

Essay Exam #1

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Lecture Exam #1

What is sociology? In what ways is it a science? What are the other social sciences and what do they study?

Sociology was defined by Auguste Comte in 1838 as the study of society. This very basic definition describes a social science that has many components and viewpoints included within it. Sociology seeks to understand how society functions and to explain why trends occur.

Sociology is a science in the sense that its researchers use the scientific method to test their theories. Sociology can be either pure or applied, but primarily tends to be pure, with the applied aspect being left up to the Social Work discipline. Sociology uses a variety of techniques to attempt to answer questions. Like other sciences, Sociology uses research and experiments to attempt to provide evidence for a theory or to provide evidence that will allow a theory to be rejected. One of the primary forms of research in Sociology is the survey. It is quicker, simpler, more uniform and more cost effective than conducting an interview with every subject of a study. Another common form of research is participant observation and field study, which involves watching people in an attempt to establish certain patterns of behavior or to collect demographic information about people who perform some type of behavior in society. A somewhat more distant approach to research in Sociology is the use of secondary analysis, which makes use of someone else's data. The most significant problem with secondary analysis is that if there are any errors in the original data it will be passed on to the new study. Using secondary analysis can eliminate a lot of redundant work in collecting the data, and in the case of census data, it can provide a much larger sample than might be possible for an individual researcher on a limited budget.

The other social sciences are anthropology, economics, history, political science, psychology and social work. Anthropology is the social science that is most closely related to

sociology. Anthropology is the study of human culture. Anthropology seeks to understand culture by analyzing various aspects of humanity including social aspects, physical traits, language and archeology. Archaeology is the study of past human societies. Archeology functions primarily by recovering material culture components, from the beginning of human existence until the beginnings of human literacy. The material cultural components of the past societies allow archeologists to determine what was important in a society and in some ways piece together the culture of a given society.

Economics is the study of the exchange of goods and services. The social science of economics studies the impact of events on economic exchanges and the impact of economic exchanges on the entities involved in the exchange. Economics is primarily broken into two different categories of convenience. The divisions of economics are microeconomics and macroeconomics. Microeconomics focuses on specific entities in economic trade, in the form of the consumers, producers of goods and services and other firms involved in trade. Macroeconomics focuses on the wider spectrum of economics which highlights things such as unemployment, inflation and economic policy.

History is the study of the human past. It is as much of a humanities discipline as it is a social science. The discipline of history is primarily composed of narrative accounts and analysis of historical events. It is the objective of historians to be objective in their study of the past, but it seems as though many ever accomplish that goal. Most historical accounts are slanted or colored by the lens of the modern era and the analysis of events tend to reflect modern thought. Typically the field of history begins its study from the beginning of the written human record and progresses forward to more recent events. History attempts to provide a perspective from which current events can be viewed.

Political Science is the science of human governance. The objective of political science is to construct general principles of how politics function. Much like history, political science uses primary source documents as evidence and as the baseline for study. Some political scientists focus on modern political affairs, while others are a little more broad in their approach and include earlier studies of politics, including those by Plato and Aristotle.

Psychology is the study of the individual. Psychology is most often associated with human behavior and cognition. Sociology and Psychology differ primarily by their focus, with Psychology focusing more on the behavior of the individual and less on the behavior of a group, except in the sub-discipline of Social Psychology which considers the individual's interactions with the society. Psychology is the closest of the social sciences to becoming a pure science, in the form of a "behavioral science".

Social Work involves applied study of society. The objective of social work is to improve the quality of life. Social workers take on the tasks of their field through research, social policy, education and community development.

All of the social sciences have a commonality in their quest to answer questions about humanity. Some do their work in the past (history, anthropology, archeology), while others work with societies a little more current (sociology, psychology, social work, economics). No matter where their inquiry begins, all social sciences seek to help humans better understand themselves.

Explain the theories of Comte and Marx. How did they view the world differently? How are the modern theories of functionalism and conflict theory based on their ideas?

