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What Is Sociology?

Sociology: The systematic study of the relationship between the individual and society and of the consequences of different types of relationships.

What Is Sociology?

- Sociology Focuses on:
 - How social relationships influence people's attitudes and behavior
 - How major social institutions affect us
 - How we affect other individuals, groups, and organizations

The Sociological Perspective

- ✍ **The sociological perspective helps us to see general social patterns in the behavior of particular individuals.**
- ✍ **It allows or forces us to look beyond the outer appearances of our social world and discover new levels of reality**
- ✍ **It also encourages us to realize that society guides our thoughts and deeds — to see the strange in the familiar**
- ✍ **Sociology also encourages us to see individuality in social context.**

The Sociological Imagination

- **The sociological imagination provides the ability to see our private experiences and personal difficulties as entwined with the structural arrangements of our society and the times in which we live.**
- **Understand social marginality, the state of being excluded from social activity as an “outsider.” People at the margins of social life are aware of social patterns that others rarely think about**
- **C. Wright Mills described sociological imagination as “An awareness of the relationship between an individual and the wider society, and ...the ability to view our society as an outsider might, rather than relying only on our individual perspective, which is shaped by our cultural biases”**

Benefits of the sociological perspective

- The sociological perspective helps us assess the truth of “common sense.” The sociological perspective helps us assess both opportunities and constraints in our lives.
- The sociological perspective empowers us to be active participants in our society.
- The sociological perspective helps us to live in a diverse world. It also encourages us to realize that society guides our thoughts and deeds — to see the strange in the familiar

The Origins of Sociology

Three major social changes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are important to the development of sociology.

- ✍ The rise of a factory-based industrial economy.
- ✍ The emergence of great cities in Europe.
- ✍ Political changes, including a rising concern with individual liberty and rights.
 - ✍ The French Revolution symbolized this dramatic break with political and social tradition.

Founders of Sociology

- **Aguste Comte**
 - **System of Positive Polity, or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity.**
- **Emile Durkheim**
 - **The Division of Labor in Society**
 - **The Elementary Forms of Religious Life**
 - **Suicide**
- **Karl Marx**
 - **Das Kapital**
- **Max Weber**
 - **The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism**
 - **The Sociology of Religion**
 - **The theory of Social and Economic organization**

Aguste Comte

Auguste Comte: Lived 1798-1857

Believed that the major goal of sociology was to understand society as it actually operates.

Comte favored **positivism**—a way of understanding based on science.

Comte saw sociology as the product of a three-stage historical development:

- ✍ The theological stage, in which thought was guided by religion.
- ✍ The metaphysical stage, a transitional phase.
- ✍ The scientific stage



Emile Durkheim

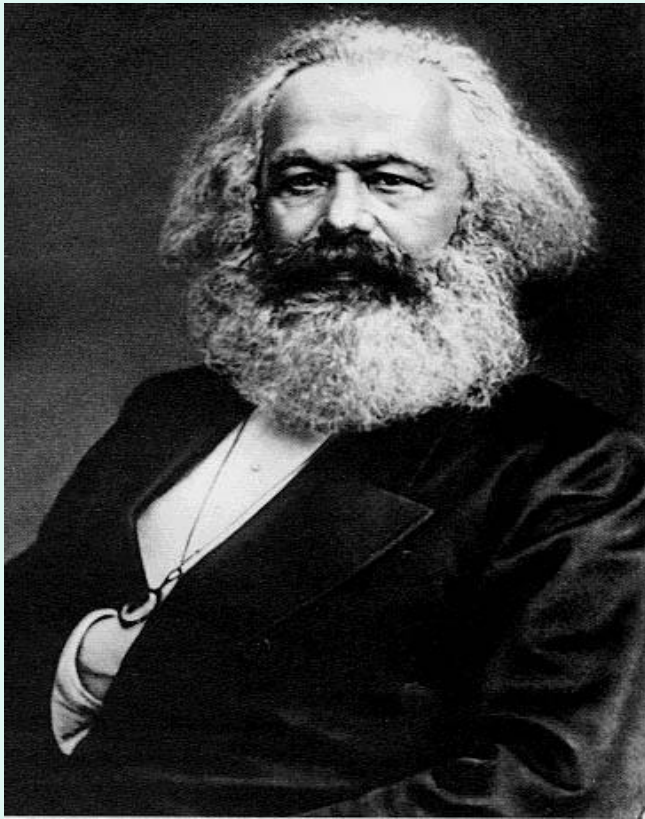
- Lived 1858-1917
- Influential French sociologist, educator, and public official
- Studied the ties that bind society together
- Mechanical solidarity
 - Traditional societies are united by social similarities
- Organic solidarity
 - Modern societies are united by interdependence
- Anomie
 - Rapid social change leads to loss of social norms and produces many social problems



