

Introduction to Anthropology: The Study of Human kind



Week 1

Introduction to Anthropology

UNIT ONE: Overview:

In this section of the course we will discuss what is anthropology, its research methods, and theories.

UNIT ONE: Introduction to Anthropology

1.1 What is Anthropology?

EXPLORE AND INTERACT ON WEBSITE

1.1 What is Anthropology?

Explore the American Anthropological Association website:

<http://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2150&navItemNumber=740>

You should be able to explain:

- What is anthropology?
- What are the 4 fields of anthropology?
- What is applied anthropology?
- What type of employment do anthropologists do?

Key Terms and Concepts

- Anthropology
- Applied Anthropology
- Cultural Anthropology
- Biological Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Linguistic Anthropology
- Holism
- Ethnocentrism
- Cultural Relativism
- Biocultural Approach

READ THE FOLLOWING:

Anthropology

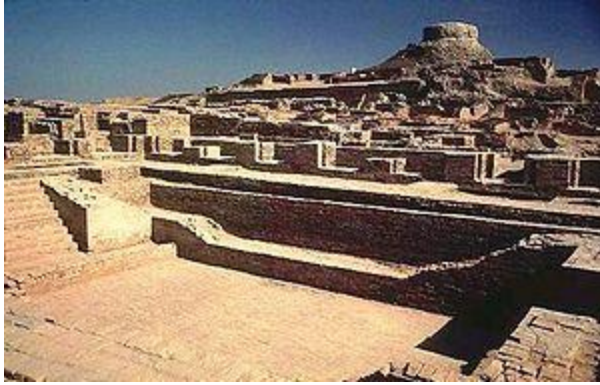
Cultural Anthropology is the study of human cultures, their beliefs, practices, values, ideas, technologies, economies and other domains of social and cognitive organization. This field is based primarily on cultural understanding gained through firsthand experience, or participant observation within living populations of humans.

This chapter will introduce you to the field of anthropology, define basic terms and concepts and explain why it is important, and how it can change your perspective of the world around you.

Anthropology is the scientific study of human beings as social organisms interacting with each other in their environment, and cultural aspects of life. Anthropology can be defined as the study of human nature, human society, and the human past. It is a scholarly discipline that aims to describe in the broadest possible sense what it means to be human. Anthropologists are interested in comparison. To make substantial and accurate comparisons between cultures, a generalization of humans requires evidence from the wide range of human societies. Anthropologists are in direct contact with the sources of their data, thus field work is a crucial component. The field of Anthropology, although fairly new as an academic field, has been used for centuries. Anthropologists are convinced that explanations of human actions will be superficial unless they acknowledge that human lives are always entangled in complex patterns of work and family, power and meaning. Anthropology is **holistic**[[1]], comparative, field based, and evolutionary. These regions of Anthropology shape one another and become integrated with one another over time. Historically it was seen as “the study of others,” meaning foreign cultures, but using the term “others” imposed false thoughts of “civilized versus savagery.” These dualistic views have often caused wars or even genocide. Now, anthropologists strive to uncover the mysteries of these foreign cultures and eliminate the prejudice that it first created.

While it is a holistic field, anthropology is typically considered to consist of five sub-disciplines, each focusing on a particular aspect of human existence:

- **Archaeology:** The study and interpretation of ancient humans, their history and culture, through examination of the artifacts and remains they left behind. Such as: The study of the Egyptian culture through examination of their grave sites, the pyramids and the tombs in the Valley of Kings. Through this branch, anthropologists discover much about human history, particularly prehistoric, the long stretch of time before the development of writing.



Excavated ruins of Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan

- **Cultural Anthropology:**(also: sociocultural anthropology, social anthropology, or ethnology) studies the different cultures of humans and how those cultures are shaped or shape the world around them. They also focus a lot on the differences between every person. The goal of a cultural anthropologist is to learn about another culture by collecting data about how the world economy and political practices effect the new culture that is being studied.
- **Biological Anthropology** (also: Physical Anthropology):Specific type of Anthropology that studies humanity through the human body as a biological organism, using genetics, evolution, human ancestry, primates, and the ability to adapt. There was a shift in the emphasis on differences (with the older “physical anthropology”) due to the development of the “new” physical anthropology developed by Sherwood Washburn at the University of California, Berkeley. This field shifted from racial classification when it was discovered that physical traits that had been used to determine race could not predict other traits such as intelligence and morality. Some biological anthropologists work in the fields of primatology, which is the study of the closest living relatives of the human being, the nonhuman primates. They also work in the field of paleoanthropology which is the study of fossilized bones and teeth of our earliest ancestors.
- **Linguistic Anthropology:** examines human languages: how they work, how they are made, how they change, and how they die and are later revived. Linguistic anthropologists try to understand language in relation to the broader cultural, historical, or biological contexts that make it possible. The study of linguistics includes examining phonemes, morphemes, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. They look at linguistic features of communication, which includes any verbal contact, as well as non linguistic features, which would include movements, eye contact, the cultural context, and even the recent thoughts of the speaker.
- **Applied Anthropology** includes the fields of Applied Medical Anthropology, Urban Anthropology, Anthropological Economics, Contract Archaeology and others. Applied anthropology is simply the practice of applying anthropological theory and or methods

from any of the fields of Anthropology to solve human problems. For example, applied anthropology is often used when trying to determine the ancestry of an unearthed native American burial. Biological anthropology can be used to test the DNA of the body and see if the DNA of the burial has any similarities to living populations.

Holism in Anthropology

Holism is the perspective on the human condition that assumes that mind, body, individuals, society, and the environment interpenetrate, and even define one another. In anthropology holism tries to integrate all that is known about human beings and their activities. From a holistic perspective, attempts to divide reality into mind and matter isolate and pin down certain aspects of a process that, by very nature, resists isolation and dissection. Holism holds great appeal for those who seek a theory of human nature that is rich enough to do justice to its complex subject matter.

