Society, Social Structure, and Interaction

Social Structure: Macrolevel
Components of Social Structure
Societies, Technology & Sociological Change
Stability and Change in Societies
Social Interaction: Microlevel
Future Changes

We have a world of patterned social interaction.

• Social interaction: the process by which people act toward or respond to other people
• This is the foundation for all relationships and groups in society

Social structure:

• The complex framework of societal institutions (such as the economy, politics, religion) and the social practices (rules, social roles) that make up a society and that organize and establish limits on people’s behavior
Questions, Issues:
- How do societies change over time?
- What are the components of social structure?
- Why do societies have shared patterns of social interaction?
- How are daily interactions similar to being onstage?
- Do positive changes in society occur through individual efforts or institutional efforts?

Social Structure: Macrolevel Perspective
- Macrolevel perspective tells us that society has several essential elements: social institutions, groups statuses, roles and norms
- Functional theorists emphasize that social structure is essential because it creates order and predictability in a society—lets us know what to expect & how to respond
- Conflict theorists point out that there is more to social structure than this—that social structures can serve to perpetuate domination

and:
- Social structure creates boundaries that decide who is an insider and who is not
- Social marginality is the state of being part insider and part outsider in the social structure
- Example: new immigrants must handle being in two distinct social groups
- Can result in stigmatization (a stigma is any physical or social attribute that disqualifies a person from full social acceptance)
Components of Social Structure:
- Includes all social positions, the relationships among those positions, and the kinds of resources attached to each of the positions
- Also includes all the groups that make up society and the relationships among them

Status:
- A socially defined position in a group or society characterized by certain expectations, rights, and duties
- Statuses exist independently of the specific people occupying them
- Example: college students--new ones arrive and older ones exit every year

Status Symbols:
- Material signs that inform others of a person's specific status
- For instance:
  - A wedding ring
  - Uniforms
  - Cars
  - Shopping carts
- What do each of these tell us?


Roles:

- The set of behavioral expectations associated with a given status
- Role Expectation is a group’s or society’s definition of the way that a specific role ought to be played
- Role Performance is how a person actually plays the role
- These don’t always match, and can be ambiguous (as to age appropriateness, etc.)
- These are complementary (one’s role is contingent upon another’s)

Role Conflict, Role Strain

- Most of us play many roles: son/daughter, sibling, student, athlete, worker, performer, etc.
- Role conflict occurs when incompatible role demands are placed on a person by two or more statuses held at the same time
- Ex.: you have test prep, practice, and to work all at the same time
- We prioritize, but we also can get overstretched

Role Strain:

- Occurs when incompatible demands are built into a single status that a person occupies
- Example: many women’s jobs are not as satisfying as men’s jobs, have less pay, less prestige, fewer open positions, more roadblocks to advancement
- Many married women deal with career and the majority of housework and childcare
- Other categories experiencing role strain include those of different races, gender identities, certain occupations (police, psychologists), and age (30+ women)
Coping:
• Role distancing: consciously fostering the impression of a lack of commitment or attachment to a particular role (going through the motions)
• Role Exit: when people disengage from social roles that have been central to their self-identity
• 4 stages: Doubt (burnout), Search for alternatives, Turning point, and Creation of a new identity

Groups:
• A social group consists of two or more people who interact frequently and share a common identity and a feeling of interdependence
• We participate in groups throughout our lifespan
• What groups are you in now?

Primary group:
• A small, specialized group in which members engage in face-to-face, emotion-based interactions over an extended period of time
• Families, close friends, school or work-related groups
Secondary Groups:
• A larger, more specialized group in which members engage in more impersonal, goal-oriented relationships for a limited period of time
• Schools, churches, corporations
• People in these may have few, if any, emotional ties to each other, but get together for practical purposes
• More specialized, people have specific roles
• But activities are more limited

Social solidarity:
• Relates to a group’s ability to maintain itself in the face of obstacles
• It exists when social bonds, attractions, or other forces hold group members together over time
• Example: when a church is destroyed in a fire, do group members stay together to worship until they can rebuild, or (without social solidarity) do they drift apart?

Social Network:
• A series of social relationships that link an individual to others
• Differ greatly for men and women
• And for different races/ethnicities, and for social classes
• May work to exclude others (old boys’ network)
• Often are efficient ways to organize
• Those without social networks are distinctly disadvantaged (ex. homeless men)
Social Network assignment:

- Catalogue your own social networks
- Where are your friends?
- What keeps your relationships going?
- How many friends do you see regularly as compared to how many you communicate with regularly online?
- What method of communication do you use most? (and realize that within your lifetime, this has changed radically)

Formal organizations

- A highly structured group formed for the purpose of completing certain tasks or achieving specific goals
- Most of us spend most of our time in these (schools, colleges, corporations, governmental institutions)
- “People-processing” institutions: provide services for people, like the Red Cross or the Salvation Army

Social Institution:

- A set of organized beliefs and rules that establishes how a society will attempt to meet its basic social needs
- How is this different from a group?
- Groups are composed of specific people, social institutions are a standardized way of doing something
- Your family vs. *family* as an institution
Functional theorists identify 5 essential tasks of these:

- Replacing members
- Teaching new members
- Producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services
- Preserving order
- Providing and maintaining some sense of purpose

Conflict theorists agree, but do not believe social institutions work for the common good of everyone in society.

