

Sociology

The Sociological Perspective

Week 1, Lecture 1

The Sociological Perspective

- Seeing the general in the particular (Peter Berger)
 - Sociologists identify general social patterns in the behaviour of particular individuals
- Seeing the strange in the familiar
 - Giving up the idea that human behaviour is simply a matter of what people decide to do
 - Understanding that society shapes our lives
- Seeing Personal Choice in Social Context
 - The power of society to shape even our most private choices
 - Example:
 - Durkheim on Suicide
 - Suicide in a comparative perspective
- Seeing Sociologically: Marginality and Crisis
 - People at the margins of social life are aware of social patterns that others rarely think about
 - Periods of change or crisis encourage us to use the sociological perspective

The Importance of a Global Perspective

1. Where we live shapes the lives we lead
2. Societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected
3. Many problems that we face in Canada are more serious elsewhere
4. Thinking globally helps us learn more about ourselves

Applying the Sociological Perspective

- Sociology has played an important role in the development of Canadian Public Policy
 - **Sociology can have an important role in our own Personal Growth:**
 - Assess “common sense”
 - Opportunities and constraints
 - Empowerment
 - Helps us live in diversity
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Careers: The “Sociology Advantage”

- **A background in sociology is excellent preparation for:**
 - Teaching and doing research
 - Doctors, nurses, and technicians
 - Criminal justice
 - Advertising, banking, business, education, government, journalism, law, public relations and personnel management
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The Origins of Sociology

- **Social change and Sociology:**
 - A new industrial economy
 - The growth of cities pushed people away from working the land
 - Political change: Shift in focus from moral obligation to God and monarch to the pursuit of self-interest
 - A new awareness of society in England, France and Germany
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Science and Sociology

- **Auguste Comte** (1798-1857) sociology to study modern social reality scientifically

Canadian Sociology: Distinctive Touches

- **Marshall McLuhan**: Influence of electronic media
 - **John Porter**: Inequality and ethnic relations in The Vertical Mosaic
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Sociological Theory

- **Theory**: a statement of how and why facts are related
 - Explains social behaviour to the real world
 - **Theoretical Approach**: A basic image of society that guides thinking and research
 - Structural-functional
 - Social-conflict (includes Feminism/Gender -conflict and Race-conflict approaches)
 - Symbolic-interaction
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The Structural-Functional Approach

- **The basics**
 - A macro-level orientation
 - Society as a complex system whose parts work together for solidarity and stability
 - Consensus theory (agreement in society)
 - **Key elements**:
 - Social structure is any relatively stable pattern of social behaviour
 - Social function refers to the consequences for the operation of society as a whole
 - **Important Sociologists**:
 - Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Robert K. Merton
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Critical Review

- Focusing on social stability and unity, ignores inequalities
- Such inequalities cause tension and conflict
- The approach ends up being politically conservative

The Social-Conflict Approach

- The basics:
 - A macro-level orientation
 - Society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change
 - We don't change things unless we're unhappy
 - Key elements:
 - Society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority
 - Factors such as race, sex, class, and age are linked to social inequality
 - Important Sociologists:
 - Kari Marx, W.E.B Du Bois
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Critical Review

- Ignores how shared values and mutual interdependence unify society
 - If it pursues political goals, it cannot be scientific
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The Symbolic-Interaction Approach

- The basics
 - A micro-level orientation (interaction with people instead of looking at society as a whole)
 - Society as the product of everyday interactions of individuals
- Key elements
 - Society is nothing more than the shared reality that people construct as they interact with one another
 - Society is a complex, ever-changing mosaic of subjective meanings
- Important Sociologists:
 - Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, George Homans & Perter Blau

Critical Review

- Ignores larger social structures, effects of culture, factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race
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The Postmodern Approach

- Postmodernism is critical of modernism with a mistrust of grand theories and ideologies
 - Human sciences cannot be scientific because of human subjectivity
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Applying The Approaches: The Sociology of Sports

- **The Functions of Sports**
 - A structural-functional approach directs our attention to the ways in which sports help society operate
 - Sports have functional and dysfunctional consequences