

Lecture 1: Introduction to Sociology

1 What is Sociology?

Definition 1: Sociology

Sociology is the systematic study of human action in social context. It involves connections between people as a structure (e.g. between individuals and groups, collective representations, and larger structures that persist over time).

Definition 2: Society

Group of people whose members interact, reside in a definable area, and share a culture.

Definition 3: Culture

A society's shared practices, beliefs, norms, values, etc.

1.1 Structure vs Agency

Foundation of sociology is relationship between social forces (big picture, macro level) vs personal choices (individual, micro level agency).

2 The Sociological Imagination

Definition 4: Sociological Imagination

Cannot understand history of an individual nor society without understanding both.

3 Social construction of reality

- Common knowledge: Taken for granted, relies on tradition, authority, and first hand experience.
- “Reality” varies over time between eras based on varying values, standards and beliefs, so should be challenged.

- “Reality” merges concrete experience (perceptions) and abstract experience (concepts).
- Must recognize that taken-for-granted perspective is not common to everyone and also not natural

4 Distanciation and Epistemology

4.1 Distanciation

- Personal knowledge is valid, but with some limits (i.e. biases)
- Gaining insights with increased social distance is distanciation (Mannheim, 2001).
- World no longer taken for granted.

4.2 Epistemology

- How we know what we know? (methods, validity, scope)
- Agreement reality: what we know inherently from our culture
- Experiential Reality: what we know from our own personal experience.
- Scientific thinking (a way of “knowing”) embraces skepticism, observation based conclusion. Is an iterative method.