Auguste Comte and Karl Marx were early European sociologists with very different ideas about society. The best way to describe the approaches of these two to a lay person would be an optimist sociologist and a pessimist sociologist. Comte's theories relate to the functioning system of society, based on his interpretation of the sciences of physics and biology and how the basic ideas could be used to work with society. In those theories Comte treated society as a biological organism, having multiple systems that must work together for the overall health of the society. Marx on the other hand did not see structure and organized systems when he viewed society, he instead saw two classes. Those classes, the rich bourgeoisie and the working class proletariat, were constantly in conflict in his theory. It was the belief of Marx that the basic functional state of society was the conflict between the two classes, which in his opinion should result in a major revolt once there was a class level consciousness among the proletariat. Marx believed that the economy was responsible for all functions of society and that all other parts of society existed to serve the needs of the economy. In the world described by Marx's theory, the conflict between the classes would result in the proletariat being successful and taking control of all factors of production, abolishing a capitalist way of life and establishing a more fair system of economics (perhaps communism). In Marx's view the ultimate social reform would be the downfall of economics and everyone being equally entitled to resources. The key problem with Marx's theory is that he neglects the human need to be selfish, and thus any system based on equal sharing of property will meet its demise as soon as one person or group discovers how to take on power and exploit the remainder of society.

The modern theories of functionalism and conflict theory relate almost directly to Comte and Marx, at least in basic principles. Modern functionalism provides for five different

institutions which function together as a complete system for society to function well. The five institutions are the family, education, the economy, religion and the political system. The family provides a basis for reproduction, producing offspring and then at a basic level educating the offspring in the ways of society, socialization. Education picks up where the family stops, providing more training in an occupation or some other skill that will enhance the individual's value to society. The economy provides for the goods and services that are needed by the society. Religion gives a base for morality and teaching some values of society, it also provides a conduit for answering some questions that otherwise may not have answers, such as those involving an afterlife and the nature of the universe. Finally, the political system provides for governance and a structure for the customs of society. The family is the base of society, just as Comte describes it, but it requires education to extend its efforts. The family and educational institution of the society both exist to serve the economy, which in turn provides needed goods and services to the families (and perhaps to education as well). The political system is an overarching structure that provides order to society and allows all parts of society more easily work together.

Modern conflict theory is obviously derived from Marx's work, but it is less extreme and does not anticipate any type of revolution. Modern conflict theory states that society is a collection of components that are all fighting for a finite number of resources. Just as Marx believed that the basis of society was a struggle for economic resources, modern conflict theory holds the same base principle.

What is culture? What are norms and values (be sure to discuss all the types of norms)? What is meant by the term ethnocentrism? Is it a good or a bad thing?

Culture is the standard of ways of feeling, thinking and acting within a group of people that is passed between generations. Culture includes norms and values, as well as certain aspects of material culture. Material culture includes all things physical that are produced and used by a culture. Archeology seeks to make sense of past cultures by discovering material cultural artifacts that will provide clues to what a particular culture determined to be important. Values are the things that are important to a society. An example of a value could be privacy. It is considered important in some societies and is quite missed when it is denied. Norms are the rules that govern how a society expects for its members to act, enforcing the values. Norms are divided into a few categories, based on their severity. Folkways are rules that tend to only be enforced by peers and in an informal way. In the privacy scenario a folkway may involve a friend looking at another friend's email or text messages over their shoulder. It is likely that if caught, the friend may be sanctioned by a comment from the friend whose privacy is being invaded. The next level of norm is a more. A more is enforced informally, just as a folkway is, but is more severe as it is seen as violating some guideline of morality. In the privacy example, it would be a violation of a more to read the email of a co-worker or supervisor without their permission. The final level of norms is law. Laws are enforced by a socially accepted person or organization. It would be a violation of law to intentionally circumvent security precautions on an e-mail server of an organization for the purpose of reading someone's email. There is an expectation of privacy. There would be legal repercussions for such an action if it is caught. There is one other type of norm, in a category of its own, a taboo. A taboo is a rule that if violated could result in expulsion from a society. Some examples of such rules are things like pedophilia, incest and cannibalism, in most western cultures. In general taboos are actions that

violate things considered to be sacred or actions that cross a boundary into something that is considered to be socially unacceptable at all times.

Ethnocentrism is the focus on one's own culture as being superior to all other global cultures. Ethnocentrism in general is bad, as it creates negative feelings between cultures. There are concerns of one culture feeling inferior to another, as well as one society feeling as though they are so much more superior to another society that there are feelings of xenophobia with the individuals in the society. There are some minor positive traits to ethnocentrism, such as having pride in one's own society. It is also a motivating factor in competition between societies, encouraging growth and innovation.

Explain what socialization is -- be sure to discuss the nature/nurture debate, and the ways in which our development socially and cognitively influences our socialization. Also, explain the ideas of Piaget and GH Mead and how they relate to our socialization.

