

**Principles of Sociology SOC 1101 Stephan Larose**  
**05/09/2018 Week 1**

**The Sociological Imagination**

What is it, and why does it matter?

**What is sociology?**

- HM 51... where all sociology books are found.
- From the Latin socius (social, being with others) and the Greek logos (word, reason, science): the scientific study of society
- Study of humans and society (everyone has a different definition of sociology)
- Provokes us with a better understanding of ourselves and others. Provides tools to better us as citizens
- Systematic study of human society and social interactions.

**What do sociologists do?**

- They teach, write books, notice social patterns
- Analyze: social trends, people, social interactions, behaviours, relationships, PATTERNS
  - Constants, repeats, reproductive
- Investigate and challenge commonly held assumptions, like stereotypes.
- Ex. Things happen differently to people depending on their characteristics. Ex. Haircut price.
- Examples: Male nurses- how they try to escape assumptions (Meet the Fockers)
  - Former Olympic boxer racially profiled in car
  - Where do patterns and assumptions come from? Across different institutions, cultures, countries, they're different

**Sociological Imagination**

- C. Wright Mills, 1916-1962)
- Ability to see relationships between personal experience and the larger society
- "The capacity to shift from one perspective to another – from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world... It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relationship between the two".(Mills, The Sociological Imagination, 1959: 4)
- We have to be aware of our location in society and its place in history. When we create sociological knowledge, society has to move you

- Enables us to understand how seemingly personal problems are related to larger social trends (homelessness and unemployment a result of a factory closing down, for example) and how they are related- turns it into social issue, public issue
- **Coffee: a purely private matter?**
  - Implies a cultural setting
  - Socially significant
  - Socially acceptable
  - Socially available
  - Implies an extensive social division of labour and a complex social organization
  - Implies the world history, economics, and politics of coffee
- **Word of caution: Peer Berger's into to his "Invitation to sociology"**
  - Favour of the notion that social patterns shape our thinking and social interactions
  - Questions on our assumptions about life- can be unsettling and difficult
    - Why some people should stay away from sociology

You have to let go of your assumptions- they are not always what they seem

**12/09/2018 Week 2**

**Origins of Sociology (social fact, conflict, and action)**

**When, where, and why was sociology invented?**

- Relatively recent origin
- 1838- French social philosopher
- New way of leaning into social world
- Philosophers have made social and human observations before invention of sociology
- Socrates (example) Plato- his student.
- Socrates never wrote, we only know of him based on what Plato said

**Some classical Philosophers and Social Thinkers:**

- Confucius- role models
- Plato- society is outcome of political negotiation
- Aristotle- social institutions are outcome of our natural instinct
- Ibn Khaldun- rules, culture, countries- their history
- Shakespeare- human behaviours and passions
- Montesquieu- human laws and geographical concerns

- Rules are arbitrary
  - Social rules involved with laws
- However, none of them approached sociology from sociological view, all viewed the ideal society, not in a systematic and scientific way.
  - They looked at how we should behave, not the reality.

### **Social Change and Sociology**

- 1900 France, Germany, England, etc.
- Dramatic transformations

### **Industrialization and Urbanization Process**

- From agriculture and handmade products to manufacturing and related industries
- People moved from the country to the city for work
- Urbanization was the result of Industrialization
- Most profound effect on families, breaks peoples' ties to the land, ancestry and life.  
Breaking old traditions
- Emergence of new social problems
  - Anonymity, isolation, inadequate housing, crowded cities, unsanitary and unhealthy work and living conditions, homelessness, high rates of poverty, pollution, criminal behaviour, etc.
  - Population discontent among the working class:
    - Strikes, protest, social uprising, angry mobs clashing with the police and army, etc.
  - Only produced what they needed to survive
  - How women, families with young kids had to work in unsanitary factories with no insurance and protection.
  - Accidents were frequent with no compensation
  - In some factories, children were chained to the machines (child labour)
  - Common in North America in the 1800s
  - We can have a more vivid understanding of social conditions (social dislocation)
  - Famous novels from the 19<sup>th</sup> century showing this change:
    - Les Misérables, Germinal, Oliver Twist, Herman Melville's novels, etc.

### **Political revolutions**

- Change in political thought
- Society as the product of individual self-interest

- New political climate: individual freedom and rights

### **The French revolution**

- Introduction of a new principle into history by demanding political action to redress mass poverty
- Sociological war
- Slogan- Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity
- Planned in coffee houses
- Bastille- women's march to the King's House
- First time the people stood up for themselves
- Social privileges were challenged- suffering
- 40 000 people sent to Guillotine- mostly aristocrats and priests
- "God's will could not be change" except that it's people, not God, that control the organization of society

### **Scientific revolutions**

- Early Sociologists
- How and why do societies change?
- What are the social forces holding societies together to create order and stability over time?
- How do modern societies differ from preceding ones?

