

## Sociology Chapter 1: What is Sociology?

- **Sociology:** the study of human behavior in society
- “Sociology is about how we create our identity, but also what sorts of resources we use to construct it.” (4)
- Sociology deals with the struggle between social order and disorder
  - it allows us to answer questions about the way society works through analyzing how institutions (like family and government) sustain social order and how problems (like poverty) make it feel like society is falling apart
  - it's a way of thinking/seeing the world
- **Sociological imagination:** the ability to see the connection between our individual identities and the social contexts (family, friends, institutions) in which we find ourselves
- We constantly hear about bad things plaguing society but at the same time, society is changing. (example: more minorities are owning businesses, more people are going to college even though crime and other things are present)
  - Sociologists see connections between both the good and bad rather than taking a side and are neither optimistic nor pessimistic
- Making comparisons to other countries also helps us in sociology
- Sociology can be studied in general or can be more specific such as “the sociology of \_\_\_”
- Sociologists are involved in creating policies to solve some of the world's most pressing problems (they see problems as analytically complex)
- Sociological perspective is not apolitical, indifferent, or avoidance
- Sociologists believe that no one person can ever see the whole picture though we must look at the larger contexts of a problem
  - We must rely on the views of other sociologists to complete the understanding of the whole picture

### Sociology and Science

- Sociology is a social science: though it is not predictable like science, you can test hypotheses to discern certain things
- There are two types of sociologists:
  - Type 1: Social phenomena (like race and class) can be studied objectively and are as real as natural phenomena, they use quantitative methods (numbers); they study people instead of objects, so scientific methods are different than those of other scientists, and this is why sociology is a social science
  - Type 2: Social phenomena only exists through human interactions and can't be studied objectively, they use qualitative methods (words), rather than other humanities scholars, they study real life instead of art, this is also why sociology is a social science
- The questions sociology poses makes it different from other social sciences
  - For example, psych calls for us to solve our “private troubles” with therapy, while sociologists believe the solution is society
- Sociology is not commonsense because commonsense explanations have no room for variation and in reality, no two people are the same
- Rather than choosing nature or nurture, sociologists believe our behavior is a result of both and finds the connections between the two; both make a person a passive object of larger forces
  - The interaction of these forces is not decisive (settling of the issue); this is the domain of sociology

- Our sociological views are based on the lens through which we see things in their own context and how we shape the contexts of events we participate in
- A sociological view allows you to see that problems are timeless and are a result of history, and allows you to find connections between larger forces and your personal experience; you must understand that history is changeable (we can influence it)
- Mills describes sociology as the connection between biography and history

### **Before Sociology**

- “The questions that animate sociology today... were the founding ideas of the field” (11)
  - Sociology emerged in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - Before the development of sociology, philosophers were questioning the connection between an individual and society because of the Enlightenment Period in which people questioned the established social order
  - John Locke: believed society was formed through rational decisions of free individuals who joined together to form a “social contract”; government solved disagreements and presented peoples’ rights, goods could move freely, and the government would have all the power if it did anything else
  - Jean-Jacques Rousseau: people are good and innocent but private property creates inequality and unhappiness; “general will” would prevent greed and through social life people could be free if they were equal
  - Thomas Jefferson combined these ideas to form the Declaration of Independence; he used Rousseau’s sense of community and Locke’s limited government
  - Mary Wollstonecraft: She believed society needed equality between men and women and called for a change in education; she believed problems are cultural
  - These views/questions were soon dealt with by the field of sociology

### **The Invention of Sociology**

- From 1776-1838 with the American and French Revolutions and Enlightenment, European society changed (monarchies became republics, the industrial revolution emerged making production simpler), etc changed the way people saw the world (this is the shift from Old Regime → New Order)

### **Classical Sociological Thinkers**

- French theorist Aguste Comte came up with the word sociology which to him meant “the scientific study of society”
  - Sociology was grouped into modernism, the notion of evolutionary progress and was thought to challenge tradition, religion, etc
  - Aguste Comte: believed society passed through three stages of development: religious (supernatural forces control the world), metaphysical (abstract ideas and fate control history), and scientific or “positive” stage (events are explained through scientific methods); he believed sociology needed science to explain social facts (the two basic facts were statics (the study of order) and dynamics (the study of the processes of social change)); he also believed sociology would bring social peace (moral focus) and would rule all sciences; it was like a secular religion
  - Alexis de Tocqueville: saw the US as the embodiment of democracy because there was never a past of monarchies; he believed that democracy would enhance or destroy individual liberty (it could make quality of life better or make people feel powerless); he created groups to solve different issues

- Karl Marx: he thought class was the organizing principle of social life; he urged people to turn towards materialism (how people organized society to solve material problems); he turned his beliefs to a political movement when he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* and believed the working class developed capitalism but eventually thought capitalism made people greedy; later wrote *Capital* about how exchange of services and labor is unequal, people need “surplus value” (to work more) to be equal with good exchange and how capitalism is competitive; capitalism would eventually fall apart bc of the gap between rich and poor and would lead to communism (public ownership); he believed this applied to industrial nations
- Emile Durkheim: he wrote *Suicide* about how suicide is social and about the connections of one person to others; he tried to measure integration (connections w/ others) and regulation (individual freedom) when these things failed (he believed too much freedom resulted in suicide), we are held together by solidarity like Rousseau’s “general will” and Comte’s “consensus”; also has roles in discipline, psych, etc. TYPES OF SUICIDE: egoistic (person doesn’t feel connected to the group), anomic (feels like there is no norm when rules of society change drastically), altruistic (cause of too much integration, kill themselves for the group), and fatalistic (people feel like there are too many rules)
  - **Mechanical solidarity:** Emile’s term for traditional society where life is uniform and people are similar (bonded by common culture)
  - **Organic solidarity:** Emile’s term for modern society where people are interdependent bc of the division of labor; they disagree on right vs. wrong but have solidarity due to their dependence on one another
- Max Weber: believed rationality was the foundation of society but it also trapped us in bureaucracy; thought sociology was both interpretive (shows sense of relationships to people involved) and value free (sociologists must use value judgments to select subjects that can be researched and must engage with minds of people being studied); he wrote *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* which compared religious ideas to economic activity (because of Protestant Reformation in Europe) people wanted to be successful as signs they would go to heaven; he began to hate capitalism and thought new social movements would reunify people and he came up w/ terms status (based on what others thought about one’s lifestyle) and party. Class is based on relationship to production and status based on relationship to consumption (traditional to legal forms of authority)
- Georg Simmel: wanted to distinguish sociology from other social sciences and thought the social forms could contain different content and social content could contain different forms; he wanted to know how these different things had distinctive properties (forms are created when people interact with one another for certain purposes and can be the stages societies go through) he did not have a single scheme for all his work, allowing for new, constant comparisons; he focuses on what social conditions make it easier for people to discover themselves (things are both good and evil)

### **Sociology Comes to the US**

- Came to US at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; took ideas from Europe and translated them to American society. These sociologists joined the **canon** (recognized as foundational sociologists)