

SOCIOLOGY

SOCIOLOGICAL DEBATES

Human Behavior: Individual or Society?

Is human behavior shaped more by individual will, interests, and creativity, or by societal constraints and motivations?

Social Order: Consensus or Conflict?

Is the regular, predictable, orderly nature of many social environments the product of consensus or agreement among all participants, or does it result from the domination of particular groups?

Social Organization: Structure or Culture?

Which is more responsible for the organization of social institutions and interactions: cultural elements (such as patterned meanings, values, and norms) or structural elements (such as classes, groups, and roles)?

Society Through Time: Stability or Change?

Are societies relatively fixed, with only periodic moments of change, or are they constantly undergoing transformation, with relatively few moments of stasis?

Level of Analysis: Macro or Micro?

At what level should we examine society? Should we take a macro approach and examine big structures and patterns such as the class system and the totality of shared meanings and beliefs? Or should we take a micro perspective and look at local, moment-to-moment phenomena such as interpersonal interaction? Or should we find a third mezzo (middle) approach by exploring, for example, organizations and institutions?

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

KARL MARX (1818–1883)

German philosopher, political economist, and revolutionary who understood human society and history to be shaped by economic conflict and who launched a scathing attack on the capitalist social and economic order.

KEY CONCEPTS

Mode of Production: How a society produces its existence; includes both means and relations of production.

Means of Production: Characteristic tools and methods (e.g., plow, steam engine, factory system) by which a society produces its goods and services.

Relations of Production: Social relationships under which production takes place; includes property relations, class divisions, and exchange mechanisms.

Base and Superstructure: Society base is its mode of production, which shapes the cultural, legal, and political institutions that constitute its superstructure.

Class: Every existing society is divided into two classes, one that owns the means of production and another that works under the control of the first. Capitalist societies are divided into capital owners (the bourgeoisie) and wage workers (the proletariat). Conflict is inevitable in class-divided societies.

Capitalism: A society characterized by privately owned means of production, production for profit, and a bourgeoisie/proletariat class division. Capitalism contrasts with other class-divided societies such as feudalism and those that rest on slavery. It also contrasts with communism, where means of production are collectively owned, goods and services are produced to meet social needs, and classes do not exist.

Wage Labor: The type of labor distinctive to a capitalist society. Workers are free in that they possess their own capacity for labor and may sell it to whomever they wish. However, this freedom is illusory because to survive workers must sell their labor in exchange for wages and work under the exploitative rule of bourgeois employers.

Surplus Value: Workers under capitalism produce more economic value than they receive as wages; the difference, or surplus value, becomes profit for their employers.

Alienation: Due to capitalist relations of production, workers are estranged: (1) from their products, because they do not own the products of their labor; (2) from their labor, because they do not control their own work activities; (3) from universal human nature, the capacity for free, conscious activity,

because work under capitalism is coercive and meaningless; (4) from other people, because relationships with others are structured by class-based economic exploitation.

Ideology: See *Elements of Society*>Culture>Key Concepts>Ideology.

MAX WEBER (1864–1920)

German historian, economist, and sociologist who helped establish social science methodology, provided general concepts still used in sociological theory and research, and produced important analyses of the development of modern capitalism, of authority structures, and of the major world religions.

KEY CONCEPTS

Ideal Type: An imaginary concept of a social phenomenon that presents the phenomenon only in its abstract, logical form, useful in identifying, comparing, and understanding the causes and consequences of the actual phenomenon.

Verstehen: Meaningful understanding of the subjective meanings of social action to the people involved, gained by researchers through empathy and concrete evidence. Weber believed that understanding the meanings of action, and not just its objective features, is crucial to sociology.

Value Neutrality: Weber believed that social science can help us clarify our ethical values and understand how to act in accordance with them, but that it is neutral because it cannot help us decide which values to hold.

Legitimate Authority: Any form of political rule in which rulers successfully justify their rule on some commonly accepted basis. Weber identified three types: (1) Rational/legal authority rests on belief in the legality of rules and the right of leaders to enact and enforce them; (2) Traditional authority rests on the sanctity of ancient traditions and belief that rulers have been chosen in accordance with them; (3) Charismatic authority rests on devotion to an exceptional individual and the rules that she or he enacts.

Bureaucracy: The form of administration based on rational/legal authority, characterized by impersonal written rules, a hierarchy of positions, a clear distinction between positions and the individuals who hold them, and recruitment on the basis of formal qualifications. Technically superior to other administrative forms because of its speed, precision, predictability, and impersonality.

