

The Sociological Imagination

What is it? Why does it matter?

Sociology → understanding the patterns and behaviours within groups

Updated definition: systematic study of human society and social interactions

- Allows us to understand ourselves, others and the world in which we live in.
- Gives us a tool to help us assess commonly what sociology really is
- Introduces us to a distinctive/unique point of view

Sociologists:

- **Notice social patterns** and patterns of behaviours
Ex: Young black men more likely to be pulled over at night than white
- Investigate and **challenge** common **assumptions** by asking WHY???
Ex: people assume male nurses are gay because nursing is assumed to be a career for women. WHY? It's an underpaid profession that deals with the care of other people.

Distinctive point of view → **SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION by: C Wright Mills**

- The ability to see the relationships btw personal experience and the social world
- To see an individual's private troubles and relating it to the broader social processes that structure them
- Making seemingly personal troubles into public issues

Ex: Private and Public troubles:

- **Private:** being overweight, marital troubles, unemployed, purposeless...are all personal in nature
BUT, when you address them, you actually confront the situation. This is the only way you can be aware of the situation.
"My husband is unsupportive" etc..
- If these private matters get shared with others, there's a common social problem. This is when it turns into a **public problem** that takes a collective to solve and resolve

Mills believed:

- To understand ourselves, we have to be aware of the trends, location of our society and the society of our location....

Social imagination of processes - A distinctive point of view

- Using the sociological imagination, it will allow us to see BOTH the strange and the familiar.
- Thinking sociologically means giving up bias and favour the initially strange

**It's hard to challenge our own assumptions.

- Questioning assumptions can be uncomfortable for some.
- Things aren't always what they seem to be. Society has layers.

Our own cultural setting gives a word "context"

- "Coffee" means something
- Friends meet over coffee, work chats over coffee
- Coffee is a social lubricant that enables social interactions in today's world, so that's why it has context and meaning to us.
- Coffee is a socially acceptable stimulant, unlike cocaine and alcohol
- Coffee is made socially available due to millions of workers in the industry
- Is addiction to caffeine a private or public matter???

COFFEE = PUBLIC because it is related to so many things and so many factors.

The Origins of Sociology: Social Fact, Social conflict, Social Action

- Where, When and Why was sociology invented?
- 1830, by a French philosopher in France
- Socrates - Plato said: people are chained to a cage facing a wall. They believe reality is the shadows but really, they have to turn around to understand the true meaning.
- Democracy was created by the Greeks.

Classic Philosophers → believed what society should be like.

- Before sociology...
 - **Confucius**: theorized role modeling and leadership
 - **Plato**: all forms of social lives were based on human discussion amongst one another
 - **Aristotle**: social institutions-(people coming together for a common purpose) were from family/religion or extensions of our natural instincts
 - **Ibn Khaldun**: tribes, cities, countries, dynasties
 - **Shakespeare**: not a philosopher but written many great literature. His work focused on human passions, emotions etc...
 - **Montesquieu**: French philosopher, spirit of OX, argues that human laws are arbitrary/random/natural and should not be universal. Always SOCIAL VALUES involved.
- ***NONE of them approached society in terms of sociology. They instead imagined a perfect society but not what was really happening in front of them.

Sociology is not Philosophy:

- There was a social change. → SOCIOLOGY emerged in the 19th century in FRANCE

Industrial Revolution:

- Era where societies started to transfer from being dependent on agriculture to manufacturing.
- Because of this, many people moved from the country to work in the cities to work in factories

Urbanization:

- When a big population moved from rural → big cities
- Caused the emergence of many social problems

This created....

Emergence of Social Problems:

- isolation/ crowded cities/
- Paris was 1500 people and there was not enough room for everyone. Houses did not fulfill people's needs
- When they lived on the farm/rural, they were in control of their work. But when they moved → they lost control since they no longer were in charge
- Workers → not given job security, long hours, terrible conditions, no compensation if you were to get hurt on the job (you'd likely get fired)
- Child labor: common. They were tied to machines so they would run around the factories
- ALL of this news led to PROTESTS!
- This was the beginning of all sociology work

Popular discontent among workers:

- Protests and strikes outburst

Political/Democratic Revolutions:

- 17th century: every time a tradition came under attack, we see a clear shift in focus
- Philosophers concluded that society is a product of the individual self interest
-

French revolution:

- People realized that people can change society. People ran society NOT GOD.
- People wanted a say and to take part in government issues
- People overthrew the monarchy
- This was the first time the King and Queen could be executed after a trial
- Countries like England and France were where most changes in society occurred.