“Socialization is what makes us human”. Socialization is the process that humans go through from birth until death that involves “becoming” a member of society. This involves learning social customs and adapting to the customs of whatever culture you are in and constantly changing to adapt to the ever changing society and the ever changing role of the individual in society. Socialization is the process through which a human acquires language, manners and “moral” rules; it is the ultimate form of cultural inheritance. As with most aspects of human development, there is a debate over whether social traits of humans are a from genetic factors (nature) or social and environmental factors (nurture). A variety of studies have been done on this topic, most of them are case studies involving identical twins that are separated, or involving feral children, who are either allowed to grow up in isolation or are in some way raised by animals. In the identical twin studies it is usually the result that the twins raised apart have a lot of the same traits of personality and at least at a basic level have the same life. Due to other aspects of socialization, mostly the embracing of individuality, this type of similarity is rarely observed in identical twins that are raised together. On the other hand, the feral child studies show a lack of any type of social skills at all in children that are not around humans during certain critical periods of their life. A child that is allowed to grow in those conditions and misses the critical period for learning human language will likely never speak any human language and will be limited to communication by gestures and grunt-type vocalizations. It is usually agreed that there is a combination of factors responsible for socialization. The rational assumption is that for socialization to occur a child must be around humans in order to learn the basics of socialization, but that certain factors of socialization may be driven by genetic factors.

In the development of humans there are three factors which contribute to the overall person. The factors of development are physical, cognitive and social. Jean Piaget and George H. Mead developed theories on how these aspects interact to influence socialization. Piaget developed a theory of development using four major stages of development. Those stages are sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete operations and formal operations. Each stage builds on the others from an infant learning to make eye-contact to a fully functional adult capable of abstract thought. In the sensory-motor stage, which begins at birth and ends as late as two years of age, is focused on gaining experiences. In this stage Piaget believes the infants goal is to obtain as many experiences as possible. This begins with stationary exploration, looking at everything and attempting to taste anything that the child comes in contact with. In the later parts of this stage the exploration is enhanced by the beginnings of crawling and eventually walking. The mobility of the child allows the child to interact with more people and more objects. The sensory-motor stage ends when the child begins making connections between experiences and begins to make sense of their world. After the sensory-motor phase the child moves into the pre-operational phase, which involves a lot of testing. The child will begin to learn cause and effect, usually by repeated attempts at tasks. A common task is dropping things. A child may drop toys or other things repeatedly to discover if every time their hands open the object falls, and to see if the object falls in the same way each time. This phase ends by age six, once the child transitions to making or learning rules for things. In the next phase, called concrete operations, the child learns a variety of rules, most of which are difficult for the child to change. A lot of rules come from the area of learning language, such as rules for plurals. The concrete operations phase ends by around puberty, opening the formal operations phase. In the formal operations phase the child does not have to “see” something concrete to be able to accept its existence. It is in this phase

that abstract concepts such as variables in algebra become within the grasp of the child and it is possible for a child to imagine other possibilities. Piaget's theory relates to socialization at several different levels, the most noticeable and most direct is in the concrete operations phase. During concrete operations with the establishment of rules the child accepts what they are told by certain significant others in their life, such as a parent, as truth. In that phase is when social customs are established in the child and the child learns what it is to be a member of their society. During the pre-operational phase it is possible that the child could try cause and effect on the emotions of the parent related to certain tasks the child performs, establishing a social baseline for responses and some initial experiences in social sanctions when the child does not adhere to the expected norms. It is also during the pre-operational phase when most children learn rituals regarding proper handling of biological excretions. Applying a rule to how and when such things are taken care of makes the process of socialization much simpler.

Mead's theory is that children learn through play. According to Mead, children learn a lot about being adults in society by imitating them in symbolic interactionism. In some ways this is similar to Goffman's theory which relates the world to being a stage and each individual being an actor in a number of roles. Children who perform symbolic interaction are rehearsing for adult roles, as well as practicing taking on the perspective of another. A concept of Mead's theory that is similar to one of Piaget's stages is the learning of rules. For Mead, rules are learned through playing games. Games have rules, just as society has norms. The child is taught through games that for everyone to get along and for everything to function, there must be rules and the child must adhere to those rules. Finally, Mead proposes the idea of significant and generalized others. Significant others are those that are "important" in our lives, parents, siblings, and close friends. Mead's generalized others are people who take on a much more narrow social role. This theory

allows for some people to be treated different, and who are at a different level of emotional closeness. Mead suggests that through games we learn about generalized others as being people who are useful to us and who might serve a vital function, but are not especially close. Through those games we learn rules of socialization that involve the norms for how people beyond those that are significant are to be treated.