

## Individual and Society 2018 (Test 1)

### Lecture 1- Jan 31st

#### **The Sociological Perspective**

- Sociology is the systematic study of human society
- Sociological perspective/imagination: the special point of view of sociology that sees general patterns of society in the lives of particular people (how people are shaped by the social world)
- C. Wright Mills coined the term “sociological imagination”
  - He wanted to see if there existed broader patterns in society
  - He began by looking at job loss—> if one individual loses their job it can be because of a mistake/late/unpleasant it is a “personal trouble” —> doesn't say much about society in general
  - If many people are out of work in a city/province/country, this is unemployment on a grander level, it is a social issue (possible cause is the change in the economy)
  - Another example would be divorce—> divorce rates going up due to increase in secularity, women movement, laws changed
- With the sociological perspective we are trying to see if there is a correlation between personal issues and social issues, is it part of a trend—> “seeing the general in the particular” (looking for general patterns in particular people)
  - The sociological perspective also sets out to “see the strange in the familiar”
    - Study how society shapes our lives, what are the things that are natural to us, are they innate or do we learn them?
    - Example: removing our shoes before entering a home
- **Seeing society in our everyday lives**
  - Personal decisions are greatly influenced by society
  - Childbearing decisions may be influenced by where you live in the world... as well as the time period you are living in—> back then kids were a form of wealth
  - Emile Durkheim is a French scholar from the 1800's—> first person to call himself a sociologist
  - He wanted to know to what extent does your environment affect your personal decisions

- Was there a difference in suicide rates in relation to social factors such as socio-economic status and marital status
- He found that males/protestants/wealthy/unmarried were more likely to commit suicide than females/Jews/Catholics/poor/unmarried
- Explained by social integration: categories of people with strong social ties had low suicide rates, and more individualistic people had high suicide rates (sense of normlessness leads to state of anomie—> lack of social standards)
- **Seeing sociologically: Marginality and crisis**
  - If things are going well for us we do not ask ourselves too many questions about society (ie power balance)
  - People who are on the margins of society see the dents in the social structures because they are experiencing the consequence—> they are aware of social patterns
  - If there is a crisis (recessions, war) we start to question society and use the sociological perspective
- **The global perspective is important for the following reasons**
  - Global perspective: the study of the larger world and our society's place in it—> we can understand ourselves/lives only to the extent that we understand others and the societies in which they live
  - Where we live shapes our lives
  - Societies are increasingly interconnected
  - Helps us to put social problems into perspective
  - Helps us learn about ourselves
- **Applying the sociological perspective (to think more critically)**
  - Helps us assess the truth of “common sense” (this changes, before common sense meant only boys should go to school)
  - Helps us assess both opportunities and constraints
    - We have a say in how we play our cards, but it is society that deals us the hand
  - Empowers us to be active participants in our society
    - The more we understand society, the more we can try to support it or change it
  - Helps us live in a diverse world

Lecture 2/3- Feb 5th-7th

## **Origins of Sociology**

- Originated in Europe in the late 1700's-1800's in France, England & Germany due to 3 major changes
- **The Industrial Revolution**
  - Change from dependence on agriculture to things being operated in factories
  - Workers became part of a large and anonymous labour force—> weakens traditions that guided community life for centuries
  - Birth of capitalism
- **Urbanization**
  - Factories located in major urban centres
  - People are moving into cities to get work and are being pushed off the land (enclosure movement)
  - Landlords fenced off more land for commercial purposes and only animals were needed on the land
  - Many people are living in crowded urban centres—> accumulation of disease and filth, living conditions aren't good, people begin to deal with alcoholism
- **Political change**
  - There were the American and French revolutions that got society shifting their focus from serving the king to democracy
  - Colonialism—> learning about other societies and the ways in which they organize themselves
- **Auguste Comte (1798-1857)**
  - French scholar who coined the term sociology
  - Applied positivism—> this is a scientific approach to knowledge based on facts
  - The goal of sociology was to try and understand how society worked and to share that knowledge with others objectively
  - Believed sociology was a product of 3 stages of historical development. Theological stage (church in the middle ages) , a metaphysical stage (renaissance/enlightenment) and finally a scientific stage (modern physics, chem)
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883)**
  - Doesn't call himself a sociologist but is very important to the ideas of sociology
  - German scholar
  - Developed the concept of social class—> the idea that society is stratified
  - Unlike Comte, he believed people should try and change society, not just understand it