- **Auguste Comte (1798-1857)**

- Coined the word Sociology... but preferred the term Social Physics
- Sought to do a science of society
- Social statics (order and stability) and dynamics (conflict and change)
- Adolf K. stole his idea and published "social physics" 6 months before him (1830s)
- French revolution has reinvented social fabric, trying to bring order out of chaos
- He innovated characteristics of scientists, by using scientific methods, applying the methods to society, tried to discover the laws of society and behaviours, and tried to figure out the laws of society (modeled after physics)
- Society conforms to laws of its own
- Society- application of physics to society
- His lexicon- society would be study of social statistics and dynamics

- **Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)**

- Created the first rules of methods in sociology
- Brought sociology to the university, created the first chair in sociology at la Sorbonne in Paris
- Trained the first students in the discipline
- Created the first academic sociological journal, L'Annee sociologique (1898)
- A founding father of sociology
  - Made it a respectable discipline
- Wrote about education, order, religion, suicide, etc.
- Statistical analysis as method of studying sociology
- Was supposed to be a Rabbi, but didn't believe in God.
  - Became sociologist at 16
  - Believes that sociology transcends the individual
- Physical world, chemical world, biological world, psychological world
- Sociological world- has its own autonomic existence.
- Can't be reduced to psychological processes
- Society is more than the sum of its parts
  - Has a unique character of its own; not reducible to the behaviour of any one individual

### **Social Facts**

- Patterned ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside any one individual but that exert social control over each person.
- The collective practice that people impose on themselves and others
- Ex. The role of a sibling, child, student, etc.
- Ex. English language doesn't need us, but we need it.
- Ex. Suicide as a personal decision

### **Suicide as a social fact:**

- Social distribution of suicide and its rate among different group and countries
  - For any given country, the suicide rate is stable over time
  - It also differs wildly among them...
    - Britain is twice as Italy
    - Denmark is 4 times that of Britain
  - Social integration:
    - Social integration is considered selfish suicide
    - Categories of people with strong social ties had low suicide rates; more socially isolated or individualistic people had higher suicide rates

- Altruistic suicide: committing suicide for the benefit of those around you, opposite of selfish suicide
- Fatalistic suicide: suicide due to hopelessness, ex: being in prison & only way to get out is to kill yourself
- More suicides in widows, men, rich.

### **Karl Marx (1818-1883)**

- Economist, philosopher, historian, social theorist, and political activist
- Stressed the importance of social conflict, and the need for further change and revolution
- Concerned about oppression, exploitation, and alienation
- Had the most profound impact on sociology
- Less than 70 years after his death, more than 1 billion people had converted to Marxism.
- Did not consider himself as a sociologist
- Regarded as one of the founders of the discipline
- Feared that people will be overpowered by change
- Despises tradition
- Expressed need for another revolution, call for another one
- Shit disturber, a radical
- First person to talk against child labour
- Critique of capitalism
- Lived his life in exile (kicked out of 12 countries)
- **Economic determinism**
  - Every aspect of social life is based on economic relationships
- **Key to human history**
  - The conflict between those who own the means of production and those who do not- class conflict
- **In the case of industrial societies**
  - The conflict between the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class)
- **Socialism**
  - The dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie
- **Communism**
  - A classless system in which the means of production are collectively owned and wealth and power are evenly distributed

### **Max Weber (1864-1920)**

- Had a tremendous impact on the development of sociology, concerned with revolution
- Afraid of bureaucrats (an official in the government who wants procedural correctness at the expense of people's needs)
- Weber's focus was on meaningful social action
- Not into social facts and structures
  - Into social actions
  - Meaningful social action:
    - The motives that underlie human behaviours
    - The ways in which people interpret and explain their own behaviours and of others
    - The way in which these actions and meanings affect the social order
- Verstehen (understanding, insight)
- Importance of ideas, values, and beliefs

### **12/09/2018 Week 3**

#### **Social transformations**

- Political revolutions: suggested that people could change society
- Industrial revolution and urbanization: presented social thinkers with a host of pressing social problems crying out for a solution
- Scientific revolution: suggested that a science of society was possible
  - Main founders were Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber

#### **Major Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology**

##### **Theory**

- From the Greek theorein, "to see". A conceptual overview of the way something works
- A set of logically interrelated statements that attempts to describe, explain. And occasionally predict social events
- Social theorizing: the task of weaving isolated observations or facts into an understanding of human society and behaviour
- Sociologists face 2 big questions- What to study? How should we connect the facts?
- Are guided by 1 or more theoretical paradigms called perspectives
- Basic image of society

