



# Sociology

# What is Sociology?

- The social science discipline that looks at the development and structure of human society and how it works (Transitions in Society, Challenge and Change)
- Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. (American Sociological Association)

# Sociology Subject Matter:

- Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, and how people interact within these contexts.
- All human behavior is social so the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob; from organized crime to religious cults; from the divisions of race, gender and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture; and from the sociology of work to the sociology of sports. (ASA)

# The Roles we Play

- We all play certain roles in our society – Social Scientists refer to this as status
- Status is the term used to describe our position within an institution

eg. Markville High School – There are many positions at Markville ranging from teacher, vice-principal, guidance counselor, principal, student and superintendent – **Can you put them in order on the hierarchy?**

# Hierarchy

- Hierarchy is the ranking system used in any particular environment based on authority or power
- Each position or role requires a certain type of expertise which is valued by society
- In order to distinguish between these roles people are expected to dress and act in a certain way
- On any given day we can play many different roles in society – eg. A parent can drive their kids to school and then go to work and teach their students

# Rules, Norms and Values

- Values – Society carries with it a system of values. A particular set of values are assigned to each role. The practitioners of these roles are expected to accept and internalize these values.
- Norms – These are rules set out for a particular role that are considered standard behaviour (eg. Catholic Priests are expected to be celibate)
- Rules – These are developed by cultures based on their system of values

# Deviance

- Deviance – Any behaviour that is different from the societal norm. It is deviant because we, as a society, do not accept it
- Deviance can range from simple eccentricities to behaviour that harms society or is considered disreputable

“We must not say that an action shocks the common conscience because it is criminal, but rather that it is criminal because it shocks the common conscience. We do not reprove (denounce) it because it is a crime, but it is a crime because we reprove it” Emile Durkheim

# Rehabilitation

- Sociology has formed a strong link with the justice system
- A fundamental component of modern imprisonment is rehabilitation, or trying to re-educate and resocialize inmates so that they can grow to accept society's values and norms



Kingston Penitentiary



# Schools of Thought in Sociology

- Sociologists have debated among themselves about the real nature of society
- As societies change and become more diverse sociologists need to consider cultural diversity when considering sociological issues

# Structural-Functionalism

- According to structural-functionalism, each society should provide its members with the fundamental requirements for functioning
- A system must have a way of fulfilling material needs, a system for socializing and educating the young, a way of regulating human reproduction (usually marriage)
- Structural-Functionalists believe their role is to try to explain the role of society's systems in enabling human society to function
- Structural-Functionalists do not concern themselves with change but instead with how society works to meet their needs

# Neo-Marxism

- Based on ideas originally proposed by Karl Marx (1818-1883)
- Marx believed that economic power led to political power. This is the key to understanding societies
- The struggle for economic power means that society is not static but ever-changing – social change is the result of a change made to the economic system
- Therefore, if we want to understand society, we must understand the economic system in place
- Neo-Marxists believe the economic system creates a rich class of owners and a poor class of workers
- They also believe that social institutions (churches, schools, prisons etc.) have been created to perpetuate the division between the powerful and the powerless

# Symbolic Interactionism

- Symbolic Interactionists believe humans have complex brains and little instinctive behaviour
- This means they can interpret for themselves the stimuli they receive in their daily life and attach their own meanings to them
- Eg. One person might pursue fame and fortune while a sibling might dedicate his or her life to charitable work in a developing country
- It is essentially how we as individuals process and interpret what we observe in society, not society's institutions, that form the core of our value system
- For this reason, Symbolic Interactionists focus their research on the human mind rather than on structures in society

# Feminist Theory

- Feminist Theorists focus on sex and gender issues, believing that women have traditionally been disadvantaged in society because men have discriminated against them
- They believe that men have made the decisions in society and that they tend to favour men.

# Liberal Feminism

- *Liberal* (or “Bourgeois”) *Feminism*, in which the claim of women for equal rights is seen in the context of a general opposition to various forms of oppression and discrimination, independently of other political convictions. Liberal feminism tends to emphasise social policy to open up professional, better-paid and prestigious jobs to women and the elimination of laws discriminating against the political, property and social rights of women (encyclopedia of Marxism)

# Marxian Feminism

- Marxian Feminists believe that women's unpaid and undervalued domestic work has made it possible for industrial owners to pay lower wages to male workers.
- They also believe that the continuation of lower paid jobs has enabled the dominant class (the capitalists) to retain their control

# Radical Feminism

- Radical Feminists believe that their natural child bearing role has led to a systematic oppression by men
- They believe they live in a patriarchal society in which men dominate most of the institutions and are so entrenched that women cannot break in to these fields

# Socialist Feminism

- Socialist Feminists try to separate issues of oppression that are the result of the patriarchy which is a result of capitalism

# Inclusionism

- Inclusionists recognized that conflict could take place in a society between ethnic, racial and religious groups as well as between economic classes
- Before WWII, most sociologists took an assimilationist view of race believing the cultural majority would eventually absorb the minority (melting pot)
- In the late 1960s however, changing immigration policies changed all this as large numbers of immigrants moved to places like Canada to live

# Comparison of the Disciplines

Discipline	Main Focus	Methods Listed
Anthropology	The development of the human species and human cultures throughout the world	Living with the cultural group for extended periods; observing rituals and group behaviours
Psychology	Individual behaviour, to discover the underlying triggers or causes of human behaviour	Studying people's feelings, thoughts, and personality development through interviews to determine past influential experiences; conducting animal experiments, believing these will lead to a greater understanding of the human mind
Sociology	How people act in group situations; the development and structure of human society and how it works	Conducting statistical analysis and observation