Protestant Ethic: Early Protestant ethical system including beliefs that individual salvation or damnation is predestined

before birth, that hard work and prosperity are signs of salvation, and that wealth is not to be squandered. This ethic encouraged people to work more than necessary, to reinvest money in their enterprises, to perceive poverty as immoral, and to see workplace discipline as just. According to Weber, this created a fundamental transition in values and practices that helped give rise to modern capitalism.

Iron Cage: An industrial, mechanistic world of rational calculation that is devoid of spirit, fervor, ideals, and great ideas. Weber saw this as the negative side of the modern, Western trajectory of rationalization, whereby social life is increasingly dominated by rational institutions and practices.

EMILE DURKHEIM (1858–1917)

French sociologist who attempted to establish the field as a science, pioneered the early use of statistical analysis in sociology, and contributed important analyses of social structure, social cohesion, and religion.

KEY CONCEPTS

Society sui generis: Society is its own reality, independent of the individuals who make it up. The Latin *sui generis* means "of its own kind."

Social Fact: The truths a society shares that have an existence independent of individual manifestations and that are capable of exerting external constraints on individuals.

Social Solidarity: The forces that hold a society or other collectivity together as a cohesive group.

Mechanical Solidarity: Solidarity based on similarity in peoples' roles, which leads to shared identities and a collective conscience that unite them as a whole. Found in small, simple societies.

Organic Solidarity: Solidarity based on an extensive division of labor and interdependence among differently specialized individuals and groups. Found in large, complex societies.

Collective Conscience: Beliefs, values, symbols, and ideas that are shared throughout a group or society and that contribute a sense of common identity, history, and purpose. Central to social cohesion in societies with mechanical solidarity.

Anomie: Without norms or laws. A condition of societies and groups with norms too weak to give their members a sense of community limits, purpose, and belonging. An abnormal condition that can lead to widespread uncertainty, unhappiness, and social disorder.

CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

FUNCTIONALIST THEORY

Views society as a system of interrelated and cooperating parts. Some functionalists compare society to a living organism: Just as the heart pumps blood and the lungs take in oxygen, different social institutions perform various tasks that are vital to society's survival. Many assume that these components function harmoniously to sustain societal viability and progress; if a part is not beneficial it will disappear. Others allow that some aspects of society are destructive. Important functionalists: **Auguste Comte** (1798–1857), **Herbert Spencer** (1820–1903), **Emile Durkheim**, **Talcott Parsons** (1902–1979), **Robert Merton** (1910–).

KEY CONCEPTS

Functional Prerequisites: Needs that all societies have and must meet in order to survive. Some examples: communication, social control, provision for sexual reproduction.

Function: Consequences of an institution or practice that are beneficial or essential to the social system.

Dysfunction: Consequences of an institution or practice that are destructive to the social system. It may be that these institutions and practices were once beneficial, but social change altered their effects.

Manifest Function: The intended and/or obvious function of a social institution or practice.

Latent Function: The unintended and/or hidden function of a social institution or practice.

CONFLICT THEORY

Includes a variety of theories that emphasize social division rather than unity. Society is divided into a number of groups with different resources, power, and prestige that often exploit and struggle with one other. Different theorists focus on different group divisions. This approach has three sources: (1) reaction against functionalism's over-emphasis of social harmony; (2) continuation of Marx's and Weber's focus on division, inequality, and conflict; (3) newer studies of social differences such as gender and ethnicity.

KEY CONCEPTS

Conflict: The social interaction in which participating individuals and/or groups all seek, but cannot all achieve, the same goal. Goals can include control of scarce resources and power over others. Conflict may be contrasted with cooperation, the interaction in which individuals or groups work together to achieve common goals. Competition is an orderly, rule-governed form of conflict.

Power: Conflict theorists believe that power is present in all social relationships. Three important sociological definitions of power: (1) the probability that a social actor (individual or group) will be able to carry out its will regardless of resistance (Weber); (2) the capacity of social structure and culture to shape human action, leaving actors little control; (3) the capacity of actors to alter the natural and social world.

Domination: Power exerted systematically and continuously by one individual or group over another.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, DRAMATURGY

Symbolic interactionism focuses on people's active construction and use of symbols and meanings to interact with their environments and with others. Prominent theorists include **George Herbert Mead** (1863–1931), **Charles Horton Cooley** (1864–1929), and **Herbert Blumer** (1900–1987). The Dramaturgical approach, a variant developed by **Erving Goffman** (1922–1982), employs theatrical metaphors to describe social interactions as dramatic presentations in which people attempt to manage others' impressions of themselves. (Another variant is **Ethnomethodology**, developed by **Harold Garfinkel** (1917–). It focuses on the joint creation and use of taken-for-granted assumptions and rules that people bring to social interactions.)