An easier understanding of holism is to say that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Individual human organisms are not just x percent genes and y percent culture added together. Rather, human beings are what they are because of mutual shaping of genes and culture and experiences living in the world produces something new, something that cannot be reduced to the materials used to construct it. It is important to note that humans who grow and live together are inevitably shaped by shared cultural experiences and develop into a much different person than they would have if developing in isolation.

What is Culture?

Culture is the patterns of learned and shared behavior and beliefs of a particular social, ethnic, or age group. It can also be described as the complex whole of collective human beliefs with a structured stage of civilization that can be specific to a nation or time period. Humans in turn use culture to adapt and transform the world they live in.



Ashanti flag, note the golden stool

This idea of Culture can be seen in the way that we describe the Ashanti, an African tribe located in central Ghana. The Ashanti live with their families as you might assume but the meaning of how and why they live with whom is an important aspect of Ashanti culture. In the Ashanti

culture, the family and the mother's clan are most important. A child is said to inherit the father's soul or spirit (ntoro) and from the mother, a child receives flesh and blood (mogya). This relates them more closely to the mother's clan. The Ashanti live in an extended family. The family lives in various homes or huts that are set up around a courtyard. The head of the household is usually the oldest brother that lives there. He is chosen by the elders. He is called either Father or Housefather and everyone in the household obeys him.^[1]

The anthropological study of culture can be organized along two persistent and basic themes: **Diversity** and **Change**. An individual's upbringing, and environment (or culture) is what makes them diverse from other cultures. It is the differences between all cultures and sub-cultures of the world's regions. People's need to adapt and transform to physical, biological and cultural forces to survive represents the second theme, **Change**. Culture generally changes for one of two reasons: selective transmission or to meet changing needs. This means that when a village or culture is met with new challenges for example a loss of a food source, they must change the way they live. This could mean almost anything to the culture, including possible forced redistribution of, or relocation from ancestral domains due to external and/or internal forces. And an anthropologist would look at that and study their ways to learn from them.

Culture is:

- **Learned** through active teaching, and passive habitus.
- **Shared** meaning that it defines a group and meets common needs.
- **Patterned** meaning that there is a recourse of similar ideas. Related cultural beliefs and practices show up repeatedly in different areas of social life.
- **Adaptive** which helps individuals meet needs across variable environments.
- **Symbolic** which means that there are simple and arbitrary signs that represent something else, something more.

Ethnocentrism

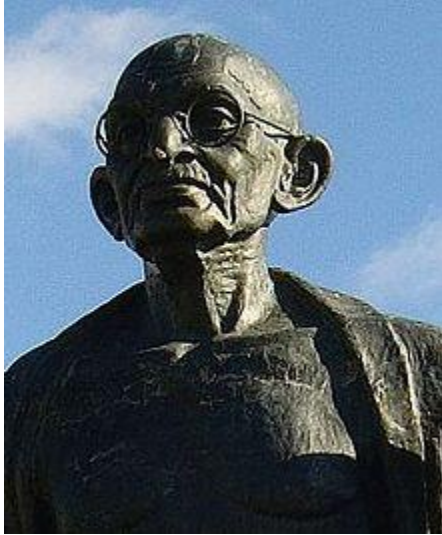


“Colonization of New England” – Early settlers cut and saw trees and use the lumber to construct a building, possibly a warehouse for their supplies. This is the first scene painted entirely by Costagghini.

Ethnocentrism is the term anthropologists use to describe the opinion that one’s own way of life is natural or correct. Some would simply call it cultural ignorance. Ethnocentrism means that one may see his/her own culture as the correct way of living. For those who have not experienced other cultures in depth can be said to be ethnocentric if they feel that their lives are the most natural way of living. Some cultures may be similar or overlap in ideas or concepts, however, some people are in a sense, shocked to experience differences they may encounter with individuals culturally different than themselves. In extreme cases, a group of individuals may see another cultures way of life and consider it wrong, because of this, the group may try to convert the other group to their own ways of living. Fearful war and genocide could be the devastating result if a group is unwilling to change their ways of living.

An example of ethnocentrism in culture is the Asian cultures across all the countries of Asia. Throughout Asia, the way of eating is to use chopsticks with every meal. These people may find it unnecessary to find that people in other societies, such as the American society, eat using forks, spoons, knives, etc. Since these countries use chopsticks to eat every meal, they find it foolish for other cultures to not use utensils similar to chopsticks; however, they do accept the fact that they use different utensils for eating. This example is not something extreme that could lead to genocide or war, but it is a large enough gap between these cultures for people to see their way of eating as the natural or best way to typically eat their food.

Another example of ethnocentrism is colonialism. **Colonialism** can be defined as cultural domination with enforced social change. Colonialism refers to the social system in which the political conquests by one society of another, leads to “cultural domination with enforced social change”. A good example to look at when examining colonialism is the British overtake of India. The British had little understanding of the culture in India which created a lot of problems and unrest during their rule.^[10]



“Statue of Gandhi” – Gandhi was an important figure in the struggle to end the period of British colonial rule in India, he fought for peace and understanding during this time of unrest.

Ethnocentrism may not, in some circumstances, be avoidable. We all often have instinctual reactions toward another person or culture’s practices or beliefs. But these reactions do not have to result in horrible events such as genocide or war. In order to avoid such awful things like those we must all try to be more culturally relative. Ethnocentrism is one solution to tension between one cultural self and another cultural self. It helps reduce the other way of life to a version of one’s own.

Cultural Relativism

The Cross-Cultural Relationship is the idea that people from different cultures can have relationships that acknowledge, respect and begin to understand each other’s diverse lives. People with different backgrounds can help each other see possibilities that they never thought were there because of limitations, or cultural proscriptions, posed by their own traditions. Traditional practices in certain cultures can restrict opportunity because they are “wrong” according to one specific culture. Becoming aware of these new possibilities will ultimately change the people that are exposed to the new ideas. This cross-cultural relationship provides hope that new opportunities will be discovered but at the same time it is threatening. The threat is that once the relationship occurs, one can no longer claim that any single culture is the absolute truth.