Political Revolution:

- A political revolution is the forcible removal of a power structure by a group of people and the implementation of a new power structure. By 'power structure,' usually we're referring to a government.
- With the intent of setting up a more improved system.

Another change was about to happen

- The french revolution made way for other revolutions. The French slogan "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

- Sociology started mainly because of the french revolution
- The women's march was the first time people ever walked on the king's palace.
-

CONCERNS?

- Early philosophers were trying to find a striking difference between the old VS the new society.
- "How did society change?"

Auguste Comte:

- Some see him as the father of sociology
- He preferred the name **social physics**
- Before he could even publish his book after that name, Adolf Hitler published his book using the same name
- He believed the french revolution wanted to bring order out of chaos and used this to find out the SOCIAL PROBLEM
- He concluded: by using the scientific method, by applying them to society he can figure out the laws of society and human behaviour
- "SOCIOLOGY WAS AN APPLICATION OF PHYSICS TO SOCIETY"
- This is how sociology, is now a study of society
-

Emelie Durkihm:

- HE is the true founder of this
- He made sociology to be a respected discipline. He taught at universities in Paris and created 1st sociological journal
- Wrote about education, crime and punishment, suicide, religion
- Introduced the scientific method
- He was concerned about the uncontrolled changes by the industrial revolution
- Upset about the lack of social insight people had
- Scared of social order and stability
- Was not religious while his family is so he didn't become a rabbi

Belief:

- Society was more than the sum of its parts
- society transcends the individual, but does not depend on anyone to exist
- Society has its unique character itself and cannot be reduced for anyone
- There's a psychological world, biological world, chemical world AS much as there's a SOCIOLOGICAL WORLD → just as important

What's the most basic unit of study in the social world? What's the social world made of?

- *Social facts!*
- They are collective facts that people impose themselves as rules, norms, and rituals
- You never created the rules that you're following but they have some sort of control over you
- These rules affect the way you act
- Social facts existed before and will continue to live after us
- Does not depend on an individual, individuals depend on it

- Ex: we depend on English language but English language does not depend on us, it will still exist
- Social facts interrelated with social order

Suicide is a social fact:

- One of the most private acts there is
- It's the moment where an individual exists alone with their own conscious
- Suicide rates varied between countries, → suicide is a social fact
- Suicide rates are higher in protestant countries than catholic, however both churches condemn suicide. SO SUICIDE IS NOT DUE TO RELIGION
- The search went on and he concluded that:
 - women, poor, Jews, married people had low suicide rates.
 - men, rich, unmarried had high suicide rates.
- Women will try and commit with drugs where men will choose a gun to be sure of death in the end
- 3 types of suicide:
 - **altruistic suicide**: do it for the community - usually in war
 - **anomic suicide**: they don't recognize the society we live in, they feel alone and hopeless, **depression**. This also happens in situations where it crops up suddenly.
 - **Fatalistic suicide**: they feel they cannot escape their own conditions. Also due to over regulation

Emile Durkheim was also depressed during the war:

- Most of his students went to war
- His entire class of 1912 was killed on the front
- Then, he got a letter that his only son was killed in the war → this resulted to Durkheim's death at 50 years

Karl Marx:

- Philosopher
- He had the most impact on sociology even though he wasn't a sociologist
- 70 years after his death, people were living in a society based on his theories → MARXISM
- He did not consider himself a sociologist but his beliefs influence society the greatest out of all the other sociologists

Marx's beliefs VS Durkheim and Comte's:

Marx:

- Not concerned about social order or tradition, he was more concerned about:
 - Capitalism, as he witnessed oppression, worker exploitation, poor working conditions, low wages, long hours
- Marx's work critiques capitalism!!!!

Economic Determination:

- Every aspect of social life was based on relationships that contributed to the economy
- Religion, politics, education, family, **everything** is based on the economy

Marx believed...

