

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Chapter 1

As you read this chapter, fill in the definitions for each term below. By using these terms in your essays, you can explain difficult concepts more easily.

Society:_____

Sociology:_____

**Sociological
imagination:**_____

**Manifest
function:**_____

**Latent
function:**_____

Broadly speaking, humanities is the study of what “makes us human”. One branch of humanities, the social sciences, is a scientific approach to understanding human society. A **Society** is defined as a group of people who live in the same territory and share a common culture. Economists, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists are all practitioners of social science.

While natural scientists (like biologists or astronomers) focus on understanding how physical materials interact, social scientists focus on how humans interact with each other and with their environment. **Sociology** is the scientific study of how society affects individuals. It uses data, statistics, and interviews to answer a wide variety of questions about human society.

Sociology is relevant because it addresses many aspects of human life. It allows students greater understanding of their own lives, and explores important issues in culture, politics, and the larger world. Sociology majors in college often enter careers as professors, lawyers, politicians, business administrators, and other jobs which require an ability to apply a scientific approach to human problems or issues.

A distinguishing characteristic of sociologists is that they always look to understand how society affects the individual. For example, the famous sociologist Emile Durkheim (1897-1951) wanted to find an answer to the question, “Why do people commit suicide?” As a sociologist, Durkheim was interested in understanding the role that society might play in an individual’s suicide. After researching the suicide rates in European countries, he found that Denmark had an extremely high rate of suicide, compared to England and France. He found that individuals who were well-integrated into the society (defined social roles, wide support network, etc) were less likely to commit suicide. Apparently, English and French citizens felt a greater sense of belonging to their society than the citizens of Denmark, which led to a lower suicide rate. Durkheim’s research helped societies begin to develop policies or programs to

help prevent or lower suicide rates by creating stronger, healthier connections between individuals and the larger society.

Durkheim's study is a classic example of using **Sociological Imagination**--an awareness of the relationship between an individual and society. For example, imagine the last time you watched a football game. Having grown up in a country where American football is an important part of society, you might not be surprised by fans who paint their faces and who cry hysterically when their teams lose. However, imagine for a moment that you are an alien visiting Earth for the first time. Surely, the behavior of football fans would seem strange and extremely interesting. Using your **Sociological Imagination**, you might ask questions to research, such as "Why do individual fans give so much emotional energy to the outcome of a game?" Or, "What social function does playing football serve?"

Such questions might lead you, as a sociologist, to create hypotheses and conduct research to come to a greater understanding of the reasons why football is so popular in the US. Your research, which could include interviewing fans and players, looking at statistics, or collecting surveys, would help you understand both the **manifest** and **latent** functions of football in the US.

A **Manifest Function** is the widely known and accepted role that an institution (in this case, football leagues like the NCAA and NFL) play in a society. Questioning members of an institution is an easy way to discover the manifest function of the society. Members of an institution, such as fans of the Denver Broncos, when questioned as to why they go to football games, might say something like "Because it's a fun game to watch and all my friends go too." In this case, some of the manifest functions of a fan group include being entertained by watching sports, and spending time with friends.

However, all institutions also have **Latent Functions**, which are roles that institutions play in a society that participants are unaware of. For example, several latent function of the NFL involve factors such as demonstrating loyalty to the US government, and providing fans with opportunities to increase their socio-economic status. At first, you might not see these as apparent functions of the NFL. But, adopting **Sociological Imagination** and viewing the NFL an outside researcher, we might find data to support these conclusions.

For example, a researcher would notice immediately that before all NFL football games, fans and players stand and sing the national anthem. This ritual reminds all US citizens present of their loyalty to the US government, and create patriotic sentiment, during which many of the participating fans and players reaffirm their identity as American citizens. In the days following 9/11, for example, sports games featured moments of silence and often featured brief speeches or appearances by politicians or US soldiers, providing a way for US citizens to feel a greater sense of solidarity with each other.

In addition, the NFL sometimes serves as a way for fans to create social networks important to increasing their income. Oftentimes, business people will take clients to "the big game" before or after coming to a major business agreement. Many jobs, from food vendors to sports agents, all rely on leagues like the NFL to create economic opportunities.

In conclusion, sociology gives us the opportunity to understand how society affects individuals. By using our sociological imagination to be aware of the relationship between individuals and society, we can research our society and other societies in a scientific manner to the best of our abilities. Our research will expose both the manifest and latent functions of institutions, and how these functions effect individuals. During this project we will explore further manifest and latent functions, how they effect individuals positively and negatively, and also understand how social identities (such as gender, race, and religion) influence how we are viewed and treated by our society. We will also explore how smaller societies exist within larger societies (for example, Mormon culture within the US culture), and how societies punish or reward members depending on their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

Chapter 2

After reading this chapter, fill in the definitions for each term below.

