

THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH PROCESSES

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Welcome To Sociology!!

- ▣ Why is this a sociological (societal) issue rather than just a personal one??
- ▣ C. Wright Mills (1959) described the “sociological imagination” as the ability to see the relationship between *individual experiences* and the *larger society*.

Social Problems: Going *Beyond* the Individual...

- ▣ Social problems require solutions at the societal level, not just the personal level...
- ▣ Other *examples* of social problems??
- ▣ *What about credit card debt?*
- ▣ *What about obesity?*

What is Sociology?

- ▣ _____ = the systematic study of human society and social interaction
- ▣ Society = People who are united by a geographic boundary who share many aspects of a culture (*e.g.*, political system, economy, language).
- ▣ **Examples of societies??**

2 Orientations of Sociology (2 “scopes”)

- ▣ Micro vs. Macro

Development of Sociology

- ▣ What **social** revolution occurred between 1760-1850 in Great Britain, which spread through the rest of W. Europe and the U.S. thereafter??

Development of Sociology....

- ▣ *Industrialization* = the process by which societies are transformed from agricultural economies to manufacturing economies.
- ▣ *Urbanization* = the concentration of humanity into cities rather than in rural areas (includes “suburbs” of today).

Development of Sociology: the Early Thinkers

- ▣ Auguste Comte
- ▣ Harriett Martineau
- ▣ Herbert Spencer
- ▣ Emile Durkheim
- ▣ What were the contributions of EACH of the above??? {Review Text}

Development of Sociology: Early Thinkers...

- Anomie = “without norms” or when norms for behavior are unclear, weak, or absent
- **Durkheim** believed that constraints on the individual's potential are **socially-based**, NOT biologically-based
- Durkheim viewed society as characterized by social structure/stability; change is the exception

Development of Sociology: Early Thinkers...

- ▣ **Karl Marx:** Viewed history of societies as a constant conflict of interests between those w/ wealth & power and those without.

During I.R., M. focused on “class conflict:”

Capitalist class

vs.

Working Class

Development of Sociology: Early Thinkers (Marx)

- ▣ Worker alienation = a feeling of powerlessness from others and oneself
- ▣ What did Marx predict would happen w/ the working class?

Development of Sociology: Early Thinkers

▣ Max Weber

- w. *“The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism”*
- Study of society should be “value free”
- Bureaucracy (an organizational model characterized by a hierarchy of authority, rules, etc.) would dominate social institutions.
- Bureaucracies would determine social relations in society (RATHER than class struggle)

Development of Sociology: Early Thinkers

- ▣ Georg Simmel
 - Micro sociology
 - Group size
 - Dyad
 - Triad
 - *Formal* sociology = the study of social *form*

Sociology Enters the U.S.!

- ▣ University of Chicago – Late 1800's/Early 1900's.
 - ▣ A natural “laboratory.” *WHY?*
 - ▣ Robert Park
 - ▣ G. H. Mead
 - ▣ Jane Addams

{Review contributions of each in text)

Sociology Enters the U.S....

- ▣ Atlanta University (today “Clark Atlanta University”)
 - ▣ Dept. founded by W.E.B. DuBois
 - Created research programs, founded 2 journals, started sociological conferences & published profusely
 - Focused on social problems which result in what he called a “**double consciousness**” = the identity conflict of being black and an American.
 - Noted that Americans claim to promote values of democracy, freedom, and equality but accept racism.

Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- ▣ {Theory = A set of logically-related statements that attempt to describe, explain, & sometimes predict events}
- ▣ In sociology, what are some “events” that theorists would try to explain? (Examples).}

Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- ▣ Why are theories (in general) important??
- ▣ In sociology, we are attempting to examine and make sense of social life....

4 Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

I. _____ Perspectives {aka “functionalism” or “structural- functionalism”}

Key Assumptions

- ▣ Society is a stable, orderly system
- ▣ System is made up of interrelated “social structures” (institutions)
- ▣ Each social structure provides functions (positive consequences) for the whole

Functionalist Perspectives...