- At any time in human history, anyone who owned the means of production were the dominant group in society. Ownership helped them control the less powerful
- Key to human conflict = conflict between those who own the means of production and those who didn't. ALSO KNOWN AS *SOCIAL CONFLICT*
- There will always be conflict between them because in order for the bourgeoisie (capitalists) to succeed, they need to exploit the proletariat (the workers)

PLAN:

- To overthrow the capitalist leaders
- Socialism: became communism
- Communism; means of production and wealth was distributed evenly. No religion, and government makes all decisions = what Marx wanted

Max Webber:

- Huge impact on society
- Focus of society was meaningful, social action. These are motives that underlie human behaviour
- He believed in the way that people make sense of their actions and those of others
- Was not into social fact and social order
- He believed in "understanding and insight" (VERSTEHEN) : → to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to understand = *SOCIAL ACTION*

Conclusion:

- Different sociologists had different ideas of what sociology was supposed to be like
- Sociology is still not unified today and it was never unified prior.

Major theoretical perspectives in sociology

- Theory?

→ a term by plato

→ a conceptual overview of the way something works

→ Art of weaving together ideas and facts to create an understanding to human and behaviors

Sociologists faced 2 issues:

- 1) What issues should we study?
- 2) How should we connect the facts

When making decisions, they were guided by many perspectives and interprets data in different ways.

Theoretical Perspective:

- Basic images of society that **guides thinking and research**
- It's a global vision of society
- Directs us to what to study, ask, and how we should ask them!

****By providing a framework, each perspective interprets reality and explains data in a different way

Classical paradigms/ perspectives in sociology:

- Functionalist's Perspectives:

→ A perspective that stresses how our lives are guided by social structures: what you know you're supposed to do already.

But what frames our behaviour? → our behaviour right now shapes our SOCIAL STRUCTURES

EX: you're in class and listening to the teacher. If you are faking it, it is even more important because you know what you're doing is wrong and it's expected of you to pay attention.

→ society works like system made up of interrelated parts that meets vital social needs

- **A system:** interrelated of its parts. These parts contribute to the function of society
- IF something happens to a part of the system, they system no longer works properly. THUS, when one part of society is affected, the entire society is affected.
- Each subsystem is a social institution that has a function in society and it's survival
- **Each institution set is a guide of rules that binds society together**
- Tension and conflicts may occur but are considered temporary in nature
- In times of conflict/ social change, there are the police and justice system that restore social order and equilibrium → can also be teachers and parents as well
- Ex: function of religion: provide a system of beliefs, unite communities, make sense of death
- Ex: function of science: validates knowledge
- Therefore, this perspective sees society as a system of interrelated parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the WHOLE pop.

Influencers of the functionalist perspective:

Talcott Parsons:

Robert Merton:

- One of the most influential sociologists
- Invented sociology of science
- Role models, focus groups, deviant behavior - invented by him
- Expanded our knowledge of social function in many ways
- **He was aware that different social patterns have different consequences for different people**
- **Manifest function** = intended function of social policies that benefit society
- **Latent function** = unrecognized and unintended function that also benefits society
- Ex: manifest function is the education system = teach literature so that the rest of society can survive
- → also has some **latent functions**: elementary and high schools serve as day care services for parents. It keeps kids occupied until they are old enough to work
- → universities keeps kids out of labour work
- → universities function as pre marital backgrounds; where you meet your love!!!!

- He was also aware that not all special patterns are functional and some may be disturb the equilibrium → where the justice system and police will come to restore the equilibrium.

After 1960s, the functionalist perspective took over the ANGLO Canadian Citizens

- Functionalist = conservative
- conflict: values the status no matter how unfair it is

Opposite of functionalist perspective:

- **Conflict perspective** = the negative of the functionalist perspective
- The exact opposite of the functionalist p.
- Values the vision based on inequality and struggles
- This system benefits some people at the expense of others.
- Ex: the 99% of the pop that has money and wants to keep making more while the 1% that are poor and are taking expenses of others.
- They try to understand society and FIGHT social inequalities to make a change.
- C Wright Mills was one of the role models in the conflict perspective and he knew that most important political decisions were made behind closed doors by people of power. DIED @46 before his debate with a senator on live TV.

