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UNIT 1
Anthropological Perspectives

Unit Overview

   An anthropologist's first fieldwork is especially challenging since it involves living in a
   strange environment with people whose culture is stranger still. Yet, as Phillip Kottak
   describes such an experience in a small community in Brazil, the reward is a greater
   understanding of and appreciation for another culture.

2. Eating Christmas in the Kalahari, Richard Borshay Lee, Natural History, December 1969
   Anthropologist Richard Borshay Lee gives an account of the misunderstanding and
   confusion that often accompany cross-cultural experience. In this case, he violated a
   basic principle of the !Kung Bushmen's social relations—food sharing.

3. Tricking and Tripping, Claire E. Sterk, Tricking and Tripping:
   As unique as Claire E. Sterk's report on prostitution may be, she discusses issues
   common to anthropologists wherever they conduct fieldwork: How does one build
   trusting relationships with informants and what are the ethical obligations of an
   anthropologist toward them?

4. Anthropology and Counterinsurgency, Montgomery McFate,
   Military Review, March/April 2005
   Countering the insurgency in Iraq requires cultural and social knowledge of the adversary.
   Yet, none of the elements of U.S. national power diplomatic, military, intelligence,
   or economic-explicitly take culture of the adversary into account in the formation or
   execution of policies. This gap in knowledge of culture has a simple cause—the absence
   of anthropology within the national-security establishment.

UNIT 2
Culture and Communication

Unit Overview

5. Whose Speech Is Better?, Donna Jo Napoli, Language Matters:
   A Guide to Everyday Questions About Language, Oxford University
   Press, 2003
   Although we cannot explicitly state the rules of our language, we do choose to follow
   different rules in different contexts. Depending on the situation, we manipulate every
   aspect of language, from simple differences in pronunciation and vocabulary to the
   more complicated changes in phrasing and the sentence structure.

The concepts in bold italics are developed in the article. For further expansion, please refer to the Topic Guide.

It is a common assumption that the mass media is making all Americans speak in a similar manner. Linguists point out, however, that while some national trends in language are apparent, regional speech differences are not only thriving, but in some places they are becoming even more distinctive.


In America today, a pervasive warlike tone seems to prevail in public dialogue. The prevailing belief is that there are only two sides to an issue and opposition leads to truth. Often, however, an issue is more like a crystal, with many sides, and the truth is in the complex middle, not in the oversimplified extremes.

8. I Can't Even Open My Mouth, Deborah Tannen, I Only Say This Because I Love You, Random House, 2001

Since family members have a long, shared history, what they say in conversation—the messages—echo with meanings from the past—the metamessages. The metamessage may not be spoken, but its meaning may be gleaned from every aspect of context: the way something is said, who is saying it, or the very fact that it is said at all.

9. Shakespeare in the Bush, Laura Bohannan, Natural History, August/September, 1966

It is often claimed that great literature has cross-cultural significance. In this article, Laura Bohannan describes the difficulties she encountered and the lessons she learned as she attempted to relate the story of Hamlet to the Tiv of West Africa in their own language.

UNIT 3
The Organization of Society and Culture

Unit Overview


The traditional hunters' insights into the world of nature may be different, but they are as extensive and profound as those of modern science.

11. The Inuit Paradox, Patricia Gadsby, Discover, October 2004

The traditional diet of the Far North, with its high-protein, high-fat content, shows that there are no essential foods—only essential nutrients.

12. Ties That Bind, Peter M. Whiteley, Natural History, November 2004

The Hopi people offer gifts in a much broader range of circumstances than people in Western cultures do, tying individuals and groups to each other and to the realm of the spirits.


The persistent use of American Indian mascots, logos and nicknames in school-related events plays an important role in warping American Indian children's cultural perceptions of themselves. Over time, such stereotypes have evolved into contemporary racist images that prevent millions of school-age students from understanding American Indians' past and present experiences.


While it has long been known that people with low socioeconomic status have higher disease risks and shorter life spans, new studies indicate that material deprivation may only be part of the explanation. Perhaps an even more important aspect has to do with the psychosocial stresses that go with their place in society.
UNIT 4
Other Families, Other Ways

Unit Overview

15. When Brothers Share a Wife, Melvyn C. Goldstein, *Natural History*, March 1987
While the custom of *fraternal polyandry* relegated many Tibetan women to spinsterhood, this unusual *marriage* form promoted personal security and economic well-being for its participants.

In the Shantytowns of Brazil, the seeming indifference of mothers who allow some of their *children* to die is a *survival strategy*, geared to circumstances in which only some may live.

*Arranging a marriage* in India is far too serious a business for the young and inexperienced. Instead, the parents make decision on the basis of the families’ *social position*, reputation and ability to get along.

Paradoxically, *Japanese families* seem to survive not because husbands and wives love each other more than American couples do, but rather because they perhaps love each other less. And as *love marriages* increase, with the compatibility factor becoming more important in the decision to marry, the *divorce rate* is rising.

UNIT 5
Gender and Status

Unit Overview

Not all societies agree with the *Western cultural view* that all humans are either women or men. In fact, many Native American cultures recognize an *alternative role* called the “*berdache*,” a morphological male who has a non-masculine character. This is just one way for a society to recognize and assimilate some *atypical individuals* without imposing a change on them or stigmatizing them as deviants.