##### **Theoretical Perspective**

- An overall approach or viewpoint toward some subject; a basic image of society that guides thinking and research (“road map” paradigm)
- Each perspective directs our attention to:
  - What to study
  - What questions to ask
  - And how we should ask them
- Each perspective interprets reality and explains data in a different way

## **Major classical paradigms or perspectives in sociology**

### **Functionalist perspective**

- Structural-Functionalist
- Society as a system made up of interrelated parts, each of which performs one or several important social functions or meets vital social needs
- Parts/subsystems: social institutions: economy, family, education, religion, government, medicine, science, etc.
- Institutions provide the rules governing behaviours, and a set of common values that bind together
- Stress that our lives are guided by social structures
  - We're frames intersections
  - Ex. Not paying attention to class- being aware of social expectations
- Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert Merton (1910-2003)
  - Study of democracy, invented sociology of science
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy, role models, deviant behaviours, focus groups
  - Merton on social functions:
    - Manifest functions: recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern
    - Latent functions: consequences that are largely unrecognized and unintended
      - Example: the education system- uni is to prepare people for jobs (manifest) but it also helps people get together and get married (latent)
    - Dysfunctions: undesirable consequences of any social pattern for the operation of society
      - Example: left and right wing criticizes unis for different reasons (threatening good old values vs threatening social order)
- Favours status quo
- Critical Evaluation:

- How can we assume that society has a natural order when social patterns differ from place to place and change over time?
- By emphasizing social integration, tends to gloss over inequality based on social class, race, ethnicity, and gender- divisions that may generate considerable tension and conflict

### **Conflict Perspective**

- Based on the 4 C: conflict, class, contestation, and change
- Society is an area of inequality generation conflict and change, and of continuous power struggle among competing groups
- Social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. are linked to unequal distribution of money, power, education, and social prestige; the social system typically benefits some people while depriving others
- Assumes that society either will or should be changed; commitment to fight against social inequalities
- Inscription on Marx's monument in London's Highgate Cemetery:
  - The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point, however, is to change it
- Brief critical evaluation:
  - By highlighting inequality and division, glosses over how shared values or interdependence generates unity among members of a society
  - By pursuing political goals, relinquishes any claim to scientific objectivity
  - Functionalist and conflict perspectives envision society in very broad and abstract terms: large-state social structures and social systems
- C. Wright Mills- figure in development of conflict perspective
  - Mostly known for "Power Elite"
  - Elite work together on political agenda that seems of their interest
  - Most important decisions are held in secret
- Not valid criticism- not doing it favours status quo

### **Symbolic Interactionist perspective**

- Micro-level focus: social interactions in specific situations (face to face, reciprocal exchanges)
- Symbolic because looks at the meaning of the interaction:
  - Plans, intentions, motivations, and self-reflexivity of actors; through speech, written language, intonations, signs, gestures, body language, gift giving, etc.

- Envisions society as the product of everyday interactions of individuals, as a shared reality created by the interactions of its members
- Broad social situations that characterize society as a whole
- Focus on social interactions
  - Ex. how pedestrians interact with homeless people
- What is the meaning of these interactions?

**Brief Critical Evaluation:**

- By focusing on day-to-day and face to face interactions, ignores the larger social institutions in which behaviour takes place
- Downplays the global and historical aspects of culture, and the effects of socially imposed definitions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age on peoples' lives
- Too focused on unique situations, forget about the bigger picture

**Feminist perspective**

- Focuses on the significance of gender in understanding and explaining inequalities between men and women in all areas of social life
- Encompasses both the micro and macro levels of analysis:
  - Daily construction and reproduction of gender
  - Series of constraints and forms of resistance in women's lives and social institutions
- Micro- speech, body, emotional management
- Macro- Work, occupation, religion, family
- Has challenged male dominated sociology with criticism
- Dorothy Smith (1926-)
  - Women's experiences are generally ignored by sociologists
  - But the world views are expressed, embodied, lived by men
  - Type of sociology that is built by the everyday experience of women
  - "Women's Studies"
- Brief critical evaluation:
  - Woman-centered
    - Divides the genders even though that's the whole point
  - Explicitly Ideological
    - Gendered world view (colours your perspective)
    - No one can escape their subjectivity (based on personal taste, ideals, experiences)

Perspective	Analysis Level	Nature of Society
Functionalist	Macrolevel	Society comprises interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability within society. This stability is threatened by dysfunctional acts and institutions
Conflict	Macrolevel	Society is characterized by social inequality; social life is a struggle for scarce resources. Social arrangements benefit some groups at the expense of others
Feminist	Macro and Micro	Society is based on patriarchy- a hierarchical system of power in which males possess greater economic and social privilege than females
Symbolic Interactionalist	Microlevel	Society is the sum of the interactions of people and groups. Behaviours is learned in interaction with other people; how people define a situation becomes the foundation for how they behave
Postmodern	Macro and Micro	Society characterized by protoindustrialization, consumerism, and global communications bring into question existing assumptions about social life and nature of reality.

