

What is a cultural anthropology

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



Cultural Anthropology is a term that is in everyday lives and topics. When one thinks of anthropology they think of the study of old remnants commonly referred to as archaeology. This, however, is not the only form of anthropology. There are four types of anthropology and they are archaeology, biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. However, Cultural anthropologists are every where and study people of all walks of life. One can find a topic and find some type of study that an anthropologist has conducted on the matter. The following are five articles that explain how anthropologists are every where.

Chapter: Corporate Anthropologists, page 24 The article talked about how anthropologists play an important role in the corporate environment.

Anthropologists have been working with businesses since the 1930's, however in the 1980's this field experienced significant growth. This was due to the " globalization of business activity and the increased awareness of the importance of culture for business," (Laabs 24).

Cultural anthropology is the study of existing people and corporations find this information useful in trying to understand human behavior within their own organization. Business anthropologists have been studying the corporate world for years, on such varied topics as how to encourage more creativity or how best to integrate multicultural learning techniques into an organization's training program," (Laabs 25). Most anthropologists who work in the corporate environment do not use the title of anthropologist. There are currently over 200 anthropologists working in this field. The article then gave an account of one anthropologist's experience in the corporate environment.

The article concludes by saying what corporations think of the value that anthropologists add to the companies and that the role will continue to grow. The anthropologist that contributed to this article was Lorna M. McDougall. She works at Arthur Andersen's Center for Professional Education, which is located in St. Charles, Illinois. McDougall is "studying why people from some cultures learn best from lectures, although others learn best through interactive learning," (Laabs 25). McDougall has played a large part in developing Arthur Andersen's Business English Language Immersion Training (ELIT) program.

This program builds a language skill that allows for communication between two parties where English may be a second language. This program also provides an awareness of each culture's business ethics. "The results of her work have helped instructors, who train Andersen consultants working in 66 countries, be better teachers," (Laabs 25). McDougall is the first onsite anthropologist employed by Arthur Andersen and continues to be a great resource for the corporation. McDougall used an "anthropological methodology" by listening in on classroom sessions and conducting interviews.

From the information that she gathered she noticed that "people from certain cultures are used to two-way communication in the classroom, although others just sit quietly while the 'professor lectures'," (Laabs 26). McDougall also teaches some of the management development classes and also contributes to the training classes. Her main areas of concentration for anthropological study include a technique where sometimes a management

team proposes an idea and at other times she will propose an idea. She has also studied the meaning of gestures and colors for different cultures.

She discovered that white in some cultures means marriage and in others, white means death. All her anthropological work has played a major part in Arthur Andersen's company. I did my presentation on anthropologists and the role that they play in corporations. Until recently I was aware that culture played a defining role in companies that participated in globalization. I did not however know the role that anthropologists contributed to this topic. I recently worked a Technological Symposium for my company and this was a huge event where people from all parts of the world attended.

It was at this convention that I learned that other cultures do business differently than Americans. It is not just a language barrier but a culture barrier. I am also aware of the work that anthropologists contribute to the development of web sites that are viewed worldwide. The anthropologist's experience and mine are vastly different. She is quite a bit more experienced in the topic of corporate anthropologists. However, she and I both realized that language is not the only barrier that corporations face when expanding the operation globally.

As the awareness of this field becomes known it will continue to grow.

Chapter: Culture and the Evolution of Obesity, page 92 The article provides " a cross-cultural and evolutionary analysis of how both biological and cultural factors in obesity evolved. This analysis explains the sociological distribution of obesity today. It also emphasizes that peripheral body fat (characteristic of women) is a small health hazard compared to abdominal fat (characteristic

of men)," (Brown 92). Peter Brown, the anthropologist who wrote the article, gave his perception on obesity.

He believes that " an anthropological model of culture has significant advantages over the commonly used undifferentiated concept of 'environment" for generating hypotheses about behavioral causes of obesity," (Brown 93). Brown states that the problem of obesity and overweight is that today" s industry thrives on the culture belief about having the perfect body and sexual attractiveness rather on the medical perspective. Obesity and being overweight is not just a psychological issue but a serious health issue. Brown claims that there are four facts about the social distribution of society that must be addressed.

