

Challenges for anthropologists in addressing the issues of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism?

Introduction

Anthropologists study the origin and development of human societies and cultures. Culture is the learned behaviour of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods; the knowledge gained from these studies promotes a greater understanding of other people and how they interpret situations to provide positive outcomes and avert misunderstandings. This creates many challenges for the researcher, one of which is if measured against one's enculturation. This is often referred to as ethnocentrism - the tendency to look at the world primarily from the perspective of one's own culture (Nickerson, 2022). On the other hand, Cultural relativism is an attitude that focuses on the importance of the local understanding of the meaning of particular beliefs and activities.

Content

Ethnocentrism can be defined as making false assumptions about others' ways based on our own limited experience. We are often unaware that we don't understand what we don't understand. Presumptions from earlier enculturation can cause us to make mistakes.

One personal example I experienced was a social problem that needed recognition in a failed marketing campaign conducted by New Zealand FibreGlass, where I was the Plant Chemist. This failure was due to an ethnocentric attitude of the company's executives towards marketing a product in a different country. I was instructed to manufacture a green-coloured fibreglass product intended for sale in hot climates; the initial country targeted was Fiji. The green colouration was to suggest coolness for hot roofs in house construction. What had not been investigated was the

population's culture, particularly its religious beliefs regarding colours. Green was considered to be of such significance that the placement of this coloured product in a home was considered unwanted. This cost the manufacturing company a considerable amount of money due to its ethnocentrism in this regard.

Other, more central and global issues resulting from such ethnocentric blindness may result in the general extremes of racialism, ethnic cleansing, exploitation, or misguided enculturation.

On the other hand, considering a more thorough examination of different cultures can enhance our progress by considering Cultural Relativism. This is the claim that ethical practices differ among cultures, and what is deemed suitable to one culture may be regarded as wrong in another. Cultural relativism implies that no society is superior to another; they are merely different. This approach encourages people to look at the world from the perspective of their own culture.

In the aforementioned personal example, two populations would not have suffered insult and injury. However, one would have gained excellent home insulation and another profitable marketplace. This could be viewed as an example of a Win-Win situation being replaced by a Lose-Lose situation resulting from cultural ignorance.

Conclusion

On a more global scale, with the increasing global difficulties experienced in the efforts to produce diplomatically positive outcomes, it is essential to conduct scientific research on existent cultures and employ methods to escape the limits of ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism is a tool for an unbiased critique. It helps us to re-examine and correct our assumptions and bias about cultures and people of the world.