An anthropologist’s study of the *ritual of seclusion* surrounding *women’s menstrual cycle* has some rather profound implications regarding human evolution, certain cultural practices and *women’s health*.

In a *rite of passage*, some Nigerian girls spend months gaining weight and learning customs in a “fattening room.” A woman’s rotundity is seen as a sign *good health, prosperity and feminine beauty*.

The concepts in bold italics are developed in the article. For further expansion, please refer to the Topic Guide.
22. Parents or Pop Culture?, Kristin J. Anderson and Donna Cavallaro, *Childhood Education*, Spring 2002
One of the most important features of childhood and adolescence is the development of an identity. The kinds of role models that parents, educators and culture heroes promote help to shape that identity, as well as, the values and behaviors they hold dear.

UNIT 6
Religion, Belief, and Ritual

Unit Overview

Because of cost, availability and cultural bias, many people rely on ethnomedical or traditional treatment of illness rather than biomedical or Western treatment. Lehmann says both systems are effective in their own ways and should be integrated in developing primary health care in the Third World.

This article explains how few generalizations about shamanism do justice to the varying social contexts and individual cultural histories of the shamans, and discusses the past perceptual biases on the part of ethnographic observers.

Miraculous recoveries from serious diseases may seem rare, but the fact is they do occur. In looking for answers, researchers have explored everything from the human immune system to the mind-body connection—even the power of prayer. What is needed is more science and less anecdotes.

Rituals promote group cohesion by requiring members to engage in behavior that is too costly to fake. Groups that do so are more likely to attain their collective goals than the groups whose members are less committed.

As the world’s second largest religion after Christianity, Islam teaches piety, virtue and tolerance. Yet, with the emphasis of some Islamists on a strong relationship between religion and state, and with an increasing number of Islamic militants calling for violence against the West, communication and mutual understanding are becoming more important than ever.

In seeking scientific documentation of the existence of zombies, anthropologist Wade Davis found himself looking beyond the stereotypes and mysteries of voodoo, and directly into a cohesive system of social control in rural Haiti.

The rituals, beliefs, and taboos, of the Nacirema provide us with a test case of the objectivity of ethnographic description and show us the extremes to which human behavior can go.

The concepts in bold italics are developed in the article. For further expansion, please refer to the Topic Guide.
Professional baseball players, like Trobriand Islanders, often resort to magic, in situations of chance and uncertainty. As irrational as it may seem, magic creates confidence, competence and control in the practitioner.

UNIT 7
Sociocultural Change

Unit Overview

When colonial governments force the conversion of subsistence farms to cash crop plantations, peasants are driven into marginal lands or into a large pool of cheap labor. In either case, the authors maintain their stand the farmers they are no longer able to feed themselves.

32. The Arrow of Disease, Jared Diamond, Discover, October 1992
The most deadly weapon colonial Europeans carried to other continents was their germs. The most intriguing question to be answered here is, why didn’t the flow of disease not move in the opposite direction?

33. Burying the White Gods, Camilla Townsend, American Historical Review, June 2003
Contrary to popular belief, there is little evidence that the Aztecs seriously believed that Hernando Cortés and his men were gods returning from the east. Instead, the author explains that, the origin and durability of the myth provided an alternate explanation for what actually happened in the period of the conquest. In addition, Camilla Townsend discusses what the indigenous people were actually thinking.

34. America, Found & Lost, Charles C. Mann, National Geographic, May 2007
Much of what we learned in grade school about Indians and colonists at Jamestown turns out to be wrong. Not only had the Indians already changed the landscape of North America, but the colonists, with their invasive species, did not simply “discover” a New World—they created one.

As traditional cultures are sacrificed in the process of modernization, tribal peoples not only lose the security, autonomy and quality of life they once had, but they also become powerless, second-class citizens who are discriminated against and exploited by the dominant society.

For many people, Buddhism is less a religion than a philosophy of life, less a theology than a meditative discipline, less outwardly aggressive than inwardly harmonious. The history of Tibet, however, provides a stark contrast to Buddhism’s Shangri-La image.

37. Seeing Conservation through the Global Lens, Jim Igoe, Conservation and Globalization, Wadsworth, 2004
Before economic globalization took hold, most traditional peoples lived in ways that ensured the continued availability of resources for future generations. Since most Western models of conservation are based on the total exclusion of indigenous peoples, it is not surprising that they speak of conservation with disdain.

The concepts in bold italics are developed in the article. For further expansion, please refer to the Topic Guide.

Having made *technological accommodations* to the modern world spanning several generations, the *indigenous peoples of Greenland* are beginning to see the *ice and snow melt* before their eyes. The prospect of *global warming* is bringing with it a possible end to their hunting way of life.


What should be done about *endangered enclave societies* in the midst of a modern nation such as Brazil? The main priority, says Roger Sandall, must be to ensure that no one should have to play the role of *historical curiosity* and that those who want to *participate in the modern world* should be able to do so, whether on the reservation or off of it.

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