Cultural relativism is the ability to understand a culture on its own terms and not to make judgments using the standards of one’s own culture. The goal of this is promote understanding of cultural practices that are not typically part of one’s own culture. Using the perspective of cultural relativism leads to the view that no one culture is superior than another culture when compared to systems of morality, law, politics, etc. ^[11] It is a concept that cultural norms and

values derive their meaning within a specific social context. This is also based on the idea that there is no absolute standard of good or evil, therefore every decision and judgment of what is right and wrong is individually decided in each society. The concept of cultural relativism also means that any opinion on ethics is subject to the perspective of each person within their particular culture. Overall, there is no right or wrong ethical system. In a holistic understanding of the term cultural relativism, it tries to promote the understanding of cultural practices that are unfamiliar to other cultures such as eating insects, genocides or genital cutting.

There are two different categories of **cultural relativism**: **Absolute**: Everything that happens within a culture must and should not be questioned by outsiders. The extreme example of absolute cultural relativism would be the Nazi party's point of view justifying the Holocaust.

Critical: Creates questions about cultural practices in terms of who is accepting them and why. Critical cultural relativism also recognizes power relationships.

Absolute cultural relativism is displayed in many cultures, especially Africa, that practice female genital cutting. This procedure refers to the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or any other trauma to the female reproductive/genital organs. By allowing this procedure to happen, females are considered women and then are able to be married. FGC is practiced mainly because of culture, religion and tradition. Outside cultures such as the United States look down upon FGC, but are unable to stop this practice from happening because it is protected by its culture.



A Chinese woman with her feet unbound



A Chinese Golden Lily Foot by Lai Afong, c1870s

Cultural relativism can be seen with the Chinese culture and their process of feet binding. Foot binding was to stop the growth of the foot and make them smaller. The process often began between four and seven years old. A ten foot bandage would be wrapped around the foot forcing the toes to go under the foot. It caused the big toe to be closer to the heel causing the foot to bow.^[4]In China, small feet were seen as beautiful and a symbol of status. The women wanted their feet to be “three-inch golden lotuses” 三寸金蓮^[3] It was also the only way to marry into money. Because men only wanted women with small feet, even after this practice was banned in 1912, women still continued to do it. To Western cultures the idea of feet binding might seem torturous, but for the Chinese culture it was a symbol of beauty that has been ingrained in the culture for hundreds of years. The idea of beauty differs from culture to culture.

1.2 Research methods

EXPLORE AND INTERACT ON WEBSITE

Explore the American Anthropological Association website description of research methods:

<http://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/ResourceDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=1465&navItemNumber=733>

You should be able to explain:

- In what way are the methods of the four fields similar and different?
- Do all anthropologists conduct fieldwork?
- What types of tools and technology do anthropologists use to gather information?
- How do anthropologists address ethics in their fieldwork?
- What is informed consent?
- How might an anthropologist's methods cause potential harm or benefit to the people they study?

There are generally three components that should be addressed:

1. Selection criteria
2. Procedures
3. Ethics

Each of the four subdisciplines may have a slightly different approach, for example a Biological or Physical Anthropologist would have different research methods than an Archeologist. Each of your research poster groups will need to describe the typical methods that anthropologists use, so pay special attention to the methodology section of the article you choose. As I review each of the subdisciplines I will go over the typical types of research methods they might use.

1.3 Theoretical perspectives

READ THE FOLLOWING:

Anthropological Theory

Key Terms & Concepts

- Social Evolution (Unilineal Evolution): E. B. Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Herbert Spencer
- Historical Particularism: Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber
- Functionalism: Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, and Bronislaw Malinowski
- Structural Functionalism: A.R Radcliffe-Brown
- Culture and Personality: Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead
- Cultural Ecology: Julian Steward and Leslie White
- Structural Anthropology: Claude Lévi-Strauss
- *****Cultural Materialism: Marvin Harris**
- Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology: Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and David Schneider

- The British school : Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.
- The American school: Clifford Geertz and Sherry Ortner
- Postmodernism
- Feminist Anthropology

You should be able to explain:

- What is a theory?
- How do anthropologists use different theories to explain humankind?
- Have you heard of any of these theories from some of your other courses?
- This course is organized around the theory of **cultural materialism**, each of your tests and final exam will have questions related to this theory. You can skim through the other theories, but stop and read the page on cultural materialism carefully.

Social Evolution of Anthropological Theory

The theory is presented in chronological order, and you can skim through this section quickly but read the section on **Cultural Materialism** carefully as the course is framed around this theory.

Anthropological Theory

Why learn theory? “Theories are analytical tools for understanding, explaining, and making predictions about a given subject matter” (1). Theories help to direct our thinking and provide a common framework from which people can work. Oftentimes through the process of using a theoretical framework, we discover that it lacks explanatory abilities. When that happens, it is modified or even abandoned.

There are a number of theoretical approaches used in cultural anthropology. This page highlights some of the major theoretical approaches used in cultural anthropology. Not all of the theories reviewed are in use any more. Social evolutionism was abandoned early on in cultural anthropology. Culture and Personality, Cultural Ecology, and Cultural Materialism have all been jumping off points for more modern theoretical perspectives.

Social Evolution (skim)

Proposed in the 19th century, **social evolution**, which is sometimes referred to as **Unilineal Evolution**, was the first theory developed for anthropology. This theory claims that societies develop according to one universal order of cultural evolution, albeit at different rates, which explained why there were different types of society existing in the world. **E. B. Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Herbert Spencer** (a sociologist) were the most notable of the Nineteenth-century social evolutionists. They collected data from missionaries and traders; they themselves rarely went to the societies that they were analyzing. They organized these second-hand data and applied the general theory they developed to all societies.

