

What is sociology?

Chapter 1





Aims of the chapter



1. How to approach studying sociology
2. What sociology is
3. The differences between sociology and commonsense
4. What is meant by sociological thinking
5. The relationship between the individual and society
6. Socialisation and identity formation



Learning objectives



1. How to study sociology, what is meant by active learning, and what examiners will be looking for
2. What sociologists study
3. Some of the key ways that sociology gives us insights that go beyond common understanding
4. What is meant by thinking sociologically and sociologists' interest in social order, social change and the relationship between the individual and society
5. How our identities arise from social relationships
6. What sociologists mean by socialisation and identity, and how Parsons and Mead put forward different explanations of these processes



My objectives



- ◆ To give you an overview of the whole course
- ◆ To explain what is sociology – what are the main points to look for in this chapter
- ◆ To highlight the main points which you need to go in depth and build upon in all sections of the guide book.
- ◆ To explain basic concepts and guide to start thinking critically.



Your objectives



- ◆ To read chapter 1 of the guide book and highlight the major points
- ◆ To cover chapters from the essential reading list and start making your own notes. It is important that you do your own reading as we go along. Do not just follow the lectures in class without working at home.
- ◆ To make sure that you do understand the major concepts covered.
- ◆ Make a list of theories and sociologists mentioned in class and in the subject guide since we will cover these theories in depth throughout this scholastic year – Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons, Mead and Goffman

Introduction

- ♦ What is sociology?
- ♦ What is sociology about?
- ♦ How do sociologists see the world?



Definitions



- ♦ Sociology is about trying to understand the social world, but it is also about trying to understand ourselves, and how societies make us who we are.
- ♦ Sociology is the systematic study of human societies, giving special, but not exclusive emphasis, to modern industrialized societies. (Giddens 2009)

Approaching sociology

Points to keep in mind when writing an exam essay

- ◆ How should you study the subject?
- ◆ To do well in sociology you must be able to
 1. Describe key sociological ideas, theories and studies
 2. Discuss and compare sociological concepts, theories and studies
 3. Apply sociological ideas, theories and studies to different aspects of social life.

Approaching sociology



**Think
about it**

- ◆ The main emphasis in sociology is on testing your thinking abilities rather than your memory.
- ◆ Do not absorb only the information given in class, but apply your knowledge to problems or questions presented.



What is sociology?



- ◆ What is sociology?
- ◆ What do you think sociologists study?
- ◆ How do you think a sociologist's understanding of some aspect of social life would be different from a 'commonsense' understanding?

The sociological imagination

- ◆ Learning to think sociologically means cultivating our imagination i.e. Looking at the broader view.
- ◆ *The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. It is characteristic of Herbert Spencer--turgid, polysyllabic, comprehensive; of E. A. Ross--graceful, muckraking, upright; of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim; of the intricate and subtle Karl Mannheim. It is the quality of all the is intellectually excellent in Karl Marx; it is the clue to Thorstein Veblen's brilliant and ironic insight . . . no less than of the profundity and clarity of Max Weber" (Wright Mills C., *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959, p. 6).*



C. Wright Mills: The Sociological Imagination

Charles Wright Mills (1916-1962) managed to cause a stir with most everything he did. Even arriving for a class at New York's Columbia University-clad in a sweatshirt, jeans, and boots astride his motorcycle-he usually turned some heads. During the conservative 1950s, Mills not only dressed a bit out of the mainstream; he also produced a number of books that challenged most of the beliefs the majority of us take for granted. In the process, he acquired both adherents and adversaries. Mills's approach to the discipline can be summed up in one sentence: A sociological imagination can transform individual lives as it changes society. As Mills saw it, sociology is not some dry enterprise detached from life. Rather, he held up sociology as an escape from the "traps" of our lives because it can show us that society-not our own foibles or failings-is responsible for many of our problems. In this way, Mills maintained, sociology transforms personal problems into political issues.

In the following excerpt* Mills describes the power of society to shape our individual lives: When a society becomes industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both. Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change. . . . The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the society in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kind of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of men and society, of biography and history, of self and world. . . . What they need . . . is a quality of mind that will help them to [see] . . . what is going on in the world and . . . what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality . . . that . . . may be called the sociological imagination. *In this excerpt, Mills uses male pronouns to apply to all people. It is interesting-even ironic-that an outspoken critic of society like Mills reflected the conventional writing practices of his time as far as gender was concerned.

Source: Mills (1959).

Sociological imagination

- ◆ Consider drinking a cup of coffee. What could we find to say from a sociological point of view about such an apparently uninteresting piece of behaviour? A lot.....





The study of social relationships



- ◆ Sociologists are primarily interested in all that happens to people in terms of their relationships with others
- ◆ The word relationship is very important in sociology.
- ◆ All sociology is about relationships of one sort or another: for example, relationships between different societies, between different parts of a society and between individuals and societies.



Study of relationships



section B How did relationships in the world change cause of globalization?

section C How do sociologists describe relationships in organisations?