Functionalism:

Conflict

Theory: _____

Interactionism: _____

All sociologists agree that society has certain effects on individuals. However, sociologists disagree on how to view society itself. These disagreements have led to the development of different “schools” of sociology. **Functionalism** is the view that sees society as a stable organization, in which all institutions play important roles in sustaining and prolonging the life of the society. **Conflict Theory**, on the other hand, sees a society as simply a collection of smaller societies and individuals, all fighting each other for dominance. To understand the difference between these two groups, let’s examine the NFL example again.

When studying people at an NFL game, a functionalist sociologist would ask, “How is this event useful to the survival of this society?” In some ways, the functionalist is like a biologist, because they are seeking to understand the survival value of each element of society. A functionalist sociologist watching an NFL game might conclude that professional football helps US society by encouraging healthy values of physical fitness, by teaching values of hard work to the younger members of society, or by allowing residents of a city to bond together over their shared team. These functions allow the US to have physically fit citizens, to create a culture of hard work that benefits the economy, and to have strong social bonds so that citizens help each other if needed.

It’s important to understand that a functionalist does not argue that all social systems are “good”; rather, they seek to understand what social systems are “useful” to

society. For example, while illegal drug gangs are usually not seen as “good” for society, a functionalist would ask the question, “Drug gangs have existed ever since drugs were illegal...so what makes them ‘useful’ to society?” Some possible answers would include the employment that it gives both to drug criminals, and to the policemen, lawyers, and judges who gain a good deal of work from investigating, arresting, and sentencing drug criminals. While there certainly are ways in which drugs are harmful to society, the functionalist assumes that long-standing institutions such as organized crime must have some usefulness to society, otherwise they would not survive.

In contrast, conflict theorists ask, “How do social elements represent struggles between the smaller groups within this society?” They assume that social behavior is best understood as a constant struggle between groups over power, housing, money, and other important resources. For example, a conflict theorist would not look for the ways in which organized crime was useful to society--instead, they would see organized crime as a struggle between unequal sub-groups of society. A conflict theorist might argue that, for a poor, uneducated person, the benefits of being a criminal outweigh the risks of jail, and organized crime reflects the economic struggle between wealthier members of society (businessmen, police, judges, etc) and the poor.

The struggle that conflict theorists assume exists is not always violent--it can be carried out through politics, negotiations, or simply by one group avoiding another. A conflict theorist watching at NFL game would ask, “How does this game show the struggle between different groups?” They might argue that, because the NFL is governed by extremely wealthy owners, the NFL serves to temporarily distract lower-class citizens from struggling for more power or higher wages.

A conflict theorist might also research how sports are used as a way for the dominant members of society to oppress minority members. For example, the banning of african-american players from Major League Baseball was a way for racist whites to remind US citizens that people of different races should never mix. However, in this case, a conflict theorist would note that Major League Baseball also became a way for an oppressed group to overcome a more powerful group. When Jackie Robinson, an african-american, was given the opportunity to play for a white team by a sympathetic owner, his baseball talent and sportsmanship shamed racist white ballplayers and allowed more black players into the league, thus creating more equality between the races in baseball.

Both functionalists and conflict theorists may use **interactionism**, a focus on non-verbal or symbolic communication. For example, a sociologist might want to learn about non-verbal interactions between members in a subculture of tango dancers. By observing a number of tango “milongas”, or dances, the sociologist would learn that tango dancers do not verbally ask each other to dance. Instead, the “leader” is expected to make eye contact with a “follower” across the dance floor. If the eye contact is returned, the leader nods to affirm the follower’s interest, and the follower nods back to assent. At that point, the leader crosses the floor to the follower and the dance begins. This entire interaction is non-verbal, but by studying it, the sociologist could gain greater understanding of social roles and behaviors than if they simply asked tango dancers to fill out a survey. In conclusion, for both functionalists and conflict

theorists, paying attention to the non-verbal communications and symbols of societies, subcultures, and countercultures can lead to greater understanding.

Chapter 3

After reading this chapter, fill in the definitions for each term below.

Culture: _____

Norms: _____

Sanctions: _____

Subculture: _____

Counterculture: _____

All societies have **culture**, which are a society's values and practices. Culture includes non-material elements like language, knowledge, or religion, but it also includes material elements like clothing, furniture, forms of entertainment, and cars. For example, American culture includes valuing democracy and freedom of religion, and relies heavily on cars for transportation. By contrast, a different society (say, ancient Egypt) valued sun-worship and relied on the Nile river for transportation. Because of these and other differences, we can confidently say that modern America and ancient Egypt have different cultures.

