

# Sociology Study Notes

## Characteristics of a science:

- a central problem
- a set of concepts
- a collection of facts
- research methods
- theoretical knowledge

✱ Sociology today is best understood as the study of culture.

## Definition of culture:

- socially constructed (made by human beings)
- consists of material and non material (in the mind) facts
- complex
- learned and shared
- historical and cumulative
- varies from place to place

↳ Culture is thought to be a mode of adaptation to an environment.

✱ Sociologists investigate:

- 1) the making of culture - The Agency Perspective
- 2) how culture shapes behaviour - The Social Structural Perspective

## Culture and human nature:

- Sociologists argue that much of the behaviour that is attributed to human nature is in fact socially determined.
- The comparative method is used to distinguish socially determined behaviour from biologically based nature.
  - 1) the cross cultural comparison
  - 2) the historical comparison

## Common Sense:

- Largely consists of prejudicial ideas about the world.

### René Descartes (the sources of our biased ideas):

- 1) the biases of childhood
- 2) the biases of the authorities
- 3) our appetites (selfish interests)

### Common errors in reasoning:

- 1) selective observations
- 2) overgeneralizations

### Science - characteristics:

- 1) the relative (not absolute) nature of ideas
- 2) the "null" hypothesis

### Definition of the concept of ethnocentrism:

- 1) the belief that how one's own people act is best
- 2) evaluating other cultures according to how things are done in one's own culture

↳ when doing sociology one must look at his own culture with new eyes; everything should strike you as strange, nothing is natural (free of ethnocentrism).

### C. Darwin (The Evolution of Species 1859) - key propositions:

- 1) variations
- 2) harsh environment
- 3) survival of the "fittest"
- 4) evolution of the species

### Cultural Variations - Ruth Benedict

- 1) the Pueblo of the American Southwest
  - sheep herding, dry land farming, hunting
  - agriculture was communally organized with produce stored in a communal storehouse
  - matriarchal family structure
  - women controlled both family property and collective property
  - non-violent, co-operative, non-emotional, collectively oriented
  - individuals demonstrated as little authority and leadership as possible

2) the Dobu of a mountainous island near New Guinea

- gardening and hunting
- property is individualistically owned
- matrilineal family structure
- husbands and wives maintained individual gardens
- no equivalent to the western concept of romantic love
- competitive and hostile inter-personal relations
- no formal authority structure
- the limitation is fear of retribution

### Cultural Variations - Margaret Mead

↳ compared 3 cultures located in New Guinea

1) the Arapesh (mountain environment)

- main activity agriculture
- little social differences between men and women
- both were gentle, non-territory, and co-operative
- neither were sexually aggressive

2) the Mundugumor (jungle environment)

- hunters
- little difference between men and women
- both were highly individualistic
- treacherous and violent
- both were sexually aggressive

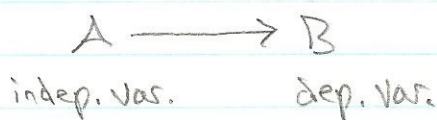
3) the Tchambuli (lake area)

- fishing and gardening
- men and women were socially unlike
- women fished while men stayed close to home
- women were dominating and impersonal; men were emotionally dependent
- women initiated courtship
- the major non economic activities of the men were related to ceremonies and arts

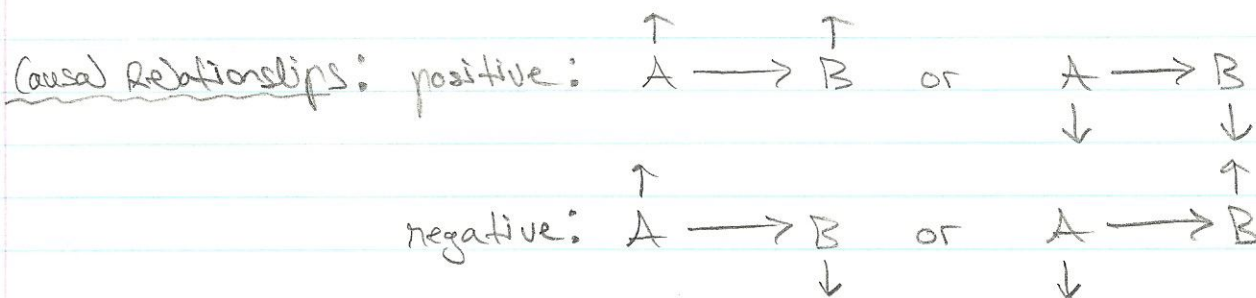
Hypothesis: A statement of a causal relationship between 2 or more events.