KEY CONCEPTS

Social Construction of Reality: Individuals and groups jointly define reality through social interactions. These definitions, not any objective realities, shape our perceptions, feelings, and behaviors.

Definition of the Situation: The understanding of what is going on that each individual or group brings to a social interaction. Though definitions of a situation might differ initially, features of the setting and continued interaction may help bring them into alignment.

“SOCIETY DOES NOT CONSIST OF INDIVIDUALS BUT EXPRESSES THE SUM OF INTERRELATIONS, THE RELATIONS WITHIN WHICH THESE INDIVIDUALS STAND.”

KARL MARX

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY, RATIONAL CHOICE

Assumes: (1) individuals try to interact so as to maximize rewards and minimize costs, where rewards and costs involve resources, esteem, prestige, and power; (2) all social interactions are structured by reciprocity, or the giving and receiving of equivalent values; and (3) people act rationally and on the basis of past experience. Exchange theorists believe that all social interactions and institutions can be understood in terms of the exchange and balancing of rewards and costs. Exchange theory is identified with **George Homans** (1910–1989) and **Peter Blau** (1918–).

FORMAL SOCIOLOGY

Focuses on the forms, or recurring and abstract patterns, of social groups and interactions rather than on their varying contents. **Georg Simmel** (1858–1918), a founder of this approach, analyzed the properties and implications of group size and divisions. Contemporary network theorists map out networks of relationships among social actors; they see institutions and interactions as products of these networks' formal characteristics, such as density and pattern of relationships. See *Elements of Society*>*Social Structure*>*Key Concepts*>*Social Tie, Network*.

ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY

CULTURE

The symbols, values, material artifacts, and rules of behavior that a society or group collectively creates and uses.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Durkheim, Functionalist Theory

- Culture provides collective conscience, social solidarity, and social control.
- Culture is widely shared; it creates and reflects social harmony.

Marx, Conflict Theory

- Culture creates and gives meaning to social divisions and conflicts.
- Dominant culture reflects the lives and interests of dominant groups.
- Culture is an element of a society's superstructure, shaped by its base. (Marx only)

Weber

- Whether culture creates unity or conflict is an empirical question.
- Interests are most important in shaping social life, but culture can play an important role in certain instances.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Culture is understood as the patterns, rules, and meanings of social interaction; these are the foundation of all social order.

KEY CONCEPTS

Symbol: A sign that represents one or more meanings. Signs and meanings are linked by social convention. Examples: language, gestures, and art.

Language: A rule-governed system of communication using vocal and written symbols (words) that have common meanings among all members of a linguistic group.

Values: Socially created ideas about what is desirable and worthwhile in life, which may guide people's goals, choices, and judgments.

Norms: Standards or codes of behavior, including expectations and obligations, that are specific to particular social settings. Examples: manners, customs, and laws. Fulfilling or violating norms often results in positive or negative sanctions.

Material culture: Material culture includes physical artifacts (e.g., adornments, buildings, and weapons) and the ways that societies produce and use them.

Subculture: A system of norms, material artifacts, and other cultural elements shared by a minority of people within a society that distinguishes the minority from the rest. Subcultures are often seen as dominated by their parent cultures.

Cultural Capital: Cultural elements such as knowledge or taste used as a form of wealth, often to distinguish oneself from others and gain access to elite circles and opportunities. Seen as a means by which inequalities are maintained alongside formally equal opportunity.

Cultural Universals: Elements common to all cultures or societies, though they may take different forms in different societies. Examples: funeral rights, cooperative work.

Cultural Relativism: The position that there are no universal cultural values or ideas. A culture can only be understood on its own terms, not from the perspectives of other cultures.

Ethnocentrism: A tendency to judge all cultures in terms of one's own; a belief that one's own culture is morally, intellectually, and/or aesthetically superior to all others.

Ideology: A system of ideas and values that justifies a particular political or social program. Conflict theory definition: A system of ideas and values that justifies one group's subordination of another by presenting a distorted view of reality that conceals power imbalances and reflects only the experiences of the powerful.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

A society's enduring overall framework of elements and relationships, in which any given individual or group has a particular location or set of locations that shapes their behaviors and opportunities.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Marx

- Social structure consists of a hierarchy of classes.
- Relationships between classes are characterized by domination, exploitation, and conflict.

