Nainita Madurai

**Anthropology** (study of human beings) differs from other disciplines because it is:

-concerned with humans in all places and through all of time

-**holistic**, or studies all aspects of peoples’ experiences

-concerned with identifying and explaining traits and customs of specific human populations

**Biological anthropology** studies the emergence of humans and their later physical evolution (**human paleontology** or **paleoanthropology**) and how and why contemporary human populations very biologically (**human variation**)

-to reconstruct human evolution or the evolution of ***Homo sapiens***, paleontologists study **fossils** of not only our evolutionary ancestors but also of our closest relative, **primates** (those who study primates are **primatologists**)

**Cultural anthropology**, the study of the aspects of human culture (customary ways of thinking and behaving of particular societies), is separated into three branches:

-**Archaeology** – reconstruction and explanation of the daily life and customs of prehistoric peoples from their remains

\***prehistory** is the time before written records

\***historical archaeology** studies the remains of those from the recent past after written records were kept

-**Anthropological linguistics** – study the emergence of language in the context of:

\*its divergence over time (**historical linguistics**)

\*how contemporary languages differ; both in construction (**descriptive** or **structural linguistics**) and in actual speech (**sociolinguistics**)

-**Ethnology** – seek to understand how and why peoples of today and the recent past differ in their customary ways of thinking and acting; there are three main types of ethnologists:

\***ethnographers** – spend a year or so living with, talking to and observing the people of a specific society

\***ethnohistorians** – study how the ways of life of a particular group of people have changed over time

\***cross-cultural researchers** – take the work of ethnographers and ethnohistorians and attempts to discover general patterns about cultural traits

In all these different branches of anthropology there exist **applied** or **practicing anthropologists**, who apply anthropological knowledge to achieve practical goals

Scientists try to achieve two kinds of **explanations**:

-**Statistical associations** – the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to chance

-**Theories** – are falsified by deriving **hypotheses** or predictions that should be true if the theory is correct; theories become **laws** when they are widely accepted in the scientific community

\*theoretical construct – something that cannot be observed or verified directly

\*an **operational definition** is a description of the procedure that is followed to measure the variable

\*to **measure** something is to say how it compares with other things on some scale of variation

By showing us why other people are the way they are, both culturally and physically, anthropology may make us more tolerant

**Culture** is defined as the learned behaviors and ideas generally shared by the members of a **society** (a particular territory population speaking a language not generally understood by neighboring populations)

-**Subculture** – the commonly shared customs of a group within a society

-culture is:

\*generally adapted to the particular conditions of its physical and social environment

\*mostly integrated, in that the elements that make up the culture are mostly adjusted to one another

\*always changing

-cultural constraints

**Ethnocentrism**, judging other cultures in terms of your own or glorifying other cultures, impedes anthropological inquiry; to eradicate this anthropologists practice

-**Cultural relativism** – a society’s customs and ideas should be studied objectively and understood in the context of that society’s culture

Anthropologists focus on general or shared patterns of behavior rather than on individual variation