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Karl Marx

- Lived 1818-1883 German philosopher Writer and social critic
- Personally involved in social change
- Believed social scientists should help to improve society



- Struggle between owners and workers
- Capitalist owners will oppress ordinary people
- Eventually, people become alienated
- People lose control over their lives

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Max Weber

- Lived 1864-1920
- German scholar who studied wide variety of topics
- Like other peers, he studied the impact of industrialization on peoples' lives
- Support for value free studies and objective research



- Rationalization
 - Traditional societies emphasize emotion and personal ties
 - Modern societies emphasize calculation, efficiency, self control
 - Personal ties decline and people become “disenchanted”

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Marx, Durkheim, and Weber Compared

- How is life treating you?
 - Marx's alienated person
 - I really don't care (because I'm detached from my work and from other people).
 - Durkheim's anomic person
 - I'm distressed by it (because there are no common rules or norms to guide me).
 - Weber's rational person
 - Let me think about it, and I'll get back to you later (because I need to make some calculations before I know how to answer).

Other Important Founders

2. Harriet Martineau: Feminist and Methodologist

Studied social life in Britain and US, translated Comte. Studied the impact of inequality

3. Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism

An evolutionary model of society, known for “social Darwinism” but thought that attempts at social reform were wrong.

American Sociology

- 1 In the United States, sociology and the modern university system rose together. Early American sociology was optimistic, forward-looking, and rooted in a belief in progress, the value of individual freedom and welfare
2. An exception to such optimism is the work of W.E.B. DuBois, who took sociology out of the ivory tower and did investigative fieldwork.
3. Contributions of considerable significance to sociology were also made by sociologists at the University of Chicago, where the first department of sociology in the United States was established in 1892.

Dominated sociology for the first half of the 20th century

Noted for study of urban problems and cities

Early American Sociologists

- W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)
 - Combined emphasis on analysis of everyday lived experience with commitment to investigating power and inequality based on race
 - Revealed social processes that contributed to maintenance of racial separation

Early American Sociologists

- Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931)
 - An early feminist
 - Argued that societies can be judged on whether the principles they claim to believe in match their actions
 - Used her analysis of society to resist oppression

Sociological Theory

A **theory** is a statement of how and why specific facts are related. The goal of sociological theory is to explain social behavior in the real world.

- ✍ Theories are based on **theoretical paradigms**, sets of assumptions that guide thinking and research.
 - ✍ Sociologists ask two basic questions:
 - ✍ What issues should we study?
 - ✍ How should we connect the facts?
 - ✍ I call this the plotting or outlining of how you want to tell the story of society.
- ✍ In addition to the three perspectives today there are three ways of using the perspectives to look at social issues.

Sociological Meta Theories

- Three general theoretical orientations or perspectives for the study of society
 - Structural-Functionalism perspective
 - Conflict perspective
 - Interactionist perspective

The Structural-Functionalist Perspective

- Parts of a social system work together to maintain a balance
 - Functions are actions that have positive consequences
 - Dysfunctions are actions that have negative consequences
 - Manifest functions are intended
 - Latent functions are unintended

Structural Functionalism

- **The structural-functional theory is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.**
 - **It asserts that our lives are guided by social structures (relatively stable patterns of social behavior).**
 - **Each social structure has social functions, or consequences, for the operation of society as a whole.**
 - **Key figures in the development of this paradigm include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, and Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton**

Structural Functionalism

- Robert Merton introduced three concepts related to social function:
 - **manifest functions**, the recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern
 - **latent functions**, largely unrecognized and unintended consequences and
 - **social dysfunctions**, undesirable consequences of a social pattern for the operation of society.
- The influence of this paradigm has declined in recent decades. It focuses on stability, thereby ignoring inequalities of social class, race, and gender