Functionalism

- Social structure consists of statuses, roles, and social institutions.
- Each element of structure performs some function in the overall social system.

Conflict Theory

- Social structure is comprised of a number of hierarchies among different groups defined by class, social status, ethnicity, and gender, among others.
- Group relationships are characterized by domination, exploitation, and conflict.

Formal Sociology

- Social structure is comprised of individuals, groups, and other social entities, and of the networks of social ties between them.

KEY CONCEPTS: MULTIPLE APPROACHES

Division of Labor: A social process whereby productive activities become separated into different specialized tasks.

Social Division of Labor: Society's total activities are differentiated into specialized occupations and institutions.

Technical Division of Labor: Specialization of tasks within a work setting, often at the command of owners seeking increased efficiency.

KEY CONCEPTS: FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

Social Status: A relatively fixed position in society associated with particular rights, obligations, and a certain level of honor. See *Role*.

Ascribed Status: A social status such as sex or age that one cannot voluntarily change.

Achieved Status: A social status gained through voluntary action or achievement, or the lack thereof. Examples: the status of a college drop out, army officer, wife.

Master Status: The most prominent of all the statuses an individual holds, affecting his or her rights, obligations, and prestige in every context.

Role: The obligations, rights, and expected behaviors attached to a specific social status. Contrast with *Social Interaction*>*Key Concepts*>*Symbolic Interactionism*>*Roles*.

Role Conflict: The situation in which a person with two or more roles finds that the roles' expected behaviors and attitudes do not mesh well.

Social Institution: An established and cohesive set of standardized and rule-governed behaviors. According to functionalist theory, some social institutions are essential because they fulfill functional prerequisites. Other theorists deny that any institution is essential.

KEY CONCEPTS: MARXISM, WEBER, AND CONFLICT THEORY

Social Class: (1) Marx, Conflict Theory: See *Classical Sociological Thinkers*>*Karl Marx*>*Key Concepts*>*Class*. (2) Weber, Social Stratification and Mobility research: A set of hierarchical categories that distinguish people based on their economic income, wealth, and, sometimes, occupational and educational status. In this definition class relations do not necessarily entail domination or conflict.

KEY CONCEPTS: FORMAL SOCIOLOGY

Group: A collectivity of individuals, bound by membership criteria, that interact and shares some values, norms, and symbols. Differs from a social category, which includes all individuals who share a social characteristic but don't necessarily interact.

Dyad: A group of two. Because they are destroyed if only one person departs, dyads require high levels of social interaction. They can provide more emotional sustenance than other groups.

Triad: A group of three. Two of the three members often come together and exclude the third. The third may act as a mediator or dividing wedge between the other two.

Social Tie: A link between two individuals, groups, or other social entities, which may transmit resources, prestige, or meanings. Examples: Individuals may be tied by friendship; businesses by transactions; books by having the same publisher.

Social Network: A set of actors or entities and of all the ties between them, where ties involve a specific type of relationship.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The process in which people act toward and respond to each other. Encounters may be face-to-face, or they may be more enduring and complex.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy

- Interaction is mediated by symbols and meanings.
- Participants in an interaction actively create and interpret these symbols and meanings.

Exchange Theory and Rational Choice

- Interaction is mediated by the exchange of resources, esteem, prestige, and power.
- Interaction participants actively try to maximize their rewards and minimize costs.

KEY CONCEPTS: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, DRAMATURGY

Gesture: One act in an ongoing interaction among several participants. George Herbert Mead distinguishes two types. **Non-significant gestures** include automatic reflexes such as breathing or blinking. **Significant gestures** include actions perceived as intentional; interaction participants try to interpret their intentions before responding to them.

Roles: Expectations about how people will behave in interactions that endure over time and across different situations. Such expectations make interaction more smooth and predictable. Contrast with *Social Structure*>*Key Concepts*>*Functionalist Approach*>*Role*.

Taking the Role of the Other: Imaginatively putting oneself in another's situation. Mead claims this is necessary in attaching meanings to others' gestures and anticipating their future actions, and is thus essential to all social interaction.

