



Universalism in Anthropology ^[1]

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For many anthropologists, universalism is an idea that has guided research for years. In anthropology, universalism can refer to two things—the idea that all humans and cultural groups are inherently equal, as well as the idea that there are certain aspects of culture that can be universally observed. Both concepts will be discussed in this section.

Universalism as equality

One of the basic assumptions of anthropology is universalism, which is that all humans and cultural groups are inherently equal. This is deeply related to the concept of cultural relativism, which asserts that all cultures have their own relative value. Anthropologists argue that through more research, compassion, and a better understanding of the rest of humanity, we will be able to create more positive interactions.

Universalism as opposed to cultural relativism

When anthropologists talk about universalism, they might also be talking about universalism as opposed to cultural relativism. Cultural relativism, while recognizing the inherent value of different cultures, also involves looking at the differences between cultures. In contrast, anthropologists look at universalism to question whether there are some aspects of culture that can be observed in every society—in all of humanity.

Often, it's very difficult to find cultural universals. Even aspects of culture that seem evident to us may not be normal in another culture. Cultures vary in terms of primary aspects like food, political structure, marriage, all the way to more complex ideas like freedom of speech, nudity, and much more.

For example, a lot of popular research has looked at the idea of cultural universals of color terms. We could think that, logically, each culture in the world has the same color terms as we do. However, research has shown that not every cultural group splits up the color spectrum in the same way. For example, some cultures only have one color term for blue and green. Clearly, anthropologists can't take much for granted.

So, are there any cultural universals?

As far as anthropologists know, there are indeed some aspects of life that are common among all cultures. These include the presence of marriage, language use, naming, etiquette, music, tool use, and many more.

Links

[1] <https://explorable.com/universalism>

[2] <https://explorable.com/>