Social relationships

- ◆ The key idea in all sociological research is that people's lives and behaviour cannot be understood apart from the social contexts in which they participate, directly or indirectly





Social institutions



- ◆ Social relationships are rarely random. Normally they are organised in various ways. Sociologists refer to these patterns of behaviour as social institutions.
- ◆ Society is a complex of many social institutions



Macro and Micro



- ◆ Macro sociology – Analyses large scale social systems and whole societies. Looks at society as systems and how different institutions function to produce particular outcomes.
- ◆ Micro sociology – it is the study of everyday behaviour in face-to-face encounter. Looks at the relationship between individuals and institutions.



Is sociology a science?



- ◆ In chapter three we will look at different approaches to research, and we will discuss whether the same concepts of natural sciences, can be utilised for sociological research.
- ◆ Keep in mind that the subject of sociological research i.e. Social institutions, is cultural rather than natural i.e. Social institutions are produced by the conscious activities of human beings.

Is sociology commonsense?

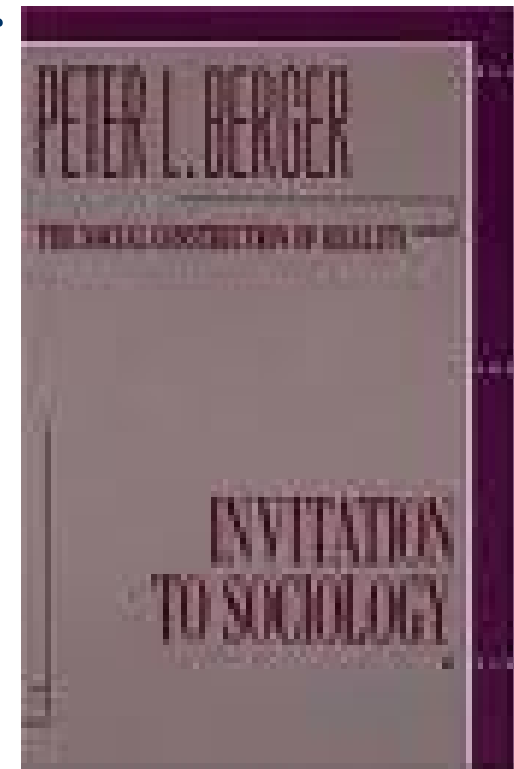
- ◆ How does sociology differ from commonsense?

Sociologists see the world differently and ask different questions about it.

1. Sociologists ask distinct sociological questions
2. Doing research
3. Applying or testing sociological theories

Asking sociological questions

- ◆ Part of the sociologist's art is making the familiar strange – Peter Berger
- ◆ I.e. Look at what you usually
Take for granted and look at it
With the eyes of a stranger or a
tourist



15th July 2010 – news item

Argentina legalizes gay marriages

- ♦ BUENOS AIRES, Argentina – Argentina became the first Latin American nation to legalize gay marriage Thursday, granting same-sex couples all the legal rights, responsibilities and protections that marriage brings to heterosexuals.
- ♦ The law's passage — a priority for President Cristina Fernandez's government — has inspired activists to push for similar laws in other countries, and a wave of gay weddings are expected in Buenos Aires. Some gay business leaders are predicting an economic ripple effect from an increase in tourism among gays and lesbians who will see Argentina as an even more attractive destination.
- ♦ "From today onward, Argentina is a more just and democratic country," said Maria Rachid, president of the Argentine Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender federation. The law "not only recognizes the rights of our families, but also the possibility of having access to health care, to leave a pension, to leave our assets to the people with whom we have shared many years of life, including our children," she said.

Socially defined concepts

- ◆ Therefore, sociologists question some of the things that most people take for granted e.g about crime, homosexuality
- ◆ What is crime?
- ◆ Up till some years ago homosexuality was a crime

Social Order

- ◆ Sociologists are interested in how social order is maintained.
- ◆ E.g. By studying crime, sociologists study what is acceptable and what not to maintain social order.



Socially Defined Concepts

- ♦ Marriage – a unity between a male and a female, now even that is changing to a unity between two partners. Eg Argentina, Belgium, Germany legalised gay marriages





Doing research

- ◆ How would sociologists study crime?
- ◆ Sociologists studying crime have access to much wider sources of information than most people who are dependent on what the media reports.
- ◆ In chapters two and three we will look into different research methods



Thinking sociologically ?



- ◆ Social problems vs sociological problems.

Social vs Sociological problems

A **social problem** is a condition which

Is held to be a threat to the welfare of a society when measured by the value system of its members

Involves a relatively large number of persons and

Is amenable to collective action

Sociological problems, are about how societies, work in the way they do.

Thinking sociologically means being curious about the order of everyday social life, how this order changes and its relationship to the behaviour of individuals.

