HL extension: theory

IB DP Social and Cultural Anthropology HL extension: theory full package

HL extension: theory

- explain six theories in anthropology and the questions each asks;
- use two theories on the same ethnographic material and judge which fits the evidence better;
- explain how the anthropologist's position shapes what is seen;
- apply the ethical principles to real cases and plan the Paper 1 HL ethics answer.

The theory kit

- Annette Weiner, returning to the Trobriand Islands in the 1970s, found that women exchange bundles of banana leaves and fibre skirts in large ceremonies after a death.
- Malinowski had said little about this female wealth, because, as a man, he had spent his time with men.
- This shows how theory and the researcher's position decide what gets seen.

Evaluating material with theory

- **Mauss**: a gift makes the receiver a debtor and gives the giver prestige. This explains exchanges between equals, where gifts are carefully returned.
- **Political economy / practice theory**: gifts follow and reproduce rank. This explains what Mauss cannot: villagers give to cadres without return, and the receiver's status rises, not falls.
- **Judgement**: Mauss fits the gifts between equals; the **power** reading fits the gifts up the hierarchy. The material shows that one theory rarely explains everything; the best answers say where each theory works and where it fails.

The ethics question

- **Do no harm** : the people studied must not be put at risk.
- **Informed consent** : people must know what the research is for, and be free to say no.
- **Anonymity and confidentiality** : protect people's identities.

The ethics question (2)

- **Openness about purpose and funding**: who pays, and who will use the results?
- **Responsibility to share**: the research should give something back to the people studied.
- Consent: do the families know who will use the findings?

The ethics question (3)

- Harm: could the findings be used to sell to children or to vulnerable people?
- Purpose and funding: the company owns the results; can the anthropologist publish freely?
- Judgement: the research can be ethical if purpose and funding are open, consent is real and identities are protected, but the anthropologist must be ready to refuse work that harms the people studied.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Social and Cultural Anthropology guide* (first assessment 2019), the HL extension.
- A. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange* (1976).
- American Anthropological Association, Executive Board statement on the Human Terrain System (October 2007).

Sources for this lesson (2)

- N. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (1968); P. Tierney, *Darkness in El Dorado* (2000) and the AAA El Dorado Task Force report (2002).
- P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977); C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).

Common errors

- Naming a theory without saying what question it asks of the material.
- Using two theories but not judging which one the evidence supports better.
- Treating **functionalism** as the only explanation; it says little about conflict and change.

Common errors (2)

- Writing about ethics in general instead of using the stimulus text and a real case.
- Forgetting that **informed consent** must be free; it is not free if the researcher arrives with soldiers or officials.
- Ignoring who might be harmed later by what the research publishes.

Key terms

- **Functionalism**: the theory that each institution has a job that keeps society stable.
- **Structuralism**: the theory that culture is built on pairs of opposites in the human mind.
- **Interpretive anthropology**: the approach that sees culture as a web of meanings to be interpreted through thick description.

Key terms (2)

- **Practice theory**: the theory that people follow learned habits (habitus) but also bend the rules for their own ends.
- **Political economy**: the approach that explains culture through unequal wealth and **power**.
- **Do no harm**: the ethical principle that research must not hurt the people studied.

Check yourself

- 1.
- Match each to a theory: "What job does this custom do?"; "What does it mean to the people involved?"; "Who gains wealth and **power** from it?" 2.
- What did Annette Weiner see in the Trobriand Islands that Malinowski had missed, and why? 3.
- Read Yan's upward gifts through Mauss and through a power reading.