▣ Key Terms:

- Social structure = Any stable pattern of social behavior

Examples?

- Social institutions = large-scale social structures designed to meet society's needs

- Examples?

- Functions = positive consequences on the whole system (e.g., society)

- Examples?

Functionalist Perspectives...

- ▣ Talcott Parsons
- ▣ Robert Merton
 - “Manifest functions:” intended & overtly recognized
 - “Latent functions:” unintended or hidden

Consider information technology....

- Recognized that social structures can be *dysfunctional* (threatening adaptability of society).
Examples??

4 Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives *continued...*

II. _____ Perspectives

Key Assumption

- ▣ Society is a continuous, competitive struggle for control over scarce resources, such as???
- ▣ Proponents of this framework:
 - Karl Marx
 - Max Weber
 - Georg Simmel
 - W. E. B. DuBois
 - C. Wright Mills

Conflict Perspectives...

- ▣ C. Wright Mills: claimed a “power elite” exists (a small clique of top corporate, political, & military officials)

Feminist Approach:

Key Assumptions

- ▣ Gender is a key element of social structure and social life
- ▣ We live in a patriarchy = a system of male dominance over women

Conflict Perspectives...

Feminist Approach: (*key assumptions...*)

- ▣ Constraints on women are socially-constructed, rather than biologically-constructed, and that social change is needed for people to develop potential

How does historical change support this view?

- ▣ Society reinforces patriarchy thru traditional socialization

How so??

Contemporary Perspectives...

- ▣ In its original formulations, is **functionalism** “macro” OR “micro?”
- ▣ In its original formulation, is **conflict theory** “macro” OR “micro?”
 - What about the feminist approach?

4 Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives *continued...*

III. _____ Perspectives

- ▣ Society is the sum of interactions of specific individuals and groups
- ▣ The PROCESS of interactions and SYMBOLS are important; symbols give meaning to social interaction{symbol = anything that represents something else}. Examples??
- ▣ Each individual brings her/his own subjective reality to social life

Symbolic interaction occurs when people communicate thru use of symbols (e.g., language, gestures, clothing...)

Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives...

- ▣ Is this framework “micro” OR “macro?”

4 Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives *continued...*

IV. _____ Perspectives: Emerged > WWII

- ▣ Some nations were entering a period of “postindustrialization,” called “postmodern” societies
- ▣ Social life in postmodern societies is characterized & influenced by postindustrialization, consumerism, global communications & info. overload
- ▣ Recognize influence of tech. in shaping social life & also influence of history itself...

Postmodern Perspectives...

- ▣ Key terms
 - Modernity = social patterns reflecting industrialization
 - Postmodernity = social patterns reflecting postindustrialization
- ▣ What kind of society were the early scholars trying to explain (*hint: the I.R.*)??
- ▣ Which societies today would be “postmodern?”
- ▣ Can we explain life today with the 3 original frameworks???
- ▣ Are postmodern perspectives “micro” **OR** “macro”?

Sociological Research!!

- ▣ View **Figure 1.3** on **page 22**; “The Theory and Research Cycle”
- ▣ *“Theory guides research, while research guides theory.”* - Norm Denzin

What is Research?

- ▣ *The process of systematically collecting information for the purpose of testing an existing theory OR generating a new one defines _____*
- ▣ **First sociological study?** _____

2 Orientations to Sociological Research

- I. Quantitative → To objectively understand social patterns thru analysis of _____ data.
 - ▣ A numerical code is assigned to all variables.
Examples:
 - ▣ Statistical analyses can be applied to see how different social categories vary on some behavior or attitude.

2 Orientations to Sociological Research...

II. Qualitative → To subjectively understand social patterns thru analysis of words, gestures, images, themes, with a focus on their_____.

- ▣ *What do we mean by “subjective?”*
- ▣ *What are some topics we could study qualitatively?*

(Examples: consider language use, messages from advertising....)