While different societies have different cultures, all societies maintain their cultures by having a set of rules of behavior that members are expected to follow. **Norms** are rules of behavior that develop from a society's values. For example, the US Constitution authorizes the federal government to tax its citizens, reflecting a value of the Founders to provide funds to keep the government running. Thus, paying taxes is a norm for American citizens.¹

Societies make sure that people obey norms by using **Sanctions**, which are simply rewards or punishments for behavior. For example, a US soldier might receive a positive sanction for bravery by being awarded a medal. In contrast, another soldier might be negatively sanctioned by being court-martialed for deserting the battlefield. Sanctions are occurring all the time in smaller ways as well. Getting a high-five from a teacher, or an angry lecture from a parent after doing poorly on a test are other examples of positive or negative sanctions. Getting a facebook 'like' or having a friend refuse to talk to you are also examples of positive or negative sanctions.

All of the above instances are examples of sanctions within a **subculture** which is simply a smaller society within a larger society. A sub-society has its own set of values and behaviors that, while different than the larger society's values and behaviors, do not

¹ Certainly there are some US citizens who object to paying taxes. However, because the wide majority of US citizens pay taxes, we can safely call the paying of taxes a norm, unless of course the majority of Americans change their minds.

conflict with them. For example, lawyers form a subculture within US society. They have a distinctive set of customs, rules, and traditions that are unique from typical US society. One example is the formal language and procedures that lawyers use in the courtroom, which are not used in other areas of US society. If a lawyer needs to break during a trial, they cannot simply stand up and leave. Instead, they must say to the Judge, "Your Honor, I motion for a brief recess", and wait for the judge's approval. Or, a waiter serving a group of investment bankers might be puzzled to overhear a conversation full of references to "derivatives" and "the bear market". Conversely, an investment banker passing by the kitchen might be confused at seeing a chef scream at a helper, "No! Why did you use a chiffonade cut and prepare the steak au tartare instead of sous vide?" The language and behaviors of these two very different groups are understood only by its members. Therefore, they form a sub-culture.

While subcultures have values and practices that differ but do not conflict with the larger society, a **counterculture** is a smaller culture with values and practices that clearly conflict with the larger society. For example, US citizens who refuse to pay taxes are considered members of a counterculture, because their behaviors and values conflict with the mainstream US society. During the Vietnam War, the young men who refused to fight in Vietnam were also considered members of a counterculture. However, it's important to note that a subculture can, over time, become a dominant culture. For example, in the 1740s, any British colonist who argued for independence would have been laughed at or severely punished. However, after the Revolution, anyone who still supported the King was considered a traitor. Therefore, the values of the counterculture quickly became the values of the society.

Reflection Questions

1. Come up with a norm that exist within American society, and the negative sanctions a member receives if they break those norms.

Norm: _____

Negative Sanction: _____

2. What is an example of a subculture in Durango? What are two norms of this subculture?

Subculture in Durango: _____ -

Norm of this subculture: _____

Chapter 4

After reading this chapter, fill in the definitions for each term below.

Social Identity

Socialization:

The Looking Glass self:

One important term to understand is **Social Identity**, which is an outward identity that influences the relationship between the individual and society . There are seven social identities that sociologists agree upon.

Race

Class (economic status)

Gender (male/female/transgendered)

Sexuality (homosexual/heterosexual/bisexual)

Age (infant, teen, elderly, etc)

Religion (Christian, Jewish, atheist, etc)

Able/Disabled (mental or physical handicap)

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are almost always judging each other by our outward appearances, which are called our “social identities”. Social identities often influence how an individual is treated by others.

One popular TV show demonstrated that an african-american boy attempting to pick a bike-lock was repeatedly confronted by passer-by, while a white boy attempting to do the same thing was usually left alone or ignored.² The bike-stealing experiment, along with many studies, show that US citizens still judge each other based on the social identity of race. Why is it that the passer-by were so quick to confront the african-american boy, but not the caucasian boy? Why do social identities (like race) effect how we treat each other?

The answer is **Socialization**, which is the process by which individuals learn the values, behaviors, and beliefs of their society. Socialization can be either explicit or implicit. An example of explicit socialization is a mother telling a child not to touch a hot stove. The teaching is verbal and direct. Implicit socialization is much harder to see,

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qMK-JSXawM>

but is occurring all the time. Today, while the US explicitly teaches that racism is bad, implicit racism is still taught by example.

