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Some Important Sociological Concepts

Social Interaction

- **Social interaction:** the ways in which people respond to one another
- How we interact with people is shaped by our perception of their position relative to our own
- Meanings we ascribe to others' actions reflect norms and values of the dominant culture
 - Ability to define social reality reflects a group's power within a society

Sociological Concept of Status

Status is not what people think of a person, status is a position within a group or society.

A status carries with it a set of culturally defined rights and duties, which sociologists call a role.

Sociological Concept- Roles

- A status carries with it a set of culturally defined rights and duties, which sociologists call a role.
 - Role performance is the actual behavior of the person who occupies a status.
 - A single status may have multiple roles attached to it, constituting a role set.
 - Role conflict results when individuals are confronted with conflicting expectations stemming from their simultaneous occupancy of two or more statuses.
 - Role strain occurs when individuals find the expectations of a single role incompatible, so that they have difficulty performing the role.
 - Duties and rights **are complementary**

Social Roles

- **Social role:** set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status
- **Role conflict:** occurs when incompatible expectations arise from two or more social positions held by the same person; or when individuals move into occupations not common among people with their ascribed status

Social Roles

- **Role strain:** difficulty that arises when the same social position imposes conflicting demands and expectations
- **Role exit:** process of disengagement from a role central to one's self-identity in order to establish a new role and identity

Groups

Group – two or more people who are bound in stable patterns of social interaction, with a sense of unity

In time, four things can happen:

Development of boundary with “in” and “out”

Group develops “objective” existence


Group obtains distinct subculture

Members develop sense of allegiance

Types of Groups

- Primary—a small group, based on face to face contact with strong ties between all members.
- Secondary— formal, relatively distant ties between members

Comparison of Primary and Secondary Groups



The image shows a group of ten stylized human silhouettes in various colors (brown, purple, orange, green, red, pink, grey, yellow) standing in a line. Below the silhouettes, the table compares primary and secondary groups.

Primary group	Secondary group
Generally small	Usually large
Relatively long period of interaction	Relatively short duration, often temporary
Intimate, face-to-face association	Little social intimacy or mutual understanding
Some emotional depth to relationships	Relationships generally superficial
Cooperative, friendly	More formal and impersonal

Types of Groups

- **In-group:** any group or category to which people feel they belong
- **Out-group:** any group or category to which people feel they do not belong
- Conflict between in-groups and out-groups can turn violent on personal as well as political level

Types of Groups

- **Reference group:** any group individuals use as standard for evaluating themselves and their own behavior
 - Two basic purposes: set and enforce standards of conduct and belief; serve as standard against which people can measure themselves and others
- **Coalition:** temporary or permanent alliance geared toward common goal
 - Can be broad based or narrow

Institutions

- Social institutions are: Family, Medical, educational, economic, religious, legal and political systems.
- Generic definition: organized pattern of beliefs and behavior centered on basic social needs

Functionalist View of Institutions

- Views them as fulfilling essential functions
 1. Reproduce membership
 2. Reproduce culture
 3. Produce and distribute goods and services
 4. Preserve order
 5. Provide and maintain a sense of meaning and purpose

Functionalist View of Institutions

- Major institutions help maintain privileges of most powerful individuals and groups within society while contributing to the powerlessness of others
- Can also view them as reinforcing inequality

Interaction View

- Others view institutions as the pattern of our everyday interactions to and use them to understand how we think and act the way we do
- Certain kinds of large institutions today are typically described as bureaucracies.

Bureaucracy

- **Bureaucracy:** a formal organization that uses rules and hierarchical ranking to achieve efficiency
- In an industrial society, elements of bureaucracy enter into almost every occupation