Social evolutionists identified universal evolutionary stages to classify different societies as in a state of savagery, barbarism, or civilization. Morgan further subdivided savagery and barbarism into sub-categories: low, middle, and high. The stages were based primarily on technological characteristics, but included other things such as political organization, marriage, family, and religion. Since Western societies had the most advanced technology, they put those societies at the highest rank of civilization. Societies at a stage of savagery or barbarism were viewed as inherently inferior to civilized society. Spencer’s theory of social evolution, which is often referred to as Social Darwinism but which he called synthetic philosophy, proposed that war promoted evolution, stating that those societies that conducted more warfare were the most

evolved. He also coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” and advocated for allowing societies to compete, thereby allowing the most fit in society to survive. With these ideas, Spencer opposed social policy that would help the poor. Eugenicists used Spencer’s ideas to promote intellectual and ethnic cleansing as a ‘natural’ occurrence.

There are two main assumptions embedded in social evolutionism: psychic unity and the superiority of Western cultures. Psychic unity is a concept that suggests human minds share similar characteristics all over the world. This means that all people and their societies will go through the same process of development. The assumption of Western superiority was not unusual for the time period. This assumption was deeply rooted in European colonialism and based on the fact that Western societies had more technologically sophisticated technology and a belief that Christianity was the true religion.

Nineteenth-century evolutionists contributed to anthropology by providing the first systematic methods for thinking about and explaining human societies; however, contemporary anthropologists view nineteenth-century evolutionism as too simplistic to explain the development of societies in the world. In general, the nineteenth-century evolutionists relied on racist views of human development that were popular at that time. For example, both Lewis Henry Morgan and E. B. Tylor believed that people in various societies have different levels of intelligence, which leads to societal differences, a view of intelligence that is no longer valid in contemporary science. Nineteenth-century evolutionism was strongly attacked by historical particularists for being speculative and ethnocentric in the early twentieth-century. At the same time, its materialist approaches and cross-cultural views influenced Marxist Anthropology and Neo-evolutionists.

Historical Particularism (skim)



Franz Boas, Father of American Anthropology

Franz Boas and his students developed **historical particularism** early in the twentieth century. This approach claims that each society has its own unique historical development and must be understood based on its own specific cultural and environmental context, especially its historical process. Its core premise was that culture was a “set of ideas or symbols held in common by a group of people who see themselves as a social group” (Darnell 2013: 399). Historical particularists criticized the theory of the nineteenth-century social evolution as non-scientific and proclaimed themselves to be free from preconceived ideas. Boas believed that there were universal laws that could be derived from the comparative study of cultures; however, he thought that the ethnographic database was not yet robust enough for us to identify those laws. To that end, he and his students collected a vast amount of first-hand cultural data by conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Based on these raw data, they described particular cultures instead of trying to establish general theories that apply to all societies.

The Historical particularists valued fieldwork and history as critical methods of cultural analysis. At the same time, the anthropologists in this theoretical school had different views on the importance of individuals in a society. For example, Franz Boas saw each individual as the basic component of a society. He gathered information from individual informants and considered such data valuable enough for cultural analysis. On the other hand, **Alfred Kroeber** did not see individuals as the fundamental elements of a society. He believed a society evolves according to its own internal laws that do not directly originate from its individuals. He named this cultural aspect superorganic and claimed that a society cannot be explained without considering this impersonal force.

Historical particularism was a dominant trend in anthropology during the first half of the twentieth century. One of the achievements of the historical particularists was that they succeeded in excluding racism from anthropology. The nineteenth-century evolutionists explained cultural similarities and differences by classifying societies into superior and inferior categories. Historical particularists showed that this labeling is based on insufficient evidence and claimed that societies cannot be ranked by the value judgment of researchers. Historical particularists were also responsible for showing the need for long-term, intensive fieldwork in order to produce accurate descriptions of cultures. One important part of doing that was to learn the language of the study group.

[Learn more about the anthropologists](#)

Lewis Henry Morgan: <https://rochester.edu/College/ANT/morgan/bio.html>

Functionalism (skim)



Émile Durkheim

The roots of **functionalism** are found in the work of sociologists **Herbert Spencer** and **Émile Durkheim**. Functionalism considers a culture as an interrelated whole, not a collection of isolated traits. Like a human being has various organs that are interconnected and necessary for the body to function correctly, so society is a system of interconnected parts that make the whole function efficiently. The Functionalists examined how a particular cultural phase is interrelated with other aspects of the culture and how it affects the whole system of the society; in other words, cause and effect. The theory of Functionalism emerged in the 1920s and then declined after World War II because of cultural changes caused by the war. Since the theory did not emphasize social transformations, it was replaced by other theories related to cultural changes. Even so, the basic idea of Functionalism has become part of a common sense for cultural analysis in anthropology. Anthropologists generally consider interconnections of different cultural domains when they analyze cultures, e.g., the connections between subsistence strategies and family organization or religion.

The method of functionalism was based on fieldwork and direct observations of societies. Anthropologists were to describe various cultural institutions that make up a society, explain their social function, and show their contribution to the overall stability of a society. At the same time, this functionalist approach was criticized for not considering cultural changes of traditional societies.

Structural functionalism was a form of functionalism that arose in Great Britain. British anthropologist, **A.R Radcliffe-Brown**, was its most prominent advocate. In the structural

functionalism approach, society, its institutions and roles, was the appropriate thing to study. Cultural traits supported or helped to preserve social structures. This approach had little interest in the individual, which contrasts with the approach advocated for by **Bronislaw Malinowski**.

Culture and Personality (skim)



Ruth Benedict

Attributed to anthropologists **Ruth Benedict** and **Margaret Mead**, the **Culture and Personality** school of thought drew on the work of **Edward Sapir** to explain relationships between childrearing customs and human behaviors in different societies. They suggested anthropologists could gain an understanding of a national culture through examination of individual personalities. There were two main themes in this theoretical school. One was about the relationship between culture and human nature. The other was about the correlation between culture and individual personality.

