

Table 4.1 Some Major Anthropological Schools of Thought and Their Understanding of Culture

Theory Name	Understanding of Culture	Critical Thinking
Nineteenth-century evolution	A universal human culture is shared, in different degrees, by all societies.	E.B. Tylor (1832–1917) L.H. Morgan (1818–1881)
Turn-of-the-century sociology	Groups of people share sets of symbols and practices that bind them into societies.	Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) Marcel Mauss (1872–1950)
American historical particularism	Cultures are the result of the specific histories of the people who share them.	Franz Boas (1858–1942) A.L. Kroeber (1876–1960)
Functionalism	Social practices support society's structure or fill the needs of individuals.	A.R. Radcliffe Brown (1881–1955)
Culture and personality	Culture is personality writ large. It both shapes and is shaped by the personalities of its members.	Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) Margaret Mead (1901–1978)
Cultural ecology and neo-evolutionism	Culture is the way in which humans adapt to the environment and make their lives secure.	Julian Steward (1902–1972) Leslie White (1900–1975)
Ecological materialism	Physical and economic causes give rise to cultures and explain changes within them.	Morton Fried (1923–1986) Marvin Harris (1927–)
Ethnoscience and cognitive anthropology	Culture is a mental template that determines how members of a society understand their world.	Harold Conklin (1926–) Stephen Tyler (1932–)
Structural Anthropology	Universal original human culture can be discovered through analysis and comparison of the myths and customs of many cultures.	Claude Levi Strauss (1908–)
Sociobiology	Culture is the visible expression of underlying genetic coding.	E.O. Wilson (1929–) Jerome Barkow (1944–)
Anthropology and gender	The roles of women and ways societies understand sexuality are central to understanding culture.	Sherry Ortner (1941–) Michelle Rosaldo (1944?–1981)
Symbolic and interpretive anthropology	Culture is the way in which members of a society understand who they are and give lives meaning.	Mary Douglas (1921–) Clifford Geertz (1926–)
Postmodernism	Because understanding of cultures most reflect the observer's biases, culture can never be completely or accurately described.	Renato Rosaldo (1941–) Vincent Crapanzano (1939–)

19th century evolutionism	A universal human culture is shared by all societies.
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Functionalism	Social practices support society's structure or fill the needs of individuals.
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Anthropology and gender	Roles of women and ways societies understand sexuality are central to understanding culture.
Symbolic and interpretive anthropology	Culture is the way members of a society understand themselves and what gives their lives meaning.
Postmodernism	Cultural understanding reflects the observer's biases and can never be completely or accurately described.