The reason why passer-by challenged the african-american boy stealing the bike, while not confronting the caucasian boy, was because they had been implicitly socialized to be more suspicious of african-american boys. A disproportionate percentage of african-american youth are jailed in comparison to white youth, and this reality is reflected in popular tv shows, music, and in the interactions that children may observe between the races. For example, the children who watched their parents suspiciously confront the african-american teenager, or the children whose parents ignored the white teenager, were both taught lessons on how to view white or black boys, by the examples of their parents. Explicitly, US citizens are taught that racism no longer exists (often by the example of the election of President Obama, an african-american). While very few people today are explicitly socialized to be racist, implicit socialization on race still continues. One study found that people playing a specialized video-game were more likely to shoot at an unarmed african-american man, while hesitating longer to shoot at an armed caucasian man.³ Clearly, people are still being taught to treat each other differently based on race.

But socialization is more than just how a person is taught behave around others of the same or different race. It also affects how an individual views members of the opposite gender, different religions, and the rest of the seven social identities. So how does socialization actually work?

You may have the idea that you are “yourself”, and that you are fully in control of your thoughts and actions. However, a sociologist would encourage you to consider the possibility that society has had at least some effect on your development as a person, and on your range of behaviors and values. Since the second you were born, you began learning from others how to behave, and, as you grew older, what to believe. In other words, you were being taught values and behaviors. For example, if you are at a party and are introduced to a new person, you might do one of the following behaviors.

- a. Shake their hand and introduce yourself, saying “Pleased to meet you, my name is...”
- b. Give them a high five and say “hi, how’s it going?”

These are both ways of introducing yourself that you may have been socialized to use, by your parents, friends, and society in general. However, it is unlikely that you would introduce yourself to the stranger by kissing them on both cheeks. Why? Because you were not socialized to behave in that way. However, if you had been born in France, you would have done exactly that, because French children are socialized differently on how to introduce themselves. Clearly, even if socialization does not determine all of your behaviors and values, it certainly limits them to a certain range of behaviors.

Similarly, your values (ideas about what are good or bad) have been shaped by society. When, as a young child, you were asked what you wanted to be when you

³ <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/07/15/guest-post-who-would-you-shoot/>

grew up, you might have replied, “Movie star!” or “President!” It is very unlikely that you replied, “Shaman!” (medicine man). This reflects the values of your society, such as valuing entertainment (movie star) or political leadership (president). However, a child in an indigenous south american culture with beliefs in traditional medicine might aspire to be a shaman, because their society values such a role. Similarly, it is unlikely that you ever aspired to be a professional cricket player, while very few Pakistani children aspire to play in the NHL. This is because the US values a sport such as ice hockey far more than cricket, while the reverse is true in Pakistan.

Finally, and most importantly, society can influence not only how you behave, or what you believe, but also, how you see yourself. **The Looking-Glass Self** is the sense of self we develop, based off of how we imagine other people to see us. Sometimes our imagination of how others see us is accurate, other times it may not be; regardless, this theory supposes that we imagine ourselves based off of how we think others see us; therefore, we create our own identities from the feedback (real or illusory) that we perceive from others.



This drawing depicts the looking-glass self. The person at the front of the image is looking into four mirrors, each of which reflects someone else's image of him back to him.

e To give an example, the figure above is imagining himself based off of other's perception of him. He imagined that his dad sees him as a good person, that his girlfriend sees him as attractive, his brother sees him as trustworthy, and his ex-girlfriend sees him as mean. Based on who is around, the figure will think of himself in different ways.

In short, socialization plays a greater role than most of us realize at first in shaping our behaviors and our beliefs. Also, our own social identities influence how we are treated by society. However, it's important to remember that these concepts don't necessarily mean that the individual isn't free to “be themselves”. They simply show

that human values, beliefs, and behaviors are affected by the society in which they live. This chapter isn't mean to say that racism will always exist, or that we have no control over our behaviors, values, or beliefs. Sociologists disagree on how much society affects us, and there is no clear answer. But what is clear is that the more you understand how society influences the individual, the better prepared you are to make your own decisions and choices--the more prepared you are to "be yourself".

Reflection Questions

1. We are often socialized according to our social identities. For example, some young boys in the US are explicitly (clearly and verbally) socialized not to show pain or grief, by the saying "Big boys don't cry." What is one way in which you have been explicitly socialized according to one of your social identities?

2. The Looking Glass self--If you were able to change one of your social categories, do you think it would cause you to think differently about yourself? Why or why not?