

## **D.2. Functionalism**

Many other anthropologists working in Boas's time, mostly in Europe, based their research on the theories of 19th-century French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Like Sir Edward Tylor, Durkheim was interested in religions across cultures. But he was not interested in the evolution of religion. Durkheim instead proposed that religious beliefs and rituals functioned to integrate people in groups and to maintain the smooth functioning of societies.

Durkheim's ideas were expanded upon by Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, two major figures in the development of modern British anthropology beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. Their approach to understanding culture was known as structural functionalism, or simply functionalism.

A typical functionalist study analyzed how cultural institutions kept a society in working order. For example, many studies examined rites of passage, such as initiation ceremonies. Through a series of such ceremonies, groups of children of the same age would be initiated into new roles and take on new responsibilities as they grew into adults. According to functionalists, any unique characteristics of the rites of passage of a particular society had to do with how initiation ceremonies worked in the function of that society.

Functionalists based their approach to doing fieldwork on their theories. They lived for long periods with the people they studied, carefully recording even very small details about a people's culture and social life. The resulting ethnographies portrayed all aspects of culture and social life as interdependent parts of a complex model. Functionalist research methods became the blueprint for much anthropological research throughout the 20th century.

During the first half of the 20th century, many anthropologists conducted functionalist ethnographic studies in the service of colonial governments. This research allowed colonial administrators to predict what would happen to an entire society in response to particular colonial policies. Administrators might want to know, for instance, what would happen if they imposed taxes on households or on individuals.

### **D.3. Structuralism**

In the 1950s French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss developed an anthropological theory and analytic method known as structuralism. He was influenced by the theories of Durkheim and one of Durkheim's collaborators, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss. Lévi-Strauss proposed that many common cultural patterns—such as those found in myth, ritual, and language—are rooted in basic structures of the mind.

He wrote, for instance, about the universal tendency of the human mind to sort things into sets of opposing concepts, such as day and night, black and white, or male and female. Lévi-Strauss believed such basic conceptual patterns became elaborated through culture. For example, many societies divide themselves into contrasting but complementary groups, known as moieties (from the French word for “half”). Each moiety traces its descent through one line to a common ancestor. In addition to many shared ritual functions, moieties create a system for controlling sex and marriage. A person from one moiety may only marry or have sexual relations with a person from the other moiety.