They are: " 1) The gender difference in the total percent and site distribution of body fat, as well as the prevalence of obesity; 2) the concentration of obesity in certain ethnic groups; 3) the increase in obesity associated with economic modernization; and 4) the powerful and complex relationship between social class and obesity," (Brown 94). He goes on to further state that " human biology and behavior can be understood in the context of two distinct processes of evolution," (Brown 96). The two processes are natural selection and historical changes in the structure of cultural systems.

Furthermore, Brown states " Because the concept of culture is rarely considered in medical research on obesity, and because I am suggesting that this concept has advantages over the more common and undifferentiated term environment, it is necessary to review some basic aspects of this anthropological term," (Brown 97). He provides a diagram that explains

culture in relation to obesity. He concludes that fatness is " symbolically linked to psychological dimensions, such as self-worth and sexuality," (Brown 99) but continues to state that this is not a consistent symbol.

In some cultures fatness symbolizes wealth and health. Lastly he concludes that culture and its relation to obesity can be concluded practically and theoretically. " First, recognition of cultural variation in beliefs and behaviors related to obesity needs to be incorporated into health programs aimed at reducing the prevalence of obesity. The second conclusion regards the need for more research on the role of culture, as it interacts with genes, on the etiology of obesity," (Brown 101). As a woman in today" s American society I am very aware of the problems and hype about obesity and overweight.

I am constantly trying to lose weight or maintain it. I am never satisfied with the way I look. Every where we look thin women are displayed on pedestals and obese and overweight people are shunned. I personally consider somebody who is overweight lacking in sexual appeal and self-confidence. The thinner that I am the more desirable I feel. I know that other cultures do not view obesity in this manner. For example I am sure that a person in South Africa who is overweight is considered to be of great status. I just hope that one day nobody will be looked at or judged on their weight.

I really enjoyed the anthropologist" s point of view on the obesity issue. The only thing that I disagree with is that such important issues such as bulimia, anorexia, and othereating disorderswere not addressed. In an article in which weight is discussed these issues go hand in hand. For every person who is obese there are three that are fighting an eating disorder, and this is

prevalent in all cultures. Peter Brown only once touched basis on the dieting craze that floods the world and this was very brief. Then he states that it is only wealthy women who are obsessed with dieting and this is incredibly false.

Chapter: White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, page 134 The article begins by the anthropologist explaining that men have privilege over women. " Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women" s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended," (McIntosh 135). Then the article proceeds to discuss how whites, whether they realize it or not, have a considerable advantage over other races. She lists twenty-six ways that whites have the upper hand.

She then concludes with her personal analysis her experiences. McIntosh explains that as a white person she had been sheltered from the privileges that she had. " I think whites are taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege," (McIntosh 135). She compiled a list of things that she encounters daily that are a privilege to white people that may not come so easily to a person of a different race. For example one item states that she " can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented," (McIntosh 135).

She then claims that if all these items are true that we are not living in a free country and that certain opportunities are available to whites. She concludes by stating that she hopes that social systems need to be redesigned. I am a

white female so I was able to place myself in the anthropologist's shoes. I grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood went to private school and I was still taught all about the different races. There is an entire month dedicated to Black History in schools. Thus, I experienced reversediscrimination, not a privilege for being white.

When applying for scholarships upon entering college I was repeatedly turned down only to see a fellow student of a different race, with lower grades, less academic activities, and lower rank receive the scholarship because of their race. Affirmative action allows for a less qualified candidate to receive the job so that the company can have a certain number of ethnic people employed. There is a black Ms. America and a Black Ms. America, yet the former Ms. America was black. There are sororities that are specifically for particular races yet regular sororities can not discriminate on race but the race specific ones can.

The anthropologist and I have very different opinions on being white. She claims that it is a privilege and that other races suffer, I strongly disagree with her. Where was her research done? Did she not look into such issues as reverse discrimination, affirmative action, and the privileges that are granted to others based on their race? The article was completely absurd. What was her basis for such an article? White people have to prove themselves where as others have doors opened for them because of the way our ancestors treated them.

McIntosh needs to do a lot more exploration into the topic. " Lee Cronk discusses possible cultural misunderstandings that were involved in the

creation of the unfortunate (and racist) term Indian giver. These misunderstandings were offensive to both Native Americans and whites. Europeans thought that gifts should be freely given and that the gift is less valued when there are strings attached," (Cronk 143). Due to the before mentioned when anthropologists study gift giving rituals they are more interested in the relationship between the giver and the receiver than the actual item being given.