- Saw two classes
  - Bourgeoisie —> owners of means of production
  - Proletariat —> sell their labour (this is unfair, people could give work and not get payed)
- He was afraid of the dehumanization the people in factories must have felt
- Called for a revolution to end class struggle
- **Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)**
  - French scholar, first person to call himself a sociologist and tried to establish sociology as a discipline
  - He didn't want to change society, just understand it
  - He studied “Social Facts” —> marital status, social class, religion, gender
    - Patterned ways of thinking, acting and feeling that exist outside of people but exercise control
    - You can't see these things right away however being from a particular religion for example might exercise control on how you dress, what you value, who you interact with...
- **Harriet Martineau**
  - First woman sociologist
  - Wrote field notes in the US —> went to the deep south to study slavery, was a very strong activist in the abolition movement as well as the protection of women in factories
  - Translated Comte's works to English
- **Nellie McClung**
  - Fought for women's rights in Canada
  - The BNA act did not recognize women as people in the constitution, she was a part of the “Famous Five” (so they could be appointed to senate) and the “Suffragette Movement”
  - Women fought hard for the right to vote in order to vote on prohibition—> reduce domestic violence
- **W.E.B Du Bois**
  - First “person of colour” to receive a doctoral degree from Harvard
  - Founded the Atlanta Sociological Library
  - Concerned about the black community post slavery—> voting, lynching
  - One of the founders of the NAACP, studied discrimination and fought for racial equality
- **Foundations of Sociological Theory**
  - Theory: statement of how and why facts are related

- Theoretical paradigm: set of fundamental assumptions that guides thinking (how to connect the dots)
  1. What should we study? (social structures/institutions)
  2. How do we make sense of the research findings? (social function)

#### - **Structural- Functional Paradigm**

- Macro-level
- Aligns with Comte & Durkheim
- Sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity/stability
- Our body is a complex system that does the same thing—> society is often compared to the body
- Social structure: any relatively stable pattern of social behaviour (families, workplace, classroom)
- Social function: consequence of social structure—> must serve a purpose for society as a whole
- Robert Merton distinguished 3 main functions of social structures
  - Manifest functions
    - Recognized/intended function—> the reason something exists (e.g. schools—> we want you to be literate/have basic knowledge and skills)
  - Latent Functions
    - Unintended & beneficial (e.g. falling in love/friendships in schools)
  - Social dysfunctions
    - Unintended & harmful (e.g. bullying/social exclusion in schools)
- We live in a “Meritocracy”—> society with rewards based on merit (unequal rewards), we are ok with this due to equality of opportunity (education)

#### - **Social-Conflict Paradigm**

- Based on the writings of Karl Marx
- Macro- level
- Society seen as an arena of inequality
- Where social functionalists see harmony, this approach sees constant turmoil/upheaval when digging a little deeper—> inequality in terms of money, power, education & social prestige

- Example: black people in the Jim Crow laws era—> not speaking up due to fear of job loss not because they agree with the functioning of society (functionalists see the superficial harmony)
- Society benefits a few at expense of the majority
- Someone from the social conflict school of thought might ask if everyone actually has equal opportunity, does meritocracy even exist, look to see dropout rates/success rates—> patterns based off of various social facts, going to analyze conflicts (are some people more victimized when it comes to bullying?) what are we teaching? who gets to decide the content that gets taught? They are saying we are being taught to comply, the design of school is to bore you...

#### - **Feminism and Gender Conflict Approaches**

- Both macro & micro level (society as a whole—> patriarchy, people's experiences)
- Grew out of the social conflict approach
- Based on the writings of Karl Marx
- Focused on one main type of inequality- social class
- As the women's rights movement gained power, they said there was inequality based on gender
- Inequalities = socially constructed—> we decide to say men and women are different and then we rank them
- Because this inequality isn't innate it means it can be changed
- They would ask if the experience was the same for both girls and boys in schools—> in the 60's not much attention was paid to girls in schools
- At first as women began to go school it was mostly white women but then in the 70's and 80's schools became more ethnic—> ethnic women said that racial inequality had to become a part of the conversation
- Committed to eliminating gender and racial inequality

#### - **Symbolic- Interaction Paradigm**

- Micro-level—> went right into homes, classrooms... close up focus on social interactions
- They see as society as a product of our everyday interactions—> this means its constantly changing (we talk to other people, watch various forms of media, listening to the radio)
- They believe we shape each other's opinions in our interactions with people
- They are interested in studying how we experience our everyday lives and why things have meaning to us

