

## Chapter 1 Notes

- **The Sociological Perspective**
- **What Is Sociology?**

“...The systematic study of human society”

- Systematic
  - Scientific discipline that focuses attention on patterns of behavior
- Human society
  - Group behavior is primary focus; how groups influence individuals and vice versa
- At the “heart of sociology”
  - The sociological perspective which offers a unique view of society
- Why Take Sociology?
- Education and liberal arts
  - Well-rounded as a person
  - Social expectations
- More appreciation for diversity
  - The global village
  - Domestic social marginality
- Enhanced life chances
  - Micro and macro understanding
  - Increase social potentials
- **Benefits of the Sociological Perspective**
  1. Helps us assess the truth of common sense
  2. Helps us assess both opportunities and constraints in our lives
  3. Empowers us to be active participants in our society
  4. Helps us live in a diverse world
- **Importance of Global Perspective**
  - Where we live makes a great difference in shaping our lives
  - Societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected through technology and economics
  - Many problems that we faced in the United States are more serious elsewhere
  - Thinking globally is a good way to learn more about ourselves
- Aspects of Sociology
- **The Sociological Perspective:**  
**Peter Berger**
- Seeing the general in the particular
  - *Sociologists identify general social patterns* in the behavior of particular individuals
    - Individuals are unique but, society's social forces shape us into “kinds” of people
- Seeing the strange in the familiar

- Giving up the idea that human behavior is simply a matter of what people *decide* to do
- Understanding that society shapes our lives
- **Durkheim's Study of Suicide**
- Emile Durkheim's research showed that society affects even our most personal choices.
  - More likely to commit: male Protestants who were wealthy and unmarried
  - Less likely to commit: male Jews and Catholics who were poor and married
- One of the basic findings: Why?
  - The differences between these groups had to do with "social integration"
  - Those with strong social ties had less of a chance of **COMMITTING** suicide
- **C. Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination**
- The power of the sociological perspective lies not just in changing individual lives but in transforming society
- Society, not people's personal failings is the cause of social problems
- The sociological imagination transforms personal problems into public issues
- **THE ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGY**

One of the youngest of academic disciplines, sociology has its origins in powerful social forces:

- Social Change
  - Industrialization, urbanization, political revolution, and a new awareness of society
- Science
  - 3-Stages: Theological, (God's Will); Metaphysical (Natural, not Supernatural); & Scientific (Natural Laws govern behavior)
  - **Positivism** - a way of understanding based on science
  - These important contributions have been pushed to the margins of society
- Sociological Theory
- Theory: a statement of how and why facts are related
  - Explains social behavior to the real world
- Theoretical paradigm: a set of fundamental assumptions that guides thinking
  - Three major approaches
    - Structural-functional
    - Social-conflict
    - Symbolic-interaction
- Paradigm and Perspective
- **Structural -Functional Paradigm**
- The basics
  - A macro-level orientation, concerned with broad patterns that shape society as a whole
  - Views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability
- Key elements:
  - Social structure refers to any relatively stable patterns of social behavior found in social institutions
  - Social function refers to the consequences for the operation of society as a whole

- Who's Who in Structural-Functional Paradigm
- Auguste Comte
  - Importance of social integration during times of rapid change
- Emile Durkheim
  - Helped establish sociology as a university discipline
- Herbert Spencer
  - Compared society to the human body, organic approach
- Talcott Parsons
  - Sought to identify tasks that every society must perform
- Robert K. Merton
  - Manifest functions are recognized and intended consequences
  - Latent functions are unrecognized and unintended consequences
  - Social dysfunctions are undesirable consequences
- Social-Conflict Paradigm
- The basics:
  - A macro-oriented paradigm
  - Views society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change
- Key elements:
  - Society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority
  - Factors such as race, sex, class, and age are linked to social inequality
  - Dominant group vs. Minority group relations
    - Incompatible interests and major differences
- Who's Who in Social-Conflict Paradigm
- Karl Marx
  - The importance of social class in inequality and social conflict
- W.E.B. DuBois
  - Race as the major problem facing the United States in the twentieth century
- **Symbolic Interaction Paradigm**
- The basics:
  - A micro-level orientation, a close-up focus on social interactions in specific situations
  - Views society as the product of everyday interactions of individuals
- Key elements:
  - Society is nothing more than the shared reality that people construct as they interact with one another
  - Society is a complex, ever-changing mosaic of subjective meanings
- Who's Who in Symbolic-Interaction Paradigm
- Max Weber
  - Understanding a setting from the people in it
- George Herbert Mead
  - How we build personalities from social experience
- Erving Goffman
  - Dramaturgical analysis

- George Homans & Peter Blau
  - Social-exchange analysis
- Critical Evaluation
- Structural-Functional
  - Too broad, ignores inequalities of social class, race & gender, focuses on stability at the expense of conflict
- Social-Conflict
  - Too broad, ignores how shared values and mutual interdependence unify society, pursues political goals
- Symbolic-Interaction
  - Ignores larger social structures, effects of culture, factors such as class, gender & race