The theory of Culture and Personality also drew on Boas' cultural relativism and Freud's psychoanalysis about early childhood. If we premise that all humans are hereditarily equal, why are people so unique from society to society? The theoretical school answered this question by using Freud's psychoanalysis: the differences between people in various societies usually stem from cultural differences installed in childhood. In other words, the foundations of personality development are set in early childhood according to each society's unique cultural traits. Based on this basis, the theoretical school of Culture and Personality researched childrearing in different societies and compared the results cross-culturally. They described distinctive characteristics of people in certain cultures and attributed these unique traits to the different

methods of childrearing. The aim of this comparison was to show the correlation between childrearing practices and adult personality types.

The Culture and Personality proponents were on the cutting edge when it emerged in the early 20th century. Using clinical interviews, dream analysis, life histories, participant observation, and projective tests (e.g., Rorschach), the culture and personality analysis of the correlation between childrearing customs and human behaviors was, at that time, a practical alternative to using racism explanations for analyzing different human behaviors. In fact, the culture and personality school was responsible for greatly limiting the number of racist, hierarchical descriptions of culture types common during the early to mid-20th century. This approach to understanding culture was instrumental in moving the focus to the individual in order to understand behaviors within a culture instead of looking for universal laws of human behavior.

Cultural Ecology (skim)

Ecology is a biological term for the interaction of organisms and their environment, which includes other organisms. **Cultural ecology** is a theoretical approach that attempts to explain similarities and differences in culture in relation to the environment. Highly focused on how the material culture, or technology, related to basic survival, i.e., subsistence, cultural ecology was the first theoretical approach to provide a causal explanation for those similarities and differences. Developed by **Julian Steward** in the 1930s and 1940s, cultural ecology became an influential approach within anthropology, particularly archaeology. Elements of the approach are still seen today in ethnoecology, political ecology, human behavioral ecology, and the ecosystems approach (Tucker 2013).

Using Steward's approach, anthropologists compare cultures in order to determine what factors influence similar cultural development; in other words, similar adaptations. In cultural ecology, cultures, not individuals, adapt. This approach assumes that culture is superorganic, a concept Steward learned from Alfred Kroeber (see historical particularism).



Julian Steward

Steward proposed that we could begin to understand these adaptations by first examining the cultural core, as this was the critical cultural component that dealt with the ability of the culture to survive. The cultural core was comprised of the technology, knowledge, labor, and family organization used to collect resources from the environment (Tucker 2013). He then thought that examination of behaviors associated with the cultural core was necessary, which included the organization of labor. Thirdly, Steward advocated for examining how social institutions and belief systems were impacted by subsistence-related behaviors. According to the cultural ecology school of thought, cultural similarities were explained by adaptations to similar environmental conditions, causing the approach to be labeled environmental determinism. Cultural changes were due to changing environmental conditions. Since environmental changes were not predictable, cultures changed in multiple directions. Cultures that may have been similar at one point might become dissimilar if environmental conditions changed. Conversely, cultures that were dissimilar could become similar. This idea of multi-directional change is called multilineal evolution and is one of the major departures from earlier evolutionary explanations of culture. **Leslie White** was another proponent of cultural ecology, although he was focused primarily on how cultures harvested energy from the environment and how much energy they used.

Structural Anthropology – “Structuralism” (skim)

Structural anthropology is a school of anthropology based on Claude Lévi-Strauss’ idea that immutable deep structures exist in all cultures, and consequently, that all cultural practices have homologous counterparts in other cultures, essentially that all cultures are equitable.

Lévi-Strauss’ approach arose in large part from dialectics expounded on by Marx and Hegel, though dialectics (as a concept) dates back to Ancient Greek philosophy. Hegel explains that every situation presents two opposing things and their resolution; Fichte had termed these “thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.” Lévi-Strauss argued that cultures also have this structure. He showed, for example, how opposing ideas would fight and were resolved to establish the rules of marriage, mythology and ritual. This approach, he felt, made for fresh new ideas. He stated:

people think about the world in terms of binary opposites—such as high and low, inside and outside, person and animal, life and death—and that every culture can be understood in terms of these opposites. “From the very start,” he wrote, “the process of visual perception makes use of binary oppositions.”^[1]

Only those who practice structural analysis are aware of what they are actually trying to do: that is, to reunite perspectives that the “narrow” scientific outlook of recent centuries believed to be mutually exclusive: sensibility and intellect, quality and quantity, the concrete and the geometrical, or as we say today, the “etic” and the “emic.”^[1]

In South America he showed that there are “dual organizations” throughout Amazon rainforest cultures, and that these “dual organizations” represent opposites and their synthesis. For instance, Gê tribes of the Amazon were found to divide their villages into two rival halves; however, the members of opposite halves married each other. This illustrated two opposites in conflict and then resolved.

Culture, he claimed, has to take into account both life and death and needs to have a way of mediating between the two. Mythology (see his several-volume *Mythologies*) unites opposites in diverse ways.

Three of the most prominent structural anthropologists are Lévi-Strauss himself and the British neo-structuralists Rodney Needham and Edmund Leach. The latter was the author of such essays as “Time and False Noses” [in *Rethinking Anthropology*].^[2]

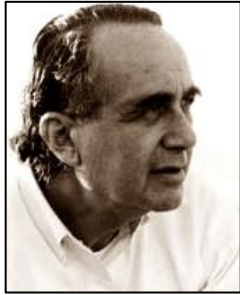
Influences

Lévi-Strauss took many ideas from structural linguistics, including those of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. Saussure argued that linguists needed to move beyond the recording of *parole* (individual speech acts) and come to an understanding of *langue*, the grammar of each language.

