

Family & Human Culture

Actual behavior

What people really do in their lives rather than what they think they are doing or what they believe they should be doing. In most societies there is a discrepancy between these three kinds of behavior. It is important for anthropologists to distinguish between them when they learn about another society and its culture.

Adaptive mechanism

A behavior, strategy, or technique for obtaining food and surviving in a particular environment. Successful adaptive mechanisms provide a selective advantage in the competition for survival with other life forms. For humans, the most important adaptive mechanism is culture.

Anthropology

The broad scientific study of human culture and biology. Anthropologists are interested in what it is to be human in all of our many different societies around the world today and in the past. In North American universities, the study of anthropology is usually divided into four main sub-disciplines: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics.

Archaeology

The systematic study of the material remains of human behavior in the past. Archaeologists reconstruct the pre-history and early history of societies and their cultures through an examination and interpretation of such things as house foundations, broken tools, and food refuse.

Believed Behavior

What people honestly believe that they are doing in their lives rather than what they think they should be doing or what they actually are doing. In most societies there is a discrepancy between these three kinds of behavior. It is important for anthropologists to distinguish between them when they learn about another society and its culture.

Body language

Gestures, facial expressions, and body postures that people use to communicate along with or instead of speech. Body language is also referred to as kinesics. Waving good-bye with a hand and arm or winking one eye to indicate a shared secret are examples of body language in North America. Body language is learned as part of a culture.

Culture

The full range of learned behavior patterns that are acquired by people as members of a society. A culture is a complex, largely interrelated whole that consists of the knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, skills, and habits learned from parents and others in a society. Culture is the primary adaptive mechanism for humans.

Cultural anthropology

The study of contemporary and recent historical cultures all over the world. The focus is on social organization, culture change, economic and political systems, and religion. Cultural anthropology is also referred to as social or socio-cultural anthropology.

Cultural relativity

Suspending one's ethnocentric judgments in order to understand and appreciate another culture. Anthropologists try to learn about and interpret the various aspects of the culture they are studying in reference to that culture rather than to their own. This provides a better understanding of how such practices as polygamy and cannibalism can function and even support other cultural traditions.

Cultural universals

Cultural traits that are shared by all of humanity collectively. Examples of such general traits are communicating with a verbal language, using age and gender to classify people, and raising children in some sort of family setting. No matter where people live in the world, they share these universal cultural traits. However, different cultures have developed their own specific ways of carrying out or expressing these general traits.

Culture shock

A feeling of confusion, alienation, and depression that can result from the psychological stress that commonly occurs during the first weeks or months of a total cultural emersion in an alien society. Until the new culture becomes familiar and comfortable, it is common to have difficulty in communicating and to make frustrating mistakes. This is usually compounded by feelings of homesickness. These feelings can be emotionally debilitating. However, culture shock eventually passes for most people.

Diffusion

The movement of cultural traits and ideas from one society or ethnic group to another. While the form of a trait may be transmitted to another society, the original meaning may not. For instance, McDonald's hamburgers are thought of as a cheap, quick meal in North America, but they are generally considered to be a special occasion food in Beijing, China and Moscow, Russia.

Dominance hierarchy

A group of individuals arranged in rank order in terms of relative dominance and subservience. In some non-human primate species, each community has a distinct male and female dominance hierarchy. Every individual is ranked relative to all other community members of the same gender. Those who are higher in the dominance hierarchy usually have greater access to food, sex, and other desirable things.

Ethnocentrism

The deep felt belief that your culture is superior to all others. Being fond of your own way of life and condescending or even hostile toward other cultures is normal for all people. Alien culture traits are often viewed as being not just different but less sensible and even "unnatural." Ethnocentrism is normal for all people in the world.

Ethnography

Anthropological research in which one learns about the culture of another society through fieldwork and first hand observation in that society. Ethnography is also the term used to refer to books or monographs describing what was learnt about the culture of that society.

Ethnology

An anthropological study that systematically compares similar cultures. An example of an ethnological study would be a comparison of what cultures are like in societies that have economies based on hunting and gathering rather than agriculture. The data for this sort of ethnology would come from the existing ethnographies about these peoples. In other words, ethnology is essentially a synthesis of the work of many ethnographers.

Gender

Sexual identity as male or female

Globalism

The view that the people and nations of the world should become more economically and politically integrated and unified. Those who advocate globalism generally believe that ethnocentrism, nationalism, and tribalism are obstacles that must be overcome.

Ideal behavior

What people believe that they should do in their lives rather than what they think they are doing or what they actually are doing? In most societies there is a discrepancy between these three kinds of behavior. It is important for anthropologists to distinguish between them when they learn about another society and its culture.

