

fields has connections to other disciplines as well; physical anthropologists often do research in biology, public health or medicine, socio-cultural anthropologists study how belief systems and cultural structures affect individuals and societies, and linguistic anthropologists are interested in how language, images and folklore shape culture – and how culture shapes language use and perception of the world. And everyone knows that archeologists dig up old stuff: human remains, clay pots and treasure from ancient civilizations. But anthropologists also understand that their particular area is just one part of an interconnected discipline that explores how human cultures function and influence the individuals within them. Individuals are understood to have singular identities and personalities shaped by the knowledge and history of their culture. Individuals do not stand alone – they inhabit the past and create the future because they represent the embodied knowledge of prior generations and transmit these cultural practices to their children. **Drinking alcohol is both a physical and a cultural act.** The physical response is well known and almost everyone can recognize when someone is drunk. Once an individual has experienced alcohol he or she understands its biological effects intimately, from the first burn upon the lips to the giddy feeling of intoxication. But drinking alcohol is also a deeply cultural act and every society has different rules for use. Anthropology acknowledges that wide cultural variations exist for almost every form of social practice, and each culture's beliefs and forms of behavior render its rules rational. Cultures have overlapping norms of belief and behavior across multiple fields of human action that mutually reinforce the 'rightness' of specific ways of seeing the world and interacting with others. For instance, religious and socio-economic structures and beliefs support many different cultural practices in addition to those tied directly to religion, social structure and economics. Each culture's rules present a reasonably holistic cultural package to those who have learned how to be human in that society. As a result, there is much variation in rules and expectations of alcohol from culture to culture – this can make drinking with someone from another culture quite an adventure. But because alcohol also has distinct and predictable physical effects there is similarity across cultures as well. Dwight Heath has spent decades studying how different cultures use alcohol, and he maintains that there are predictable rules that operate in every culture that uses alcohol: