic anthropology delves further than studying languages to explore how humans have developed different languages. It also explores how culture influences people's language and vice versa. Examples of problems linguistic anthropologists deal with include: how humans developed language since we are the only animals to have evolved such a rich, intricate and complex system of communication, and how languages evolved into the diverse multitude of languages that humans speak in different regions. They also study whether the language spoken shapes worldview. For example, if speakers of a particular language have only six words for colors, and speakers of a different language have over twenty, will people from the second language see more colors than the first? Cultural anthropology is the study of human cultures. Culture refers to a peoples' way of life. It consists of a peoples' social organization, economics, political systems, art, language, religion, food and dressing. Humans are the only animals to develop and transmit complex cultures. This is a matter of interest to cultural anthropologists. Cultural

anthropology observes the diversity in humans' cultural practices and hypothesizes on why this is so. Cultural anthropology is further subdivided into Economic anthropology, Medical anthropology and Urban anthropology. Economic anthropology is the study of peoples' means of production. It studies the modes of economic production, consumption and exchange in different societies. The modes of production that people choose are influenced by the conditions in which they live. Pastoralists adapt to cattle herding because the arid areas they live in are unsuitable for farming, while people in fertile areas practice agriculture as a means of sustaining their livelihood. The effect of globalization on world economy is also studied. The impact of global trade and how it has stratified countries into developed and developing countries is also studied. Medical anthropology is the study of the interrelation between culture and health. Medical anthropologists seek to understand how culture affects perception of health, disease and illness, the way we handle illness and our response to falling ill. The impact of culture on health has been found to be so strong that culture-bound illnesses exist. This is whereby a medical condition is found to exist in one culture only, such as Amok in Malaysia and Koro in South-East Asia. Such cases offer fascinating study for medical anthropologists. The impact of healthcare interventions for diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS in Third World areas where they are prevalent may be affected by the cultural divide. These cultural differences call for the cultural expertise of medical anthropologists. Urban anthropology is a relatively new field of anthropology that deals with issues of urbanization. It developed to counter the perception that anthropologists only studied "native" and exotic societies but was unconcerned with the

rapidly developing urban areas. It deals with issues such as population growth and explosions in cities due to rural-urban migration and the overall impact of city life on dwellers. Physical or Biological anthropology is the study of biological characteristics of human beings. It traces the evolutionary history of humans, their genetic diversity, and how adaptations to various climates gave rise to physical differences. It has three subfields:

Paleoanthropology is the study of human evolution as represented by the fossil record. Paleoanthropologists trace the development of the hominid family, represented by the genus “Homo”, using fossil evidence. Milestones in the progress of the hominid family such as the development of tools and discovery of fire are some of the findings that paleoanthropologists make.

Primatologists study non-human primates such as apes. Since they are humans' closest evolutionary relatives, observing their biological structure, genetic composition and social behavior can provide insights into human behavior. Osteology is the study of bones. Bones provide details such as age, sex and growth and development of a person. These details come in handy when the anthropologist has only bones to go on to determine the aspects of someone's life, such as what diseases may have afflicted the people of a certain ancient population. Archaeology is the study of material remains of past civilizations and their cultures to obtain clues as to how they lived.

Material remains include fossils, artifacts and cave paintings. Archaeologists may use plant and animal fossils to give them an idea of how past humans interacted with their environment, such as the climate they lived in and the diseases that may have afflicted them. This subfield is called paleoecology.

Conclusion Anthropologists strive to study all facets of human beings. The

various subfields of the discipline facilitate these studies by concentrating on specific aspects of humanity. Anthropologists apply the knowledge gained from these studies to tackle social problems.