SUMMARY:

Functionalist: macro level

- Sees the big picture → ex. Looking at a city from a plane
- Therefore, this perspective sees society as a system of interrelated parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the WHOLE pop.
- Each institution set is a guide of rules that binds society together
- A perspective that stresses how our lives are guided by social structures: what you know you're supposed to do already.
- But what frames our behaviour? → our behaviour right now shapes our SOCIAL STRUCTURES
- EX: you're in class and listening to the teacher. If you are faking it, it is even more important because you know what you're doing is wrong and it's expected of you to pay attention

Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton: influencers

- Different social patterns have different functions depending on the person
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- → universities function as pre marital backgrounds; where you meet your love!!!!
- **Ex: latent function: crime→ sets an example of how we should behave in a society**
- Society is made of a bunch of parts that work together to maintain a whole society. This stability is threatened by dysfunctional acts and institutions.

Conflict: macro level

- **Society is characterized by social inequality.** Social arrangements benefit some groups at the expense of others.
- Ex: the 99% of the pop that has money and wants to keep making more while the 1% that are poor and are taking expenses of others.
- Ex: Doug Ford's cuts to education benefits the government but takes the expenses of children learning in classrooms and teachers losing their careers!
- They try to understand society and FIGHT social inequalities to make a change.

Feminist: macro and micro level

- Society is based on patriarchy system of power (macro)
- Men are the ones who possess the greater economic and social privilege than females (micro). Basically, men have more privilege than females. **Economically and socially.**
- Dorothy smith, one of the most famous sociological influencers → realized that womens' experiences have been left out of sociology
- Being left out of sociological research, many concepts of women were still written by men
- She dedicated her life's work to finding a form of sociology based on women!!
- And she did! She overturned the gender inequality in sociological research.

Ex: Women should have the right to abort if they wish because it is their body and no man should have more power over that than the women who are experiencing it.

Symbolic interactionism: micro level→ **specific interactions and finding meaning**

- Society is the sum of people and groups
- Behavior → Learn by interacting with others, our behaviour changes depending on who we are associated with
- How people define a situation becomes the base for how they act afterwards

Ex: social media greatly impacts the way we act and who we will become based on who we follow or watch on those platforms.

SO NOW WE KNOW:

SOCIOLOGY: systematic study of human society and social interaction!!

- Systematic study because they employ research methods

The Sociological Inquiry; The Fallacies of Common Sense and The Principles of Sociological Research

- Anytime we try to make sense of a phenomenon, you theorize and research .

- All of us experience theory and research in our daily lives
- **Ex: body piercing**
- Fashionable and profitable industry
- These people are willing to pay for holes drilled into them
- This is a strange social phenomenon.. WTF is wrong with them
- IT is an addiction, you keep wanting more
- Its an art?

We typically wonder why people do things the way they do and think the way they think

- In everyday theorizing, we might be thinking these people are weird, seeking attention, and harming themselves

→ sociologists look past the level of personalities, they look at the cultural and historical context

Ex; some sociologists might think this is a way to reclaim one's own body

- Other will think its an act of resistance against mainstream ideas of beauty
- Or to break social norms and traditions → signs of rebellion
- Others might use it as a right of passage

There are theories that are more comprehensive and are much more reflective on our everyday theories:

- How scientific theory theory differ from our everyday theorizing

The trapping and fallacies of everyday theorizing:

- 1) **Common sense:** shared understanding, the sense we have in common - the shared sense. It is widespread among people and what everyone knows.

WHY DO WE USE COMMON SENSE?

- because the common sense well known among people, its hard to refute; prove them wrong. Once people believe in one thing, it is hard to change them.
- they don't require much thinking and reflection
- based on very basic reasoning
- its not universally accepted. What is common sense in one country is not the same for others. And common sense of one year will be different 5 years from now.
 - The fact that is widespread among the pop might not always be true.
 - **Common sense notions:**
 - Ex: women are more likely to be raped than men
 - Ex: crime rates have increased over the past 30years
 - Ex: most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by strangers
 - Ex: Living together before marriage increases the chances of your marriage being stable
 - THESE ARE ALL FALSE.
 - Men are more likely to be physically assaulted. Women more for rape. They have equal chances of getting assaulted
 - Crime rates and homicide rates have steadily decreased
 - Sexual assault cases are more common by family members, friends, co workers...

