**The Study of Anthropology:**

What is it? And what is it used for?

By Kara

“The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences” -Ruth Benedict (“BrainyQuote”) Anthropologist are crucial in this world today, they help us understand our lineage, they help us figure out other people’s language and culture, and they dig up lost and old objects to better comprehend humans. 

Imagine anthropology as a tree. Anthropology is the trunk, and there are 4 main branches. These four branches split or branch out into smaller branches that are the smaller fields within the four main ones. Someone can study all the fields or focus on one specific field.

But what *is* anthropology? You may ask. Anthropology is the study scientific study of humans. But there are many other smaller fields of anthropology. Like the house I mentioned. The four main branches of anthropology are linguistic anthropology, cultural anthropology, biological/physical anthropology, and archaeology.

Linguistic anthropology is the study of how language influences social life. Linguistic anthropologists also study language variations, like how people say certain words differently, and what they mean when pronounced differently. For example, “ahnt” or “aw-nt”. Linguistic anthropologists are providing important information for program development, policy information, and practical solutions to everyday language issues.

Cultural anthropology is the study of cultural variation among humans. Cultures can be very similar and also can very very different. After all, an Eskimo raised in a Tupiq is from a very different culture than a monk living in a temple in China. A cultural anthropologist will go and live with people from a different culture. They will learn all they can about that culture, and then they will find differences and similarities between that culture and other ones.

Biological/physical anthropology is the study of biological or behavioral aspects of human beings. Biological anthropologists seek to document and explain. They want to explain the pattern of change among human populations, and they want to document and trace our ancestry via the fossil records as far back as our technology now can tell. Currently, Ardipithecus ramidus is the oldest hominid that we have found. The 4.4 million-year-old female (“Ardi”) is the most complete specimen of Ardipithecus ramidus.

Archaeology is the study of the things that humans leave behind. They use a lot of different tools, such as trowels, pick-axes, and even bulldozers. Archaeologists are responsible for the artifacts that they collect. This means that they have to bring, let’s say, some archaeologist finds a pot. They have to bring that pot back to a lab in order to clean, restore, and stabilize that item properly. Before the dig, after the dig, and even in the middle of the dig, archaeologists record notes, images, maps, measurements, etc. But that’s not all. Archaeologists do not just only *find* information, but they also use it to educate people. Many archaeologists are professors and are involved in teaching.

Anthropologists are important in this world today. They help us to understand each other’s language, they track our lineage down to 4.4 million years ago to better figure out how humans came to be, they dig up lost and old objects to learn about our old ancestors, and they want to appreciate and learn about different and diverse cultures. Remember, anthropologists are important in this world.

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