Impression Management: Interaction participants' attempts to control the impressions about themselves that others receive so that they appear to have a particular role or status or simply appear in a favorable light. (Dramaturgy)

Front Stage and Back Stage: Two socially defined regions in which interaction occurs. The front stage is where impression management takes place; the back stage is where participants may relax and prepare for the next performance. (Dramaturgy)

SOCIALIZATION

The process by which people learn the culture and social skills of their society and of their particular social location. Socialization takes place throughout life, though many theories focus on infants and children.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Symbolic Interactionism

- Focuses on emergence of the self through social interaction.
- Mead's stages of development of the self: (1) Young children have no sense of self and only interact by imitating others; (2) In play, older children learn to take the role of the other,

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

especially of significant others; (3) School-age children play organized games through which they acquire a concept of the generalized other. By assuming the role of the generalized other, they develop cohesive adult selves.

Functionalist Theory

- Focuses on the process in which individuals become: (1) integrated into society by internalizing its shared values and norms, and (2) differentiated into particular social roles.
- Socialization is a functional prerequisite of all societies.

Conflict Theory

- Sees socialization as a process in which individuals are assigned to different, unequal, and competing groups.
- Socialization plays a key role in maintaining the dominance of the powerful.

Accounts of Childhood Development

- Focuses on how infants develop into competent members of society and develop their own unique, personal characteristics.
- Sociologists rely on psychological theories of the different stages individuals pass through in the process of socialization. Important theories include those developed by **Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939), **Jean Piaget** (1896–1980), **Lawrence Kohlberg** (1927–1987), and **Erik Erikson** (1902–1994).

KEY CONCEPTS

Nature/Nurture Debate: Debate over whether human behavior is dictated by biology ("nature"; genes and instincts) or shaped by social factors such as culture, structure, and

socialization ("nurture"). Most sociologists take the latter view.

Over-socialized Concept of Man: The critique that some theories (Durkheim, Functionalism) overstate the degree to which individuals internalize societal norms and depict individuals as having no capacity for creative action.

KEY CONCEPTS: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Self: Our self-awareness and sense of who we are, which first emerges out of our interactions with others during childhood.

Looking-Glass Self: The understanding of the self as a product of our perceptions of how other people view us; others are a mirror in which the self takes shape. (Cooley)

Primary and Secondary Groups: Primary groups are small and relations are regular, face-to-face, and personal; they play a significant role in socialization. Secondary groups are larger and more impersonal; interaction is not as regular, and is usually undertaken to achieve specific goals rather than for its own sake. (Cooley)

Significant Others: Other people who play large roles in the lives of children and whose roles children take on in play. (Mead)

Generalized Other: An abstract concept of others as a group. By taking the role of the generalized other the individual develops a unitary sense of self and internalizes societal attitudes and behaviors. (Mead)

Play and Games: In play the child takes on the role of one other actor at a time. Games require the ability to take on and respond to many different roles. Through taking on multiple roles in games, the child forms a concept of the generalized other. (Mead)

TOPICS IN SOCIOLOGY

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND MOBILITY

KEY CONCEPTS

Social Stratification: The division and hierarchical ranking of people into layers associated with different degrees of command over material resources, power, and prestige. Divisions upon which stratification may be based include:

- **Income and Wealth:** Closely related to occupational and educational status.
- **Race or Ethnicity:** Many sociologists believe that racial categories are false and refer to ethnic differences instead. **Race** is a socially constructed set of distinctions that categorize people on the basis of biological characteristics. **Ethnicity** is a way of categorizing people on the basis of their shared cultural, linguistic, or national identities.
- **Gender:** The set of socially constructed meanings, practices, norms, skills, and other characteristics ascribed to people on the basis of biological sex.
- **Age:** In many societies, power, prestige, rights, and obligations are assigned to people on the basis of their age.

Stratification System: A specific set of relationships between stratified groups in a society. Most complex societies have several intersecting stratification systems. Sociologists have identified four major types:

- **Slavery:** Stratification system in which some people own others as their property and control their activities. People become slaves through birth, military defeat, or debt.
- **Caste:** Stratification system in which people are assigned to the social group (caste) of their parents. Their affiliation entails specific rights and duties and determines their life-style, occupational choices, wealth, and prestige.
- **Estate:** Stratification system based on legal and customary distinctions between a group that possesses land and power by virtue of noble birth, and a group that works for the first group in exchange for land and protection.
- **Class:** See *Classical Sociological Thinkers>Karl Marx>Class and Elements of Society>Social Structure>Key Concepts: Marxism, Weber, and Conflict Theory>Social Class*.

Social Mobility: The movement of individuals or groups up and down stratification hierarchies. Mobility depends on type of stratification: It is quite rare under slavery and more common under class systems.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Marx

- See *Classical Sociological Thinkers>Karl Marx>Key Concepts>Class*.