Informant

Someone who is not only knowledgeable about his or her own culture but who is able and willing to communicate this knowledge in an understandable way to an anthropologist or some other outsider. Ethnographers usually try to develop a warm and trusting relationship with their informants. This makes it more likely that they will learn what the informant's culture is really like.

Judgment sample

A probability sample that includes only a limited number of key people selected by an anthropologist to be his or her informants based on the likelihood that they possess knowledge concerning the research questions and will be most able to communicate it. For example, religious leaders would be the most likely informants if research concerns religious beliefs and practices. The judgment sample approach works best if the focus of research concerns cultural information that only some members of the host society possess.

Linguistics

The comparative study of the function, structure, and history of languages and the communication process in general. Linguistics is also referred to as linguistic anthropology.

Monogamy

Marriage of one woman to one man at a time is monogamy. This is the most common marriage pattern around the world today. If remarriage is allowed following divorce or death of a spouse, the marriage pattern could be defined as being "serial monogamy."

Nationalism

Extreme loyalty and devotion to a nation and its interests, usually at the expense of other nations or societies

Participant Observation

Physically and emotionally participating in the social interaction of another society on a daily basis in order to learn about its culture. In practice this usually requires living within the community as a member, learning their language, establishing close friendship ties, eating what they eat, and taking part in normal family activities. By becoming an active participant rather than simply an observer, ethnographers reduce the cultural distance between themselves and the host society.

Physical Anthropology

The study of the non-cultural, or biological, aspects of humans and near humans. Physical anthropologists are usually involved in one of three different kinds of research:

- 1) Non-human primate studies (usually in the wild),
- 2) Recovering the fossil record of human evolution, and
- 3) Studying human biological diversity, inheritance patterns, and non-cultural means of adapting to environmental stresses. Physical anthropology is also referred to as biological anthropology.

Polyandry

The marriage of one woman to several men at the same time-this is a rare type of polygamy. It usually takes the form of "fraternal polyandry", which is brothers sharing the same wife.

Polygamy

The generic term for marriage to more than one spouse at the same time

Polygene

The marriage of one man to several women at the same time. This is the most common form of polygamy. It often takes the form of "sororal polygyny", which is two or more sisters married to the same man.

Probability Sample

A sample of people that is carefully chosen so that it will be representative of the entire community or population. Choosing who will be in the sample can be difficult, especially at the beginning of an ethnographic research project when the first contacts are made and the composition of the society and its culture are still poorly understood.

Random sample

A probability sample in which people are selected on a totally random, unbiased basis. This can be accomplished by assigning a number to everyone in a community and then letting a computer or hand calculator generate a series of random numbers. If a 10% sample is needed, then the first 10% of the random numbers will indicate who will be the focus of the research. This sampling approach is reasonable for ethnographic research only when there does not seem to be much difference between the people in the population. Since this is rarely the case, random sampling is not often used for ethnographic research.

Social Anthropology

The study of contemporary and recent historical cultures all over the world is social anthropology. The focus is on social organization, culture change, economic and political systems, and religion.

Society

A group of interacting organisms is society. In the case of humans, societies are groups of people who directly or indirectly interact with each other. People in human societies also generally perceive that their society is distinct from other societies in terms of shared traditions and expectations.

Stratified Sample

Stratified sample is a probability sample in which people are selected because they come from distinct sub-groups within the society. This approach may be used by ethnographers if the information that is being sought is not specialized knowledge such as the esoteric activities of a secret organization with restricted membership.

Subculture

A regional, social, or ethnic group that is distinguishable from other groups in a society. Members of a subculture often share a common identity, food tradition, dialect or language, and other cultural traits that come from their common ancestral background and experience. Subcultures are most likely to exist in complex, diverse societies, such as the U.S. and Canada, in which people have come from many different parts of the world.

Tribalism

Tribalism is a profound loyalty to one's tribe or ethnic group and a rejection of others. Those who promote tribalism generally believe that globalism is a threat that must be overcome. A pattern of establishing ethnically "pure" nations through aggressive "ethnic cleansing" occurred in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990's. Similar attempts to carve out tribal based nations have occurred in the former republics of the Soviet Union and in a number of African nations.