- If they were studying education they would like to know what the experience of students are, not how society is benefiting as a whole or who is benefiting
- They are also interested in symbols we use to communicate to one another (e.g a grade that we experience subjectively)
- Weber—> wrote the book “Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (successful= the chosen one so the religion promoted hard work)
- **Critiques of paradigms**
  - Structural- Functional
    - Too broad, ignores inequalities (tend to assume that everyone is sharing the same experience and in agreement of how it should go), conflict is ignored (focuses on the ways in which we agree in society)
  - Social- Conflict
    - Too broad (inherently these groups are in conflict with each other, don't look at individuals who get along), ignores shared values (e.g murder), mutual interdependence overlooked, pursues political goals (the sociologists seek to bring social change—> they are biased when conducting research, you are inserting yourself too much in your research)
  - Symbolic- Interaction
    - Ignores larger social structures (e.g studying two students interacting but overlooking their gender)
- Cultural Universal—> a feature that reappears in most societies over time (term used by structural- functionalists), it must serve a purpose if its been around this long

#### Lecture 4- Feb 12th

### **Sociological research**

- **Three frameworks for sociological investigation** (favoring one research orientation over the other)
  - Positivist sociology
    - Comte: the study of society based on scientific observation of social behaviour (what people do)

- We want to look at things that we can measure/observe (e.g studying marriage—> how many people got married/divorce? What age people were at for their first marriage? Studying trends)
- Weber spoke about objectivity in terms of our research—> we don't bring in our own values/beliefs into our research, “value- free”
- Difficult to achieve this “value-free” approach because the work we do is often one we are passionate about
- Interpretive sociology
  - Focuses on the meanings people attach to their social world
  - Not just what people do, but why they do it—> trying to understand the meanings people create in every day lives (qualitative data)
  - Gathered by conducting interviews, going out in the world where people are, participant observations (most similar to symbolic- interactionists)
- Critical sociology
  - The study of society that focuses on the need for social change
  - The focus is on both collecting information and to question the nature in which society functions —> promotion of change
  - Asks morals and political questions
- Positivist —> social-functional, interpretive—> symbolic-interaction, critical—> social conflict
- **Components of sociological research**
  - Concept: a mental construct that represents some part of the world in a simplified form (to label aspects of social life, e.g family, and to categorize people e.g social class)
  - Variables: concept whose values change (e.g upper class/lower class)
    - Operationalization of variables: specify exactly what is to be measured before assigning a value to a variable
    - Statistics (mean, median, mode) also used
  - Reliability: consistency in subject matter—> repeated measurements give the same result
  - Validity: precision in measuring exactly what one intends to measure
  - Correlation: two or more variables change together (e.g education—> income, the more education you have, the more income you have)



- Cause & effect: change in one variable *causes* change in another (e.g.—> social integration is cause of increased suicide rates)
- To be sure of a real cause and effect relationship:
  - Correlation—> make sure variables are connected
  - The independent variable (causes change) precedes the dependent variable (changes) in time
  - That there is no evidence of a spurious correlation (e.g ice cream sales and property crime, increase in fire trucks and firefighter injuries, living together means more divorce (third variable = religiosity)—> they change together but there is no real correlation)
- **Gender & Research: research can be influenced by gender in 5 ways**
  - Androcentricity (focus on male) & Gynocentricity (focus on female)
  - Overgeneralizing
    - Conduct research on one gender and try to generalize it on everyone
  - Gender blindness
    - When we don't think about gender at all
  - Double standards
    - Reflecting our society's behaviour and adding it into our research (e.g teen dating—> slut)
  - Interference
    - There are times when our gender (or age) influences the comfort that our participants have with us—> if we are asking them something embarrassing it could make them uncomfortable
- **Research Ethics: Basic guidelines**
  - Researchers must:
    - Strive to be technically competent and fair-minded
    - Disclose findings in full
    - Protect the safety, rights and privacy of subjects
    - Obtain informed consent
    - Disclose all sources of funding & avoid conflicts of interests (when accepting money from a source)
    - Demonstrate cultural sensitivity
- **Research methods (systematic plan for doing research)**

- Experiment: allows us to look at cause & effect, highly controlled conditions (not often used because there are so many factors that contribute to sociological research. e.g violence & video games)
- Survey: series of statements in a questionnaire/interview (used a lot—> allow us to gather a lot of information in a short period of time)
- Participant observation: systematically observing people while joining in their routine activities
- Analysis of existing sources: re-analyzing data collected by others
- 10 steps in sociological research
  - Select & define topic
  - Review the literature (what else has been said about the topic)
  - Develop key questions
  - Access requirements for study (try and figure out the parameters, what we need to consider)
  - Consider ethical issues (what concerns might there be, bring to an ethics review board to check for risk)
  - Select research method (ideally is chosen on what would be the best method for the kind of research but we usually go with the one we can best afford)
  - Collect data
  - Interpret findings
  - State conclusions
  - Publish findings (go into journal in order to be credible)