Lévi-Strauss applied this distinction in his search for mental structures that underlie all acts of human behavior: Just as speakers can talk without awareness of grammar, he argued, humans are unaware of the workings of social structures in daily life. The structures that form the “deep grammar” of society originate in the mind and operate unconsciously (albeit not in a Freudian sense).

Another concept was borrowed from the Prague school of linguistics, which employed so-called *binary oppositions* in their research. Roman Jakobson and others analysed sounds based on the presence or absence of certain features, such as “voiceless” vs. “voiced”. Lévi-Strauss included this in his conceptualization of the mind’s universal structures. For him, opposites formed the basis of social structure and culture.

Cultural Materialism – (read this section carefully)



Marvin Harris (1927-2001)

Cultural materialism is one of the major anthropological perspectives for analyzing human societies. It incorporates ideas from Marxism, cultural evolution, and cultural ecology. Materialism contends that the physical world impacts and sets constraints on human behavior. The materialists believe that human behavior is part of nature and therefore, it can be understood by using the methods of natural science. Materialists do not necessarily assume that material reality is more important than mental reality. However, they give priority to the material world over the world of the mind when they explain human societies. This doctrine of materialism started and developed from the work of **Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels**. Marx and Engels presented an evolutionary model of societies based on the materialist perspective. They argued that societies go through the several stages, from tribalism to feudalism to capitalism to communism. Their work drew little attention from anthropology in the early twentieth-century. However, since the late 1920s, anthropologists have increasingly come to depend on materialist explanations for analyzing societal development and some inherent problems of capitalist societies. Anthropologists who heavily rely on the insights of Marx and Engels include neo-evolutionists, neo-materialists, feminists, and postmodernists.

Brief Definition: Cultural Materialism is a theory used to explain cultural similarities and differences by putting a theoretical emphasis on the material constrains (the infrastructure).

Cultural materialists identify three levels of social systems that constitute a **universal pattern**: 1) infrastructure, 2) structure and 3) superstructure. Infrastructure is the basis for all other levels and includes how basic needs are met and how it interacts with the local environment, it consists of the “mode of production” and “mode of reproduction”. Structure refers to a society’s economic, social, and political organization and consists of the “Domestic Economy” and “Political Economy”, while superstructure is related to ideology, symbolism, and values that support the system.

Cultural materialists like **Marvin Harris** contend that the infrastructure is the most critical aspect as it is here where the interaction between culture and environment occurs. All three of the levels are interrelated so that changes in the infrastructure results in changes in the structure

and superstructure, although the changes might not be immediate. While this appears to be environmental determinism, cultural materialists do not disclaim that change in the structure and superstructure cannot occur without first change in the infrastructure. They do however claim that if change in those structures is not compatible with the existing infrastructure the change is not likely to become set within the culture.

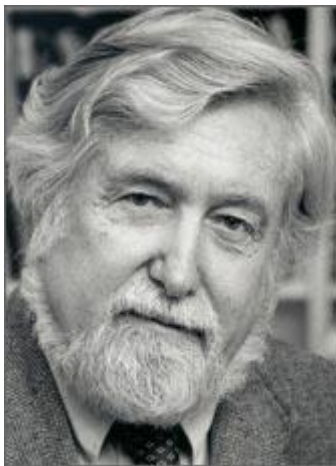
Brief outline of the **universal pattern**:

- I. **Infrastructure:**
 1. **Mode of Production** (Environment, Technology, and mode of exchange)
 2. **Mode of Reproduction** (Relates to Demography: birth rates, death rates, migration)
- II. **Structure:**
 1. **Domestic Economy** (Affines (kinship based on marriage), Consanguines (Kinship based on birth), Marriage rules, Division of labor – gender roles).
 2. **Political Economy** (How the society deals with conflict & conformity, forms of leadership, patterns of warfare)
- III. **Superstructure**

The beliefs that support the system. Religion (myth, rituals, etc.), Art, Music, Dance, Games, Architecture, etc.

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology (skim)

The theoretical school of **Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology** assumes that culture does not exist beyond individuals. Rather, culture lies in individuals' interpretations of events and things around them. With a reference to socially established signs and symbols, people shape the patterns of their behaviors and give meanings to their experiences. Therefore, the goal of Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology is to analyze how people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols. The major accomplishment of symbolic anthropology has been to turn anthropology towards issues of culture and interpretation rather than grand theories.



Clifford Geertz

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology emerged in the 1960s when **Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and David Schneider** were at the University of Chicago and is still influential today. Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology does not follow the model of physical sciences, which focus on empirical material phenomena, but is literary-based. This does not mean that Symbolic and Interpretive anthropologists do not conduct fieldwork, but instead refers to the practice of drawing on non-anthropological literature as a primary source of data. The Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropologists view culture as a mental phenomenon and reject the idea that culture can be modeled like mathematics or logic. When they study symbolic action in cultures, they use a variety of analytical tools from psychology, history, and literature. This method has been criticized for a lack of objective method. In other words, this method seems to allow analysts to see meaning wherever and however they wish. In spite of this criticism, Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology has forced anthropologists to become aware of cultural texts they interpret and of ethnographic texts they create. In order to work as intercultural translators, anthropologists need to be aware of their own cultural biases as well as other cultures they research.

There are two schools of thought within Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology. **The British school** was interested in how societies maintained cohesion and is illustrated by the work of

Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. The American school is exemplified by **Clifford Geertz and Sherry Ortner** and was focused on “how ideas shaped individuals subjectivities and actions” (Johnson 2013: 842). An important contribution of Symbolic and Interpretive anthropologists, specifically Clifford Geertz, is “thick description,” which encourages rich descriptions and explanations of behaviors with an end goal of understanding their cultural significance. Geertz borrowed this concept from Gilbert Ryle, an Oxford philosopher. The classic example of thick description is the difference between a wink and a blink. A blink is an involuntary twitch (thin description) while a wink is a conspiratorial signal to another person (thick description). The physical movements are identical, but the meaning is different.