Weber

- Society is stratified by class, status hierarchies, political affiliations, and other designations.

Functionalist Theory

- Stratification systems reflect values shared throughout society.
- Stratification and inequality serve a positive function by ensuring that the most important roles are performed by the most qualified people.

Conflict Theory

- Contemporary societies are stratified by class, status, ethnicity, gender, and other divisions.
- Stratification systems involve domination and exploitation of some groups by others.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Focuses on face-to-face interactions in stratified societies and groups.

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Social institutions are established or standardized patterns of rule-governed behavior. They include the family, education, religion, and economic and political institutions.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Marx

- Social institutions are determined by their society's mode of production.
- Social institutions serve to maintain the power of the dominant class.

Weber

- Social institutions are interdependent but no single institution determines the rest.
- The causes and consequences of social institutions cannot be assumed in advance.

Durkheim

- Set the stage for later functionalist analyses of institutions by concluding that religion promotes social solidarity and collective conscience.

Functionalist Theory

- The social institutions listed in this section (along with other social institutions) fulfill functional prerequisites and are essential.

Conflict Theory

- Social institutions tend to reinforce inequalities and uphold the power of dominant groups.
- Emphasizes divisions and conflicts within social institutions.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Focuses on interactions and other symbolic communications within social institutions.

1. THE FAMILY: A socially defined set of relationships between at least two people related by birth, marriage, adoption, or, in some definitions, longstanding ties of intimacy.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do families vary across different societies, historical periods, classes, and ethnic groups?
- How are authority, resources, and work distributed within families?
- How do parents, particularly mothers, balance the demands of work and family?
- What are the causes and effects of divorce, domestic violence, and single parenting?

NOTES

Functionalist Theory: Functions of the family include socializing children, regulating sexual behavior and reproduction, distributing resources, providing social support.

Marx: The family upholds the capitalist economic order by ensuring the reproduction of the working class and by maintaining housewives as a reserve labor force.

2. EDUCATION: A formal process in which knowledge, skills, and values are systematically transmitted from one individual or group to another.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do educational practices vary across different societies and historical periods?
- How does education affect individuals' subsequent activities and achievements?
- What are the effects of class, race, and gender on educational institutions and experiences?
- What are the causes and consequences of various trends in education, such as grade inflation, violence in schools, and increasing public funding of religious instruction?

NOTES

Marx: Education serves the capitalist order by producing skilled workers with habits such as punctuality and respect for authority.

Functionalist Theory: Functions of education include transmitting shared values and beliefs, transmitting specific knowledge and skills, sorting individuals based on skill, and establishing social control over youths.

Conflict Theory: Educational tracking systems and other differential treatment of students reinforce social inequalities.

Symbolic Interactionism: Face-to-face interactions in the classroom can have long-range consequences for students' educational achievements.

3. RELIGION: A unified system of beliefs and practices pertaining to the supernatural and to norms about the right way to live that is shared by a group of believers. Sociologists treat religion as a social rather than supernatural phenomenon.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do the world religions differ? How are they similar?
- How have religions developed and changed, and why do people engage with them?
- What is the relationship between religion and other aspects of social life such as stratification, deviance, and conflict?
- What are the causes and consequences of contemporary trends such as secularization, the splintering of religious groups, and shifting church-state relationships?

NOTES

Marx: Religion is the "opium of the people"—it masks domination and diverts workers from rebelling against exploitation.

Weber: Classified religions by their approach to salvation.

- Ascetic religions require active self-mastery; mystical religions require passive contemplation.
- Other-worldly religions require focus on the next life (e.g., heaven); this-worldly religions require focus on earthly life.

Durkheim: Religion provides social solidarity and collective conscience; it expresses and celebrates the force of society over the individual.

Functionalist Theory: Functions of religion include providing meaning for life, reinforcing social norms, strengthening social bonds, and marking status changes (e.g., marriage). Dysfunctions, according to some, include justifying persecution.

4. ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS: Sociologists understand the economy as the set of arrangements by which a society produces, distributes, and consumes goods, services, and other resources.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What institutions and relations characterize different economic systems (e.g., capitalism, socialism, and feudalism)?
- How do consumption and leisure patterns differ among various cultures, historical periods, and social groups?

- How do the structures of business organizations affect productivity, job satisfaction, and inequalities?
- What are the causes and consequences of contemporary trends such as economic liberalization, declining unionization, and increased consumer debt?

NOTES

Marx: Economic organization (the means and relations of production) determines the major features of any society.