- These couples who tend to live with each other before tend to get divorced
- 2) **False Obviousness**: explanations that seem to be so obvious, people decide no research needs to be done to prove it.
 - *PAUL LAZARFELD: & MERTIN*
 - PAUL LAZARFELD: he conducted research on american soldiers, he identified research methods that we use today....
 - He attended a conference and showed them his fake results before his real ones.
 - Ex: he found that soldiers' morale from the countryside were better than that of soldiers from the cities → obvious to him so he made a conclusion of it.
 - IT IS FALSE.
 - Soldiers morales are hard for everyone, doesn't matter where you come from.
 - LAZARFELD wanted to warn his population that research is important and we need it to confirm.
 - In conclusion: The only obvious thing to this we have to be suspicious of self evident statements because it might not be true....

Prejudice and stereotype:

- **Prejudice**: one has negative attitudes towards another group. This can be directed towards race, social class - the way they look, etc....
- It's a prejudgement
- Prejudice forms stereotypes:
- **Stereotypes** → overgeneralizations about the appearance, behaviour, mindset, or other characteristics
- Ex: guys with long hair, natives, women, men, Canadians, Americans....
- Ex: hippies - we see them as feminin, drug deals, surfers, not hygienic, women beater.
- Ex: men - tough, emotionless, rational people, aggressive, active
- Ex: women - emotional, fragile, bad driver, caring, thoughtful, soft.
- Ex: canadians - apologetic, **polite**, we live in igloos, nice,
- Ex: americans - overweight, rude, selfish, violent, patriotic

To overcome this, we need to understand and identify them to be able to see past this. We should determine the truth of an ideal.

- Mark Twain quotes: false beliefs gets us in trouble

The Principles of Sociological research:

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

Skills for research:

- You need to be curious! This is something we need to work on.
- How do we cultivate/ prepare **curiosity??**

- By cultivating oneself, → ex. Read books, museums, movie theatres,
- Literature provides and illustrates sociological concepts.
- Travel: stimulates the sociological imagination, to learn more about others and about ourselves. We become more aware of our surroundings.
- We can learn from people whose way of life is different than ours. Don't be too quick to judge. Ex: old woman with coconuts and fruit cakes
- **money is not the most important thing, it is to make connections with others.
- Social marginality: being an outsider and excluded from society. the more acute of one's social marginality is, they can notice social pattern in the society. Step back of routine.

→ Benefit of being a minority: you can see things that not everyone can see. You can become a goth and see how people will view you.

- Social change/social crisis: people realize the life that they live and want to make a change. To better our society.
- Critical Outlook: greek → krino → separate things out/sort
- We do this to put things into question, we must cultivate doubt.
- To be critical, we must put ourselves under the test. Ask why our method is better than the other alternatives.
- Ex: CIDA did projects in Africa - water project.
- Women of the river. They knew that running water meant being stuck in the house 24 hours. The only way the women ever got to see their friends was at the river - outside the village. Yes, it is a long way from the house, but the women enjoyed it. They were not resisting technological change, they were resisting the unfi gender roles.
- These researchers were not thinking critical enough and did not weigh all the pros and cons. → this is why their project more or less failed.

MIDTERM 1 REVIEW

- A) definitions
- → 4 questions worth 9 points
- → some will require examples
- → no additional marks if we answer something not in the question
- Ex: what is prejudice and what is a stereotype? Provide an example of a stereotype.
- B) short essay questions
- Out of 60 points

Short essay:

- Choose 2 of three questions to answer
- These are questions of comprehension and understanding
- Ex: list the main assumptions of the functionalist, conflict, feminist, and symbolic interactionist perspectives about society. Using examples, describe how each perspective would view a contemporary issues.

- List the main assumptions about the nature of society. What are the things they take for granted. THEY ARE ALL DIFF.
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- Examples: could be 4 different examples or 1 example viewed differently 4 ways. USE RELEVANT EXAMPLES.
- Contemporary issue: show a