Levinson and Malone Typology of Families

Matrifocal Family

Consists of a mother and her children

Nuclear Family

Consists of a wife/mother, husband/father, and their children

Polygynous Family

Consists of a husband/father, two or more co-wives/mothers and their children

Polyandrous Family

Consists of one wife/mother, her children and two or more husband/fathers

Extended Family

Consists of individuals who are recognized as both husband/father and son/brother or wife/mother and sister/daughter at the same time. Extended families combine at least one individual's family of orientation with his or her family of procreation. Murdock (1949) views the extended family as composite nuclear families. Linton views them as multi-generational consanguine families to which spouses are added. Murdock (1949) provides us with a typology of extended families based on post-nuptial residence. Nimkoff (1965:19) has produced a typology based on structural differences-

Murdock's Typology of Extended Families

An extended family consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship rather than of the husband-wife relationship, i.e., by joining the nuclear family of a married adult to that of his parents. The several types of extended family depend primarily upon the prevailing rule of residence.

Patrilocal

The families of procreation of a man, his married sons and his sons

Matrilocal

The families of procreation of a woman, her daughters and her daughters' daughters

Bilocal

Either the son or the daughter, depending upon circumstances of the particular case, may remain at home and thereby attach his family of procreation to his/her family of orientation. Thus the nuclear family of a married couple is united with those of some but not all of their sons, of some but not all of their daughters, and of some but not all of their grandchildren of either sex. Nuclear families of adjacent generations, in short, may be linked by any type of parent-child relationship.

Avunculocal

A man, his wife or wives, his young sons and unmarried daughters, several of his sister's adolescent but unmarried sons, a sister's son who is married to his daughter, the young children of the latter couple, possibly other married nephews or daughters with their families, and occasionally even a grand nephew or two. In this instance the associated nuclear families are linked through two relationships, that between parent and daughter and that between maternal uncle and nephew. In some societies with this type of extended family, however, the nephew does not marry the daughter, so that the uncle-nephew link alone connects the associated nuclear families of adjacent generations.

Nimkoff's Typology of Extended Families

Fully Extended Family

The families of at least two siblings or cousins in each of at least two adjacent generations

Fraternal Polyandry

Where the husbands are brothers (to one another)

Fictive Kinship

"A relationship, such as god-parenthood, modeled on relations of kinship, but created by customary convention rather than the circumstances of birth." Examples include "blood brothers", "godparents". Some would make a distinction between "fictive" kin and "putative" kin, the latter including adopted children.

Filial Widow Inheritance

The norm that allows a man to inherit his father's widows, except his own mother. It can occur only in polygynous tribes but even then is rare.

Filiations

Relationship to or through one's father and one's mother, or the basing of rights on this relationship

Fraternal Joint Family

Consists of two or more brothers and their wives (and children); the bond of union is consanguine

Fraternal Polyandry

A family consisting of several brothers with one wife in common

Generalized Exchange

A system of marriage exchange in which women are viewed as circulating within groups

Genitrix

Biological mother

Genitor

Biological father

Gens

An antiquated term for a patrilineal descent group now more commonly known as a clan

Group Marriage

A marital union involving several women and several men at once. It does not appear to ever have existed as the cultural norm or the prevailing type of union in any known society.

Hyper gamy

Denotes a marriage rule prescribing union of a female with a male of higher status

Hypo gamy

Denotes a marriage rule prescribing union of a female to a male of lower status

Incest

Sexual intercourse between two persons who are related by a real, assumed, or artificial bond of kinship that is regarded as a bar to sex relations. Where sex relations are forbidden, but not because of kinship, they may be called mismating. Where either party occupies a status forbidding sex relations, e.g., a nun, sexual intercourse may be termed status unchastity. (Murdock 1949:261)

Incest Taboo

A rule prohibiting sexual relations between immediate kin (father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister) and others culturally defined as in an equivalent relationship. Differs from "exogamy", which prohibits marriage but not necessarily sexual relations

Indirect Exchange

A system of alliance (prescriptive marriage) whereby kin groups exchange wives indirectly, so that a man must marry his actual or classificatory MBD (matrilineal alliance) or FZD (patrilineal alliance, said not to exist) but so that wife-givers cannot be wife takers.

Iroquois Terminology

A mode of kinship reckoning, usually but not always associated with unilineal descent, in which cross and parallel relatives are distinguished according to relative sex of connecting relatives in the middle

three generations only.

Joint Family

Two or more nuclear families that form a corporate economic unit

Kin Class

A class or set of kin types labeled by a single kin term, for e.g., cousin, uncle, grandfather

Kin Group

A social group whose members define their relationship (or their eligibility for membership) by kinship or common descent

Kin Term

A lexeme whose primary referent is genealogical

Kin Type

Any specific genealogical relationship, e.g., Mother's brother, Father's brother, Father's sister's husband

Kindred

A social group or category consisting of an individual's circle of relatives, or that range of a person's relatives accorded special cultural recognition. A group of persons, all of whom have a single relative (Ego) in common who is not an ancestor of theirs. It follows that the only persons having identical kindred would be full siblings.

