What’s an Anthropological Approach?

Anthropological research diverse, yet all share a single outlook.

Outlook: study every aspect of people from a ‘global and comparative approach’.

Kinds of Anthropologists

Biological Anthropologists

What do they study?

- evolution of humans
- human biological variability

field is growing

Cultural Anthropologists

study the cultures world-wide to “evaluate how diverse cultural elements intermesh and change:.

- ethnographers - people who “describe present-day cultures on a first-hand basis
- ethnology - “comparative study of multiple cultures”

Anthropological Linguists

study linguistic behavior

field is declining

Archaeology

study cultures, often extinct, by looking at material remains

field is expanding

The Culture Concept in Anthropology

What is Culture?

numerous definitions of culture

Tylor’s definition, culture is learned, is too broad

Three views of culture: Language analogy

- ideolect - individual variation
- language - general shared/collective patterns
- system of communication - “underlying rationale of language”; a function

The Potlatch: Culture at Three Levels

cultural ideolect - culture from an individual’s viewpoint

cultural language or culture - “shared, modal aspects”

cultural system - the function of the culture

White - pioneered study of cultural systems

Binford - systems are “a set of repetitive articulations among the social, technological, and ideological aspects of culture.

-cultural systems are extrasomatic

“People do not share a culture - they participate in it”.

Potlatch example

- ideolect - individual costumes, behaviors, styles
- culture - each participant shares a belief in the potlatch as an institution
- systems - a way of re-distributing resources to those with less

The Etic Versus the Emic

Emic - study of a culture from a “native’s point of view”.

Etic - study of a culture using categories developed by the researcher, which may be unfamiliar to the individuals of the culture being studied.

Ideational Versus Adaptive Research Strategies

Culture as Adaptation

study culture as a way of adapting to the surrounding environment through things such as technology.

Culture as Ideas

study culture as a set of “ideas, thoughts, and shared knowledge”.

What’s an Anthropological Approach?
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  Outlook: study every aspect of people from a ‘global and comparative approach’.

Kinds of Anthropologists
  There are four types of anthropologists. Biological anthropologists study the evolution of humans and human biological variability. The three remaining types of anthropologists study cultures, both present day and in the past. Cultural anthropologists study mainly modern-day cultures to understand how they work and change. Ethnographers are cultural anthropologists who study cultures on a first-hand basis. Ethnology is the comparative study of several cultures. The third type of anthropologists are anthropological linguists, who study linguistic behavior. And finally, archaeologists study the material remains of cultures. Since many of cultures that archaeologists study are extinct there are no informants to observe or describe.

The Culture Concept in Anthropology
  There are numerous definitions of culture, but a useful analogy is one derived from linguistics. Culture can be viewed at three levels: the ideolect, which deals with individual behavior; the language or the aspects that individuals share; and the systems, which address the function of the language.

The Potlatch: Culture at Three Levels
  The potlatch was used as an example of how this three level view of culture can be applied to cultures. At the ideolect level, you have the individual costumes, behaviors, and styles represented at the potlatch. While all may be different, each participant shares a belief in the potlatch as an institution within their culture. The suggested purpose of the potlatch is to redistribute resources to those who have less.

The Etic Versus the Emic
  There are two ways that culture can be studied. An emic approach uses the terms and the perspectives used by individuals within the group being studied. The other approach, the etic, uses categories that are developed by the research, which may be unfamiliar to the individuals of the culture being studied.

Ideational Versus Adaptive Research Strategies
  There are also two ways culture can be viewed. When culture is viewed as adaptation, then researchers try to understand how it helps a group adapt to the surrounding environment through things such as technology or settlement patterns. Researchers who view culture as ideas, will try to understand the mindset of the culture and the individuals within a culture.