- ▣ *Which theoretical framework would likely correspond well with a qualitative study?*

Questions to Consider...

Note: In any study, we specifically identify **what varies...**

- ▣ *Which factors “varied” in Durkheim’s study?*
- ▣ *In which orientation to research are we likely to precisely measure the factors that vary??*

Key Terms in Research

- ▣ A concept (or factor) that differs from one case to the next in your study is called a _____.

{Note: In sociology a “case” could be an individual, a group, a school, an organization, a region, a society, etc.}

Examples of variables that you could study??

Key Terms in Research...

- ▣ Any concept (factor) that does NOT vary from one case to the next in your study is called a _____.
- ▣ *Example:* You are interested in how “physical exercise” affects “self-confidence” among 19-year olds.

What *varies*?

What is *constant*?

Key Terms in Research...

- ▣ **Measurement** = the process of determining the value or content of a variable in a specific case.

Note: In the social sciences, measurement can be tricky!!

2 criteria for a good measure of variables:

- ▣ *The extent to which a study (or research instrument) accurately measures what it is supposed to measure is called?? _____.*
- ▣ *The extent to which a study (or research instrument) yields consistent results is called?? _____.*

Research Methods in Sociology

Research methods = specific strategies or techniques for conducting research.

4 research methods

- I. **Survey** = Participants respond to a series of questions or statements to tell us about social / personal life patterns. {Commonly used to study that which is NOT directly observable, e.g., past behavior, as well as current beliefs, opinions, and attitudes}.

2 kinds: *self-administered questionnaire:

*structured interview:

- ▣ *Are surveys “quantitative” OR “qualitative?”*

Surveys...

- ▣ What are “**strengths**” (or advantages) of surveys??
- ▣ What are “**weaknesses**” (or disadvantages) of surveys??
- ▣ Review Text for these.

Research Methods in Sociology...

II. Secondary Analysis of Existing Data = Data are analyzed that were originally collected by another person, group, or agency. *Examples?*

“content analysis” = one type of secondary analysis which involves examination of cultural artifacts OR various forms of communication. *Examples?*

- ▣ *Is secondary analysis “quantitative” OR “qualitative?”*

Secondary Analysis of Existing Data...

- ▣ What are “**strengths**” (or advantages) of secondary analysis (of existing data)??
- ▣ What are “**weaknesses**” (or disadvantages) of secondary analysis (of existing data)??
- ▣ Review Text for these.

Research Methods in Sociology...

III. Field Research = People are observed and/or interviewed in NATURAL settings (to reveal aspects of social life).

Examples of settings?

Ethnography = A type of field research which involves an in-depth study of a group, usually over a long period of time (months or *years!*)

Which theoretical framework would likely guide field research?

- ▣ *Examples of topics to study using field research?*
- ▣ *Is field research “quantitative” OR “qualitative?”*

Field Research...

- ▣ In your opinion, what are “**strengths**” (or advantages) of field research??
- ▣ In your opinion, what are “**weaknesses**” (or disadvantages) of field research??

Research Methods in Sociology...

IV. Experiment = The researcher studies variables under highly-controlled conditions (to learn about processes of social life). (Some variables **are manipulated** by the researcher).

Note: Experiments are the best method to determine if a “*cause and effect*” relationship exists between variables. *WHY?*

2 kinds: *laboratory experiment

*field experiment

- ▣ *Examples of topics to study using an experiment?*
- ▣ *Is the experiment “quantitative” OR “qualitative?”*

Experiments...

- ▣ What are “**strengths**” (or advantages) of experiments??
- ▣ What are “**weaknesses**” (or disadvantages) of experiments??
- ▣ Review Text for these.

Questions to Consider...

- ▣ *Which research method did Durkheim's study of suicide involve??*
- ▣ *Was Durkheim's study quantitative **OR** qualitative?*
- ▣ *How could you study suicide using the **OTHER** orientation?*
- ▣ *Which research method is the **OLDEST**?*
- ▣ *Which research method is the **MOST COMMON** in sociology?*