Kinship

Relationship based on or modeled on the culturally recognized connection between parents and children (and extended to siblings and through parents to more distant relatives.)

Levirate

A system where a dead man's brother (or equivalent close male relative) succeeds to his status as husband, by marrying his widow. Rule whereby a man is entitled to inherit the widow of his deceased brother.

Leviratic polyandry

Simultaneous marriage of a woman to two or more men who are brothers (to one another)

Lineage

A unilineal descent group based on patrilineal descent (Patrilineage) or matrilineal descent (matrilineage) whose members trace descent from an apical ancestor/ancestress by known genealogical links. A descent group in which the links connecting living members with a common ancestor (or ancestress) may be actually demonstrated. Variations: Patrilineage, where links are traced exclusively through the male lines; Matrilineage, where links are traced exclusively through the female lines;

cognatic lineage, where links are traced through both sex lines

Lineal Kinsmen

Direct descendants and ancestors to whom Ego has an unbroken chain of parent-child linkages. For example, Ego's father, mother's father, father's mother's father, son, son's daughter's son, etc.

Lineal Family

One nuclear family in the senior generation and two or more nuclear families in the junior generation

Mater

Sociological mother

Matriarchy

Rule of the family (and society) by the mother; no strictly matriarchal societies are known.

Matrilateral Relations

Those kinship relationships one acquires through mother.

Matrilineage

A unilineal descent group based on matrilineal descent

Matrilineal Descent

A principle of descent from an ancestress through her daughter, her daughter's daughter

Matrilocal Residence

A post-nuptial residence pattern in which the newly wed couple establishes residence with wife's group. Some would restrict this usage to those societies which have unilineal descent groups.

Matri-patrilocal Residence

A pattern of initial matrilocal residence followed by permanent patrilocal residence

Mixed Descent

"Gillin (1948:433) notes that mixed descent is relatively rare but two varieties do occur. Sex-linked mixed descent affiliates males with their father's male line; females with the mother's female line. Cross-sex mixed descent affiliates males with the mother's father, females with the father's mother."

Monogamy

A form of marriage which limits a person to only one spouse at a time

Negative Marriage Rules

Rules which stipulate only "whom one should not marry but have no rule about the actual choice of partner.

Neolocal Residence

Residence of a couple after marriage in a new household not linked spatially to that of the groom's or the bride's kin

Nepotic Inheritance

The norm that a man inherits his uncle's wife or wives. It has been found in patrilineal groups but fits more logically a matrilineal framework, where it is usually found. It is far from universal with matrilineal descent, however.

Nuclear Family

A family unit consisting of parents and their dependent children. The social unit, based on real or putative or fictive blood ties, and consisting of a male, his wife, and their dependent offspring also, called "elementary family" or "conjugal family".

Parallel-Cousins

The children of same-sexed siblings; similarly, the offspring of one's parents' same-sexed siblings

Pater

Sociological father, not necessarily biological father

Patrilateral Relations

Those kinship relations one acquires through father. One's kinsmen and kinswomen on "father's side"

Patrilineage

A unilineal descent group based on patrilineal descent

Patrilineal Descent

"Descent traced through a line of ancestors in the male line.

Patrilocal Residence

Residence of a married couple with the husband's group

Polygamy

Plural marriage, of which there are two major types: polygyny and polyandry. Polygyny is a marriage of a male to two or more females.

Polyandry

Marriage of a female to two or more males

Positive Marriage Rules

Rules which stipulate "not only whom one may not marry, they specify also whom one should marry.

Preferential Marriage

A marriage pattern (e.g., marriage with a cross-cousin, a brother's widow, etc.) that is socially valued and desirable, but not enjoined

Prescriptive Marriage

In alliance theory, a requirement that marriage be with a partner in a particular kinship category. Even where "incorrect" marriages occur, they are likely to be classed as if they were correct, and kinship relations readjusted accordingly.

Primary Relatives

Ego's parents and siblings in his family of orientation and his spouse and children in his family of procreation

Primogeniture

Primogeniture is an inheritance rule which favors the first born child in a family.

Residence

"Referring to conventional rules or patterns of behavior concerning the place a couple lives after marriage

Sororal Polygyny

Where the plural wives are sisters (to one another)

Stem Family

Two nuclear families in adjacent generations with one son/husband or daughter/wife who is a member of both families