Origins of sociology

◆ Karl Marx



◆ Durkheim



Max Weber





Origins of sociology



- ◆ Chapter 4 deals with these three main founders of sociology.
- ◆ Other sociologists mentioned are Parsons, Goffman and Mead
- ◆ It is important that all through the course you study these theories and apply them to the subjects in question e.g. Socialization, organizations, globalization, power, religion

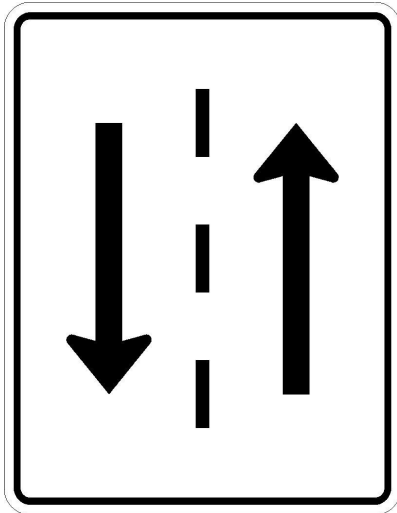


The individual and society



- ◆ The main question is individuals create society, but do societies create individuals?
- ◆ What do you think?
- ◆ This is a very important question to understand some of the main concepts of this course.

The individual and society



- ◆ Therefore thinking sociologically involves seeing the relationship between the individual and society as a two-way, rather than a one way street.

Self and Society

- ◆ Write down ten words you use to describe yourself

1. Maltese
2. Social Worker
3. Female
4. Mother
5. Wife
6. Daughter
7. Chatterbox
8. Approachable
9. stupid



Self and society



- ◆ Social identity
- ◆ Social Roles
- ◆ Personal identity

Self and society

- ♦ Roles – lead to expectations of behaviour. A very important concept in this course – e.g. A priest – expectations how they should behave. What happens when a person does not behave according to his/her role i.e.

According to what is expected of him/ her?



Gender Differences

- ◆ Sociologists have shown that gender has important social dimensions. Different societies place different expectations on males and females.





~Gender Differences~



- ◆ List five ways how your life would be different if you had to be born a man rather than female, and the other way round.
- ◆ Which of these are due to biological causes, and which of them are due to the way in which society is organised ?



Socialisation and identity



Socialization

The various processes through which people learn about, and generally conform, to the norms and values of the social groups in which they live.

Socialisation and identity

◆ Primary



secondary



tertiary



Self and identity



- ◆ It is through socialisation that a person develops a sense of identity



- ◆ Social identity
- ◆ Personal identity



Socialization



- ◆ The role of others
- ◆ The role of the individual
- ◆ Can we change the way we live, where we live, how we live, how we look, what we believe in? How easy it is today?

On stage and off stage

Erving Goffman (1969)

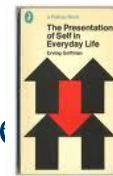
- ◆ Identities are things we consciously manipulate, or present, in given situations.

Goffman states that we are like actors, playing the roles on stage

Like actors we have our time off the stage – e.g. At home –

– There is less deliberate presentation of self and more congruence

Between how we are seen and how we really are.



Read giddens page 268 - 269



Erving Goffman

- ◆ “Essays on the social situation of Mental Patients and other inmates” (1961)

In his study on asylums Goffman wanted “to learn about the social World of the hospital inmate, as this world is subjectively experienced by him.” Goffman believed that a group of persons “develop a life of Their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal, once you Get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is To submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round Of petty contingencies to which they are subject.”



Reading on socialization and identity



- ◆ Fulcher and Scott chapter 4
- ◆ Giddens (2008) pp. 22 –24, pp 163 – 69, and p.238
- ◆ Macionis and Plummer (2005 and 2008 editions) chapter 7

Two theories of socialisation and identity

◆ Talcott Parsons
(1902-1979)



G.H.Mead
(1863 – 1931)



Conclusion

- ◆ Socialisation describes the processes by which people learn social behaviour. It is through socialisation that people develop a sense of social and personal identity, and these identities can change through social interaction.
- ◆ Whereas Parsons saw socialisation arising from internalisation of social norms, Mead suggested it arose primarily from people's ability to take the role of the other.

Summary of main points

- ◆ Sociology is primarily about understanding ideas. You need to be able to i) describe key sociological ideas, theories and studies ii) discuss and compare sociological concepts, theories and studies, apply sociological ideas, theories and studies to different aspects of social life.
- ◆ The key idea in all sociological research is that people's lives and behaviour cannot be understood apart from the social contexts in which they participate, directly or indirectly
- ◆ Sociology is different from commonsense because it involves i) asking distinct sociological questions ii) doing research and iii) applying or testing sociological theories.
- ◆ Sociological problems are about how parts of societies, work in the way they do. Thinking sociologically means being curious about the order of everyday social life, how this order changes and its relationship to the behaviour of individuals.



Summary of main points



- ◆ Origins of Sociology – Marx, Weber and Durkheim
- ◆ The individual and society – Social roles, Personal identity and Social identity
- ◆ Socialisation – three stages
- ◆ Theories of socialisation – Parsons, Mead and Goffman