Postmodernism (skim)

Postmodernism is a theoretical approach that arose in the 1980s to explain an historical period, post-modernity, which is generally accepted to have begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is a period related to the Cold War and social upheaval in many parts of the world. The postmodernism theoretical approach is difficult to define and delineate. It is generally scoffed at in the Natural Sciences, debated in the Social Sciences, and more favorably accepted within the Humanities. In the past, debates on the merits of the postmodern approach have created divisions among faculty and derision between disciplines. The postmodern approach challenges the “dominating and bullying nature of science and reason” and focuses on “...splitting the truth, the standards, and the ideal into what has been deconstructed and into what is about to be deconstructed, and denying in advance the right of any new doctrine, theory, or revelation to take the place of the discarded rules of the past” (Cooke 2006: 2014). It is the academic equivalent of the social clamor against the establishment that arose in the 1960s and 1970s.

Postmodernists claim that it is impossible for anyone to have objective and neutral knowledge of another culture. This view comes from the notion that we all interpret the world around us in our own way according to our language, cultural background, and personal experiences. In other words, everybody has their own views based on his or her social and personal contexts. Because of this aspect of human nature, anthropologists can never be unbiased observers of other cultures. When postmodern anthropologists analyze different societies, they are sensitive to this limitation. They do not assume that their way of conceptualizing culture is the only way. The postmodernists believe that anthropological texts are influenced by the political and social contexts within which they are written. Therefore, it is unreasonable when authors try to justify their interpretations and underlying biases by using the concept of objectivity. The postmodernists claim that the acceptance of an interpretation is ultimately an issue of power and wealth. In other words, we tend to legitimize particular statements represented by those with political and economic advantage. In order to heighten sensitivity towards those who are not part of mainstream culture, the postmodernists often promote underrepresented viewpoints, such as those of ethnic minorities, women, and others. Postmodernists also re-introduced a focus on individual behavior, which has become known as agency theory. Agency approaches examine how individual agents shape culture.

Postmodern anthropologists gave other anthropologists an opportunity to reconsider their approaches of cultural analysis by ushering in an era of reflexive anthropology. The anthropologist tries to become sensitive to his or her unconscious assumptions. For example, anthropologists now consider whether they should include in ethnographies different interpretations of culture other than their own. Furthermore, anthropologists need to determine their own standards for choosing what kind of information can be counted as knowledge. This reflection leads anthropologists to enrich their work. At the same time, the challenges by postmodernists often result in backlash from those who feel their understandings are threatened. Some anthropologists claim that the postmodernists rely on a particular moral model rather than empirical data or scientific methods. This moral model is structured by sympathy to those who do not possess the same privilege that the mainstream has in Western societies. Therefore, postmodernism will undermine the legitimacy of anthropology by introducing this political bias.

Another typical criticism on postmodernism comes from the fear of extremely relativistic view. Such critics argue that postmodernism will lead to nihilism because it does not assume a common ground of understanding. Some opponents claim that postmodernism will undermine universal human rights and will even justify dictatorship. Postmodernism is an ongoing debate, especially regarding whether anthropology should rely on scientific or humanistic approaches.

Feminist Anthropology (skim)

Feminist anthropology is a four-field approach to anthropology (archaeological, biological, cultural, linguistic) that seeks to reduce male bias in research findings, anthropological hiring practices, and the scholarly production of knowledge.^[1] Simultaneously, feminist anthropology challenges essentialist feminist theories developed in Europe and America. While feminists practiced cultural anthropology since its inception as an [American discipline]? (see Margaret Mead and Hortense Powdermaker), it was not until the 1970s that feminist anthropology was formally recognized as a subdiscipline of anthropology. Since then, it has developed its own subsection of the American Anthropological Association – the Association for Feminist Anthropology – and its own publication, *Voices*.

History:

Feminist anthropology has unfolded through three historical phases beginning in the 1970s: the anthropology of women, the anthropology of gender, and finally feminist anthropology.^[2]

Prior to these historical phases, feminist anthropologists trace their genealogy to the late 19th century.^[3] Erminnie Platt Smith, Alice Cunningham Fletcher, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Frances Densmore—many of these women were self-taught anthropologists and their accomplishments faded and heritage erased by the professionalization of the discipline at the turn of the 20th

century.^[4] Prominent among early women anthropologists were the wives of 'professional' men anthropologists, some of whom facilitated their husbands research as translators and transcriptionists. Margery Wolf, for example, wrote her classic ethnography "The House of Lim" from experiences she encountered following her husband to northern Taiwan during his own fieldwork.^[5]

While anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict are canonical representatives of the next stage in the history of feminist anthropology, the true theoretical pioneers of the field were women of color and ethnic women anthropologists. Hortense Powdermaker, for example, a contemporary of Mead's who studied with British anthropological pioneer Bronislaw Malinowski conducted political research projects in a number of then atypical settings: reproduction and women in Melanesia (Powdermaker 1933), race in the American South (Powdermaker 1939), gender and production in Hollywood (1950), and class-gender-race intersectionality in the African Copper Belt (Powdermaker 1962). Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston, a student of Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology, experimented with narrative forms beyond the objective ethnography that characterized the proto/pseudo-scientific writings of the time. Other African American women made similar moves at the junctions of ethnography and creativity, namely Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, both of whom studied dance in the 1940s. Also important to the later spread of Feminist anthropology within other subfields beyond cultural anthropology was physical anthropologist Caroline Bond Day and archaeologist Mary Leakey.

Reflexivity in Anthropology – Writing Culture, Self-Reflective Writing (skim)

In anthropology, reflexivity has come to have two distinct meanings, one that refers to the researcher's awareness of an analytic focus on his or her relationship to the field of study, and the other that attends to the ways that [cultural practices](#) involve consciousness and commentary on themselves.