The Conflict Perspective

- Society is held together by who has power at a moment in time
 - Power allows some to dominate others
 - Dominance leads to conflict
 - Conflict and change are inevitable
 - Conflict holds society together as new alliances are formed and others fail

Social Conflict

- The **social-conflict paradigm** is a framework for building theory that sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change.
 - Most sociologists who favor **the** conflict paradigm attempt not only to understand society but also to reduce social inequality
 - Key figures in this tradition include Karl Marx, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Wright Mills
- This paradigm has developed rapidly in recent years. It has several weaknesses.
 - It ignores social unity based on mutual interdependence and shared values.
 - Because it is explicitly political, it cannot claim scientific objectivity.
 - Like the structural-functional paradigm, it envisions society in terms of broad abstractions.

The Symbolic Interaction Perspective

- Individuals construct the nature of their social world through social interaction
 - Social life is possible only because humans can communicate through symbols
 - All human communications take place through the perception and interpretation of symbols
 - How people define situations is important
 - There is a general consensus on how situations are defined
 - We do not respond directly to reality but to the symbolic meanings we attach to the real world

Symbolic Interaction

- **The symbolic-interaction paradigm is a framework for building theory that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals.**
 - **The structural-functional and the social-conflict paradigms share a macro-level orientation, meaning that they focus on broad social structures that shape society as a whole. In contrast, symbolic-interactionism has a micro-level orientation; it focuses on patterns of social interaction in specific settings.**
 - **Key figures in the development of this paradigm include**
 - **George Herbert Mead**
 - **Erving Goffman**
 - **George Homans**
 - **Peter Blau**

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism attempts to explain more clearly how individuals actually experience society. However, it has two weaknesses:

- **Its micro-orientation sometimes results in the error of ignoring the influence of larger social structures.**
- **By emphasizing what is unique, it risks overlooking the effects of culture, class, gender, and race.**

Table 1.1 (p. 15)
Comparison of Three Theoretical Perspectives

PERSPECTIVE	VIEW OF SOCIETY AND PROCESSES	KEY CONCEPTS
Functionalism	Sees society as a system of parts that work together to maintain the cohesion of the whole system	Manifest functions Latent functions Dysfunctions Anomie
Conflict Theory	Sees society as a collection of parts held together by social power	Conflict Dominance Inequality Alienation
Symbolic Interaction	Sees society as socially constructed by everyday encounters between people	Symbols Meaning Significant others Definition of the situation

Contemporary ways of applying sociological Perspectives

- Critical Theory which grew out of a dissatisfaction with 20th-century sociology in general and Marxism in particular
- Feminism intellectual movement in the humanities and social sciences that is having a profound impact on the nature and direction of sociology
- Postmodernism which expresses a deep distrust of science and the principle of objectivity.
- Today's leading theorists
 - Talcott Parsons
 - Robert Merton
 - C. Wright Mills
 - Paul Lazarsfeld

Applying Paradigms of Sociology to Sports

- The functions of sports. A structural-functional approach directs attention to the ways sports help society to operate.
- Sports and conflict. A social-conflict analysis points out that sports are closely linked to social inequality.
- Sports as process. interaction. The symbolic-interaction paradigm sees sports less as a system than as an ongoing

Sociology's Four Realms

- Basic Science
 - Expanding knowledge
- Critical Sociology
 - Debate, argument, and controversy
- Applied Research
 - Application of knowledge to real-world problems
- Public Activism
 - Working for social change

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Pursuing Social Change

- In early 1900s, many leading U.S. sociologists saw themselves as social reformers
- Early female sociologists took active roles in poor urban areas
 - Jane Addams (1860–1935) and Ida Wells-Barnett prevented racial segregation in Chicago public schools
 - W. E. B. Du Bois cofounded NAACP

Practicing Sociology

- **Applied sociology:** use of the discipline of sociology with the intent of yielding practical applications for human behavior and organizations
- **Clinical sociology:** dedicated to facilitating change by altering social relationships or restructuring social institutions

Using the Sociological Imagination

- **Globalization:** worldwide integration of government policies, cultures, social movements, and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas
 - Our lives are more connected with and interdependent upon diverse groups of people
- Social problems must be addressed before they overwhelm the world