Functionalist Theory: Functions of economic institutions include: production and distribution of goods, assignment of individuals to different social roles such as occupations.

5. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: Institutions that pertain to the governance of a society, its formal distribution of authority, its use of force, and its relationships to other societies and political units. The state, an important political institution in modern societies, is the apparatus of governance over a particular territory.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do political institutions differ across historical periods and societies?
- How do different social groups participate in political institutions, and with what consequences?
- How and why do individuals participate in political processes such as voting or joining lobbying groups?
- How are political institutions related to other aspects of society, such as the economy and the mass media?

NOTES

Weber: Defines the state as an authority that maintains a monopoly on the use of violence in its territory. See *Classical Sociological Thinkers*>Max Weber>Key Concepts>Legitimate Authority.

Functionalist Theory: Functions of political institutions include protection from external enemies, resolving group conflicts, defining societal goals, and strengthening group

identity and norms. Pluralism, a particularly functional type of political institution, entails distribution of power among many groups so no one group can gain control.

Conflict Theory: Pluralism and democracy are illusions that invite the powerless to believe that they have a voice in governance, when in fact their control is quite limited.

DEVIANCE, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND LAW

KEY CONCEPTS

Deviance: Behavior that violates established social norms. Sociologists do not see any act as intrinsically deviant.

Social Control: Social practices and mechanisms that encourage conformity to established norms, prevent deviant behavior, and deal with the repercussions of deviance.

Law: A formal type of social control associated with complex societies; includes a system of rules and sanctions with specialized personnel and institutions to carry them out.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES

Functionalism, Durkheim

- Deviance has positive functions: it provides opportunities for society to reassert common values and norms, and it spurs social change.
- One of the first social thinkers to explain deviance in social rather than biological and psychological terms. (Durkheim only)

Conflict Theory

• Deviance is one aspect of the power, inequality, and conflict that pervade society.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Focuses on how people come to engage in deviant behaviors and assumed deviant identities.
- The labeling of deviants as such strengthens their deviant identities and may encourage further deviant behavior.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Shifts in various aspects of society, including both large-scale transformations in social structure, culture, and institutions and small-scale changes in local meanings and interaction.

GENERAL THEORIES OF LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Historical Materialism: Marx's theory of historical development. Class conflicts produce revolutionary societal transformations that yield higher and higher stages in the development of the mode of production. The last revolution is by the capitalist proletariat against the bourgeoisie, producing a classless communist society.

Rationalization: See *Classical Sociological Thinkers*>Social Theories>Max Weber>Iron Cage. Weber saw the general trajectory of Western society as one in which logic and reason were coming to dominate faith and emotion in most areas of social life.

From Mechanical to Organic Solidarity: See *Classical Sociological Thinkers*>Emile Durkheim. Primitive societies were characterized by mechanical solidarity; as these societies grew they developed complex divisions of labor, giving way to organic solidarity.

From Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft: Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) used these two terms to describe pre-modern and modern societies, respectively. Others argue that elements of both are present in all societies.

Gemeinschaft: Community. Relationships are personal, enduring, and based on kinship or status; individuals are motivated by obligations, customs, and loyalty.

Gesellschaft: Society or association. Relationships are impersonal, contractual, and short-term; individuals are motivated by rational self-interest.

Differentiation: Functionalist **Talcott Parsons** described long-term social change as a process of increasing differentiation among the various elements of society, due to elaboration of the social division of labor and increasing separation of social functions and institutions. Parsons saw differentiation as a form of evolutionary process.

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS

GENERAL APPROACHES

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Sociological research is based on the use of empirical data to substantiate concepts and theories and to test hypotheses.

Empirical Data: Facts we observe, measure, and verify with our senses.

Concept: A simple, abstract construct (idea) that represents some aspect of the world.

Theory: A formal statement that attempts to explain a phenomenon by attributing it to particular relationships among a group of concepts.

Hypothesis: An educated guess or proposition about the relationship between two or more phenomena that is stated in testable form.

SOCIOLOGY: SCIENCE OR INTERPRETATION?

Most sociologists probably find themselves somewhere between these two positions:

Sociology as Science: Sociological research is a systematic method of direct observation of the world, similar to the natural sciences, which produces objective knowledge of social phenomena and, in some cases, general social laws. Associated with variable research.

Interpretive Sociology: Sociological research examines the meanings that actors attach to social phenomena. Meanings are subjective and not governed by universal laws; hence, sociology differs from natural science. Associated with qualitative research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Once the researcher has a question and some concepts and theories, she or he must pick a level of analysis, a time-frame, and a method of gathering data, and decide what type of data analysis will be most appropriate.