The article makes several references to past situations and gives several examples of anthropologist's point of view. The anthropologist's experiences came from first hand knowledge when trying to give gifts to the people that they were studying. One anthropologist by the name of Richard Lee, from the University of Toronto, had an experience with the !Kung hunter-gatherers. He gave the tribe an ox as a token of good will but all the !Kung did was complain about how scrawny the ox was. " Only later did Lee learn, with relief, that the !Kung belittle all gifts," (Cronk 144). According to the !

Kung ridiculing gifts " is their way of diminishing the expected return and of enforcing humility on those who would use gifts to raise their own status within the group," (Cronk 144). Another example from an anthropologist was by Rada Dyson-Hudson, from Cornell University. Dyson-Hudson gave the Turkana's of Kenya pots, maize meal, tobacco, and other items. Much to her dismay it was less than appreciated. " A typical response to a gift of a pot, for example, might be, 'Where is the maize meal to go in this pot?' " or, 'Don'

t you have a bigger one to give me? " To the Turkana, these are legitimate and expected questions," (Cronk 144).

As a child and as an adult the whole gift giving process is different. I can remember getting a gift and never thinking anything of it. As an adult if I get a gift that is quite elaborate I always want to return a gift even better the giver. It is as if I want to one up the giver, as if it is going to make me a better person to give the better gift. As a child I remember receiving items from childhood friends and when a fight would occur the friend wanting the gift back, and this was referred to as Indian giving. Now as I get even older gift giving rituals such as Christmas has become consumer warfare.

I think that gift giving is a touchy topic in all cultures. The similarities between the anthropologist's experience and mine are amazing. It just goes to show that gift giving is a process that will never be fully grasped no matter how much research is done on the topic. Chapter: society and Sex Roles, page 159 Ernestine Friedl (Human Nature, 1978) The article begins with the anthropologist giving two contrasting examples of the roles men and women play in different cultures. Following this introduction the thesis is given that the roles will never be clearly defined as long as examples from other cultures are used in the argument.

The article continues to site examples about how men are the dominant sex because they are the hunter's and provide the resources. Several examples of tribes are given to support his hypothesis that as long as men provide the resources than they will have the upper hand. He concludes by stating that as women continue to gain positions in roles that allow them to provide the

resources than they will be able to make demands to change the sex roles. Friedl makes the argument that to understand society and its sex roles one must not "toss examples from the world's cultures at each other like intellectual stones," (Friedl 160).

He states that the differences, biologically speaking, can be "clarified by looking at known examples of the earliest forms of human society and examining the relationship between the technology, social organization, environment, and sex roles," (Friedl 160). Friedl claims that the factors in a society that cause male dominance need to be researched because once these factors are understood then one can apply this knowledge to the constant changes in the sex roles due to the modern society.

Through Friedl's observations he learned that "The male monopoly on hunting unites men in a system of exchange and gives them power," (Friedl 161). "Women do not hunt, I believe, because of four interrelated factors: variability in the supply of game; the different skills required for hunting and gathering; the incompatibility between carrying burdens and hunting; and the small size of seminomadic foraging populations," (Friedl 161). He also believes that another reason are not the dominant sex is because it is difficult to provide resources when one is pregnant.

I grew up in school learning about how women's roles in society have evolved over time. I realize that women were not and still are not the dominant sex. This is partly because it is still difficult for women to be in positions of power. I once tried for a position in a spirit organization at Texas Tech University. It was a male organization thus I was declined membership.

Even in dating the men pay, open the doors for the women, and play the dominant role. I agree with Friedl in that the dominant sex is the one that provides the resources.

His research was done by past observations and my experience came from personal experience in such areas as dating, work, and school. The times that I was unable to provide resources I was not dominant, but the times that I did provide the resources I had the upper hand. As we continue to grow as a society then women will be in such positions of power and then maybe an equality between the sexes can exist. My favorite article was the article titled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack". This was because it is such a controversial topic that gets a rise out of me and makes my temper flare.

I would really like to argue my point of view with the anthropologist that wrote the article. It is a topic that is extremely controversial and will be around as long as there are people and different races. In conclusion, I now realize all the studies and broad range of topics that are discussed by cultural anthropologists. They play an important role in every day activities that I take for granted. As long as there are people and at the rate the world changes there will always be a need for cultural anthropologists.