

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology: Class 9
Thinking about society: Structure and Function
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- Quiz
- Monaghan and Just 2000, chapter 3
 - Up to now, we have emphasized **culture**
 - ideas, values, meanings... ways people interpret, and thus respond to, things and events
 - Another approach is to look at **society**
 - the group of people that a person is a member of
 - anthropologists focus particularly on social organization
 - a society's ways of categorizing people into types or subgroups
 - genders
 - ages
 - classes
 - ethnicities
 - castes
 - etc.
 - and the society's rules for how those people interact
 - who has what kinds of power
 - who can be friendly with who, or has to be formal, respectful, etc.
 - who has obligations to who
 - etc.
- You *have* a culture, but *belong to* a society
- So anthropologists seek to understand how societies are organized, and why
 - what is the structure of society
 - the roles and rules of how they interact
 - why is the society structured in that way?
 - what functions does the structure serve?
- Some ways of explaining the rules of behavior that make up social organization
 - **Functionalism**
 - Bronislaw Malinowski
 - explained behaviors as being sensible in terms of the problems they solve: social rules are functional
 - "**Doctrine of Needs**" - behaviors serve basic human needs
 - food, shelter, friendship, sex...
 - **Structural functionalism**
 - A.R. Radcliffe-Brown
 - many behaviors explainable in terms of the situations people are placed in by their roles in the social structure
 - roles like mother, father, child, uncle...
 - example: both "avoidance relationships" and "joking relationships" are commonly standard between people in certain relationships

- because the structural relationship inherently tends to create tension
 - such as mother-in-law and son-in-law
 - both are competing for attention, time, love of the daughter/wife
 - mother-in-law sees the son-in-law drawing her daughter away from her
 - son-in-law sees the mother-in-law as exerting power and making demands of his wife and him
 - or brother-in-law and sister-in-law
 - man has a sexual relationship with his wife, but cannot with his sister, yet he is placed in a fairly close, familiar relationship with her
 - "joking" relationships require standardized, acceptable expression of conflict or sexuality, while limiting them and requiring that no offense be taken
 - "avoidance" relationships require efforts to avoid contact, so conflicts do not arise and no offense is taken
 - these stereotyped behavioral roles divert, avoid, or channel tension in acceptable ways
 - they are not just weird behaviors
 - rather, they make sense as responses to specific, recurring structural situations
 - they serve a function in dealing with social structure
 - hence "structural functionalism"
 - Some other useful ideas
 - **Institution**: "discrete, enduring, autonomous pattern of behavior"
 - marriage, the Presidency, the university, banking, prison
 - Emile Durkheim: mechanical vs. organic solidarity
 - two different ways that society can be held together, people can feel they form a single society
 - **mechanical solidarity**
 - all families do the same things, are basically alike
 - as in societies where all families farm for themselves
 - or foragers like the !Kung
 - **organic solidarity**
 - as in having different organs, like a person's body
 - families do different things, but interact and depend on each other
 - as in our own society
 - Traditional society, modern society, postmodern society
 - read this section, but realize that these three categories of types of societies are problematic at best
 - know that people use them, but don't take them too seriously
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