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

Unit of Analysis: The specific social entity about which data will be gathered and empirical claims made. Some possible units of analysis: individuals, careers, city birth rates, unionization votes, nations, business establishments.

Cross-sectional Study: Uses data from one time point only.

Longitudinal Study: Uses data gathered at several points in time. Permits conclusions about change.

METHODS OF GATHERING DATA

Surveys: People are asked to respond to a prepared set of questions or statements in either a verbal interview or a written questionnaire.

In-Depth Interviews: People are asked to respond at length to a series of questions posed by the researcher. Questions may be fixed in advance or the interviewer may allow open-ended discussion.

Field Research (Participant Observation): Researchers observe and talk to people in their ordinary settings while sometimes joining in their activities.

Document Study: Data is gathered from documents such as newspaper articles, marriage records, or diaries.

Experiments: A method used to test a specific hypothesis about a cause and effect relationship. An experiment has three steps: (1) measuring the effect variable; (2) exposing the effect variable to the cause variable; and (3) measuring the effect variable again to see if a change has occurred. Any factors that might affect the two variables being measured and that are not part of the causal relationship being tested must be controlled.

VARIABLE ANALYSIS OR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS?

Variable Research: Entails choosing variables to represent relevant concepts, measuring the variables, and analyzing the results. Data is often gathered through surveys; analysis is statistical.

• **Variable:** A concept that can take on more than one value. For example, the variable ethnicity may take on the values African-American, Latino, Asian, etc.

• **Measurement:** The procedure by which the value of a variable is determined in a specific case. For example, one could measure ethnicity by looking at each individual person or by asking each person what their ethnic identification is.

Qualitative Research: Entails selection of questions, concepts, and relevant data sources. Data is often gathered through interviews or field research. Analysis involves identification of categories and patterns in the data and continual reassessment of questions and concepts.

CAUSAL ANALYSIS: A DOMINANT APPROACH

Much sociological research aims at establishing the presence of causal relationships among social phenomena. (The following discussion assumes variable research.)

Causal Analysis: The goal is to establish (or refute) the existence of a causal relationship between two or more variables. To establish causation, the research must demonstrate that: (1) the variables are correlated; (2) the causal variable precedes the effect variable in time; and (3) a change in the causal variable results in a change in the effect variable regardless of changes in other factors. Proving (3) is difficult because of the broad potential for unmeasured spurious or intervening relationships in the social world.

Correlation: Two variables are correlated if they change together. **Positive Correlation:** When the value of one

increases (decreases), the value of the other increases (decreases). **Negative Correlation:** When the value of one increases (decreases), the other decreases (increases).

Spurious Relationship: A false relationship between two variables (A, B). A and B may appear to be causally related, but they are actually affected independently by a third variable (C). For example, suppose that the U.S. cities with the highest number of art museums (A) also have the highest concentrations of smog (B). Does this mean that art causes smog? A more likely explanation is that city size (C) is causally related to both the number of museums and the concentration of smog. **A ← C → B**

Intervening Relationship: A relationship between two variables (A, B) that is dependent on the actions of a third variable (C). For example, suppose that working class students (A) perform poorly on SATs (B). Does this mean that working class students are less intelligent? A more likely explanation is that working class students go to low-quality schools (C). Here a school-quality variable intervenes in the relationship between student social class and SAT score. **A → C → B**

ISSUES IN RESEARCH

The following concerns are relevant to all sociological research:

Reliability: Consistency of observation, such that the same results are obtained each time the observation is repeated.

Validity: There are many types of validity; one important type is construct validity, which addresses the question of whether the researcher is measuring exactly what he or she claims to measure.

Generalizability: Most sociologists can only observe a few of the sociological phenomena about which they wish to make empirical claims, so they generalize from this few to the larger group. The most common way of doing this is to select the smaller group of cases by systematically sampling them from the larger group or population. If the sample represents the population well, conclusions about it are **generalizable**; if not, they are **biased**. Typically, the best way to achieve generalizability is by using a large, randomly selected sample.

Value-free Research and Objectivity: Many believe that sociologists should strive to produce objective, value-free analysis; they should avoid introducing their own values into their research. Others claim that it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to completely suppress their values; values are an important impetus for sociological research.

Research Ethics: Sociologists agree that some research methods can harm or pose risks to participants. For this reason, most sociologists adhere to established guidelines for conducting research in a manner that will reduce risks and conform to widely accepted ethical standards.