The first sense of reflexivity in anthropology is part of social science's more general self-critique in the wake of theories by [Michel Foucault](#) and others about the relationship of power and knowledge production. Reflexivity about the research process became an important part of the critique of the colonial roots^[12] and scientific methods of anthropology in the "writing cultures"^[13] movement associated with [James Clifford](#) and [George Marcus](#), as well as many other anthropologists such as Ruth Behar. Rooted in literary criticism and philosophical analysis of the relationship of anthropologist, representations of people in texts, and the people represented, this approach has fundamentally changed ethical and methodological approaches in anthropology. As with the [feminist](#) and [anti-colonial](#) critiques that provide some of reflexive anthropology's inspiration, the reflexive understanding of the academic and political power of representations, analysis of the process of "writing culture" has become a necessary part of understanding the situation of the ethnographer in the fieldwork situation. Objectification of

people and cultures and analysis of them only as objects of study has been largely rejected in favor of developing more collaborative approaches that respect local people's values and goals. Nonetheless, many anthropologists have accused the "writing cultures" approach of muddying the scientific aspects of anthropology with too much introspection about fieldwork relationships, and reflexive anthropology have been heavily attacked by more positivist anthropologists.^[14] Considerable debate continues in anthropology over the role of [postmodernism](#) and reflexivity, but most anthropologists accept the value of the critical perspective, and generally only argue about the relevance of critical models that seem to lead anthropology away from its earlier core foci.^[15]

The second kind of reflexivity studied by anthropologists involves varieties of self-reference in which people and cultural practices call attention to themselves.^[16] One important origin for this approach is [Roman Jakobson](#) in his studies of [deixis](#) and the poetic function in language, but the work of [Mikhail Bakhtin](#) on carnival has also been important. Within anthropology, [Gregory Bateson](#) developed ideas about meta-messages ([subtext](#)) as part of communication, while [Clifford Geertz](#)'s studies of ritual events such as the Balinese cock-fight point to their role as foci for public reflection on the social order. Studies of play and tricksters further expanded ideas about reflexive cultural practices. Reflexivity has been most intensively explored in studies of performance,^[17] public events,^[18] rituals,^[19] and linguistic forms^[20] but can be seen any time acts, things, or people are held up and commented upon or otherwise set apart for consideration. In researching cultural practices reflexivity plays important role but because of its complexity and subtlety it often goes under-investigated or involves highly specialized analyses.^[21]

One use of studying reflexivity is in connection to [authenticity](#). Cultural traditions are often imagined as perpetuated as stable ideals by uncreative actors. Innovation may or may not change tradition, but since reflexivity is intrinsic to many cultural activities, reflexivity is part of tradition and not inauthentic. The study of reflexivity shows that people have both self-awareness and creativity in culture. They can play with, comment upon, debate, modify, and objectify culture through manipulating many different features in recognized ways. This leads to the [metaculture](#) of conventions about managing and reflecting upon culture.^[22]

Explore: Learn more about the anthropologists

Ruth Behar: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Behar

Ruth Benedict: <http://www.americanethnography.com/article.php?id=7>

Mary Douglas: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/may/18/guardianobituaries.obituaries>

Clifford Geertz: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/01/obituaries/01geertz.html?pagewanted=all>

Marvin Harris: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/28/us/marvin-harris-74-is-dead-professor-was-iconoclast-of-anthropologists.html>

Zora Neale Hurston: <http://afa.americananthro.org/zora-neale-hurston/>

Bronislaw Malinowski: <http://www.nndb.com/people/320/000099023/>

Margaret Mead: <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/Mead/biography.html>

Sherry Ortner: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/ortner/>

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown: <http://www.nndb.com/people/318/000099021/>

David Schneider: <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/01/us/david-schneider-a-giant-of-cultural-anthropology-is-dead-at-76.html>

Julian Steward: http://www.browsebiography.com/bio-julian_steward.html

Victor Turner: http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/theory_pages/Turner.htm

Leslie White: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/642054/Leslie-A-White>

Summary Outline of this Chapter:

OUTLINE OF UNIT ONE:

UNIT ONE: Introduction to Anthropology

1.1 What is Anthropology? (Read excerpt from Cultural Anthropology, Tracy Evans.)

1.1.1 Key terms and concepts

1.1.2 Anthropology

1.1.3 Holism in Anthropology

1.1.4 What is Culture?

- 1.1.5 Ethnocentrism
- 1.1.6 Cultural Relativism

1.2 Research methods

Explore and Interact on American Anthropological Association website to learn about the research methods in each of the four fields: biological/Physical, Archeological, Linguistic, and Cultural Anthropology.

1.3 Theoretical perspectives (Read excerpt from Cultural Anthropology, Tracy Evans.)

- 1.3.1 Anthropological Theory
- 1.3.2 Key Terms and Concepts
- 1.3.3 Social Evolution of Anthropological Theory
- 1.3.4 Anthropological Theory
 - 1.3.4.1 Social Evolution
 - 1.3.4.2 Historical Particularism
 - 1.3.4.3 Functionalism
 - 1.3.4.4 Culture and Personality
 - 1.3.4.5 Cultural Ecology
 - 1.3.4.6 Structural Anthropology “Structuralism”
 - 1.3.4.7 *Cultural Materialism
 - 1.3.4.8 Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology
 - 1.3.4.9 Postmodernism
 - 1.3.4.10 Feminist Anthropology
 - 1.3.4.11 Explore more about anthropologists – links to websites featuring famous Anthropologists

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Source: Evans, Tracy Cultural Anthropology, “Chapter 1: What is Anthropology” Lumen Publishing: 2017. (Candela Open Courses:
<https://courses.candelalearning.com/anthropologyx15x1/part/main-body/>

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External links

- [What is Anthropology?](#) – Information from the American Anthropological Association
- [SLA](#)– Society for Linguistic Anthropology

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