★ The ideal experiment controls or holds constant all other events in the environment that might conceivably effect the outcome.

↳ Such events are called control variables or extraneous variables.



★ Researcher manipulates the independent variable, and measures the dependent variable.



★ Sociologists seldom use the experimental method because:

1) when doing sociological research it is seldom possible to control all events in a natural setting

2) nor is it possible to reproduce the complexity of a social situation in a lab

### Survey Methods:

- data is gathered from large numbers of people (random)
- questions are standardized
- questions are closed ended

↳ used to:

- 1) statistically describe a sample or population
- 2) test hypotheses

★ Social economic status is proportional to years of schooling.

- questions are structured, predetermined, same for all
- advantages of closed questions (easy to answer and code)

- disadvantages:
  - new q's cannot be added
  - categories may not be exhaustive
  - researchers may misinterpret what the respondent meant to say
- advantages:
  - large sample size allows one to generalize
  - standardized nature of the questions allows others to reproduce the study

### Qualitative Interviewing:

- respondents are asked for detailed answers in own words
- goal is to construct a comprehensive or rich understanding, including respondents' points of view
- sample is small and opportunistic
- interview: semi-structured
- questions: open ended

- Strengths:
- respondents can answer as they wish, and are not forced to select an answer that may not represent them.
  - they can explain themselves to satisfaction of researcher.
  - respondents can raise issues not previously considered.

- Weaknesses:
- small sample size and non random nature of the sampling makes it difficult to generalize.
  - opportunistic nature of sample and the variability between interviews makes it difficult for others to reproduce the study.

### Ethnographic Field Research:

- goal is to construct a comprehensive or rich understanding, including the respondents' points of view.
- sample: small & opportunistic
- detailed observations are made over a prolonged time in a natural setting
- the role of the researcher is to observe everything.

- Variations:
- 1) overt (more ethical)
  - 2) covert (negates the Hawthorne effect)
  - 3) non-participatory (more objective)
  - 4) participatory (allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional states of others)

advantages: - many and varied observations allow for the construction of a complex understanding

disadvantages: - very time consuming, hence limited # of cases  
- limited cases and non random sampling makes it difficult to generalize.  
- difficult to reproduce study because of uniqueness of each place or grouping of people.  
- closeness of researcher to people as a result of long period of contact raises issue of objectivity

### Functionalists theoretical framework:

- 1) thinking of society as a living organism (holistic)
- 2) emphasis on the importance of the normative system
- 3) ability of conflict in society as superficial and transitional

### Functional indispensability:

↳ all standardized cultural forms and practices are assumed to be somehow important for maintaining a society

### Manifest and latent Functions:

- Manifest Functions: - importance of the form or practice is obvious  
- consequences of change is thus predictable
- Latent functions: - importance is obscure (needs to be discovered)  
- consequences of change is thus unpredictable

Examples of Latent Functions: 1) low love (drug for fuel, fertilizer, building material)  
2) crime (innovators, redefines moral boundaries)

### Functionalist Perspective:

cultural values are embodied in organizations:

Values → norms → social roles → institutions

cultural values shape personality:

values → socialization → personality

## Canada and the USA

✱ Lipset argues the 2 countries share a similar set of values with one key value divergence:

USA - more individualistically oriented (freedom, equality, self-reliance)

Can. - more collectively oriented (sharing, co-operative, elitist)

causes:

- 1) American Constitution
- 2) climate differences
- 3) frontier difference

Value difference is reflected in:

- 1) personalities → Can's more supportive of gov., unions, police & courts
- 2) organizations → Can organizations tend to be more hierarchically organized and elitist in nature (churches, appointed senate, courts, governors)
- 3) gov't policy → social welfare, HC, support for ethnicities, gun laws

✱ Michael Adams argues that the values of Can's and Americans are changing, but continue to diverge:

USA - Americans are becoming more traditionally oriented.

CAN - Can's are becoming increasingly rationally oriented.

evidence: 1. religiosity

2. support for the traditional nuclear family

3. the belief in the natural superiority of men.