- **THEREFORE sociology is the systematic study of human society and social interaction**

**24/09/2018 Week 4**

### **The Sociological Inquiry**

- The fallacies of Common Sense, and The Principles of Sociological Research
- Although not all are intentional, everyone is engaged in research in daily life.
  - Example: shopping on ebay, explaining phenomena
  - Example: piercings- once cultural, now fashion.
    - Why do they do it?
    - Self-punishment, attention, outside social norms, peer pressure, addiction.
    - Where does the desire come from?
    - Most people use psychological POV,
    - In contrast, sociologists look at individual's behaviour, social and historical context, extend into larger social framework.
      - A way to reclaim their body in consumer society that sells body
      - Act of resistance against western beauty
        - Dissatisfaction with norms and social life
        - Act of rebellion/resistance

- Rite of passage, spiritual outlet, re-enacting something we forgot

### **Common Sense**

- Means we all share
- Commonly held assumptions- most of which are false
  - Examples
    - Women are more likely to be assaulted than men
    - Rates of murder and other violent crimes have steadily increased over the past 20 years
    - Most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by strangers
    - Living together before marriage increases the likelihood of having a stable marriage
- The fact that a belief is widespread among the population doesn't make it true
- Hard to refute
- Based on rudimentary reasoning
- Not universally accepted

### **False Obviousness**

- Paul Lazarsfeld and R.K. Merton's "The American Soldier" (1949)
- Lazarsfeld: Austria born American sociologist (1901-1976). Created the Bureau for Applied Social Research.
- "The American Soldier"
  - 1. Soldiers from the Southern US handled the hot climate of the pacific island better than the soldiers from the northern US.
  - 2. The morale of soldiers from the countryside was better than that of soldiers from the cities
  - 3. The desire of soldiers to be brought back home was stronger during combat and hostilities than it was after the German surrender and the end of the war
  - All 12 statements made were FALSE but presented as true at first
- Humans tend to conform, no questions asked
- Lesson to be drawn: The only evident thing is that we have to be suspicious of self-evident statements

### **Prejudice and Stereotypes**

- Prejudice, from the Latin prae (before, pre-) and iudicium (judgement): a pre-judgement
  - Preconceived notion of group of people or things

- Without supporting evidence
- Positive or negative
- Stereotypes, from stereotypes (solid): overgeneralizations about the appearance, behaviour, mindset, or other characteristics of members of particular groups:
  - Examples: guys with long hair, natives, men and women, Canadians and Americans

**As Mark Twain once said...**

- “What gets us into trouble is not what we don’t know, it’s what we know for sure that just ain’t so”

**26/09/2018 Week 4**

**Principles of sociological Research**

**The Scientific Method**

1. Select and formulate a research question
2. Review relevant literature
3. Select an appropriate research design
4. Collect data
5. Analyze the data, draw conclusions, and report the findings

**Stimulating Curiosity**

- Having an open mind
- Active thinking- requires training, muscles to flex
- How to stimulate sense of curiosity?

**WAYS TO STIMULATE CURIOSITY:**

**1. Cultivating oneself**

- Documentaries, museums, novels, blogs, movies, etc.
- Novelists teach about how the world works

**2. Traveling**

- Learning about others and ourselves
- People whose habits differ
  - Example- prof went to Venezuela and offered to purchase all coconuts from lady, but she refused because she was lonely and selling coconuts is her only way of communicating with people
- Everybody has something to teach you

### **3. Social Marginality**

- We all feel like outsiders sometimes
- The more acute our social marginality, the more aware we are of our surroundings
- Ways to become an outsider (how to experience social marginality)
  - Grow out hair, pretend to be homeless, pretend to be a trump supporter

### **4. Social Change/ Social Crisis**

- C. Wright Mills- great depression on 1930s
  - They saw great social forces at work
  - They took the sociological approach: economy collapse being something wrong with the system

### **Critical Outlook**

- To criticize, from the Greek “krino” (to separate, to distinguish): to sort things out
- To cultivate doubt, to put things into question
  - Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
    - Installed water in every home in African village
    - Women still went to collect water from the river because it was their only means of talking to one another due to male dominated culture in village