Assignment:

- Consider any social institution that you now are in or were in: how does it accomplish each of the essential tasks?
- How does it replace members?
- How does it teach new members?
- How does it make, share, and use goods?
- How does it preserve order?
- How does it provide and keep a sense of purpose?

Societies, Technology, and Sociocultural Change:

- 5 types of societies: hunter-gatherers, horticultural and pastoral, agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial
- First 3 are preindustrial
- Sociocultural evolution: the changes that occur as a society gains new technology
Hunting and Gathering Societies:
- Use simple technology for hunting animals and gathering vegetation
- Basic social unit is kinship group (family), also used to distribute food (basic economic unit)
- Move frequently
- Relatively egalitarian (almost everyone works)
- No formal institutions for education, religion, or politics
- Religion based on animism, shaman is the religious leader

Horticultural and Pastoral Societies:
- Pastoral societies are based on technology that supports the domestication of large animals to provide food (typically nomadic)
- Horticultural societies are based on technology that supports the cultivation of plants to provide food (settled)
- Family is basic unit of society
  - horticulture affords more complex records of lineages; land (originally was) communal; use of tools; division of labor, originally were egalitarian; education, religion & politics relatively informal

Yesterday & Today’s Pastoral & Horticultural Societies:
- Gender specific division of labor
- Religion tends to be based on gods
- Politics: government is simple, backed up by military force
- Have existed throughout the world, but today are mainly in parts of Africa, Asia, South America, Oceania
- Modified forms
Agrarian Societies:

• Use the technology of large-scale farming, including animal-drawn or energy-powered plows and equipment, to produce their food supply
• Enabled people to spend their entire lives in one location
• Can produce a large surplus of food, allows for domestication of animals that in turn enrich the soil
• In some areas, multicropping is possible

Agrarian Societies:

• Social inequality is highest of all preindustrial societies
• 2 major classes—landowner and peasants
• Inheritance is the major force of wealth transfer
• Politics are based on feudal system
• Peasants have no political power

Agrarian Societies:

• Gender-based inequality increases dramatically
• Men control land and food distribution
• Men (strength) become more involved in food production, women become more involved in child care and home; distinct gender roles
• Marriage rules strengthen, women’s lives become more restricted, and “legitimacy” of heirs is more important
• Women’s sphere is in the home
• Men have more formal status, recognition
Agrarian Societies:
• Monotheism replaces belief in many gods
• Began about 5-6 thousand years ago
• “Dawn of Civilization” bringing many changes, inventions, writing, math, first cities
• Agrarian societies can be as big as several million

Industrial Societies:
• Based on technology that mechanizes production
• Originated in England (Industrial Revolution)
• Involves the application of scientific knowledge to the technology of production
• Water, steam, and fuel powered machinery
• Revolution of manufacturing, transportation
• Electric lights, cars, telephones, airplanes, etc., many changes that lessened physical labor and increased efficiency

Industrial Societies:
• Large scale production extended into agriculture—agribusinesses have replaced most family farms
• But are also efficient means of feeding large numbers of people
• Which is good, because most people live in cities and can’t grow their own food
• Changes social structure—job becomes identity, kinship ties less important, leisure time should matter, but most work more, & more isolation
Industrial Societies:
• Social institutions transformed:
• Family is less important as economic, education, & political institutions grow more complex
• Family is still VERY important in the socialization of children, but less so as an engine of economic growth, more important as a unit of consumption
• Form of the family is more diverse
• Traditional religious institutions less important but religion still powerful

Industrial Societies:
• Religious institutions influence what issues will be debated & politics
• But most industrialized societies have democracy, wider political participation
• Standard of living generally rises, but inequality persists
• Division of labor became more distinct, with men as breadwinners, women (middle and upper class) in the home
• People of color often left behind
• Many changes, including environmental decline

Postindustrial Societies:
• One in which technology supports a service- and information-based economy
• Characterized by information explosion: large numbers of people either supply or apply information, or work service jobs
• And rise of consumer society
• And global village
• Worldwide instant electronic communication
• Information (knowledge) is the commodity
• No clear transition from industrial to post-
Postindustrial Societies:
• Knowledge is the basic source of innovation
• Education becomes one of the most important social institutions
• Formal education crucial to success
• Scientific research is institutionalized, needed for support of development

Stability and Social Change
• Functionalist: focuses on stability of society and importance of equilibrium even in times of social change
• Conflict: highlight how societies go through continuous struggles for scarce resources and how innovation, rebellion, and conquest bring about social change

Typologies:
• Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tonnies developed typologies to explain the processes of stability and change in societies
• Typologies: classification scheme containing two or more mutually exclusive categories that are used to compare different kinds of behaviors or societies
Durkheim: Mechanical & Organic Solidarity

• Durkheim felt pre-industrial societies were held together by strong traditions and by members’ shared moral beliefs and values
• Industrialization meant more specialized economic activities with social solidarity rooted in members’ shared dependence upon one another
• Division of labor: how tasks of a society are divided up and performed

Durkheim, cont.:  
• Categorized societies 2 ways: mechanical, organic solidarity
• Mechanical solidarity: refers to the social cohesion of pre-industrial societies, in which there is minimal division of labor and people feel united by shared values and common social bonds
• An automatic sense of belonging
• Social interaction is mostly face to face
• Similar work, little specialization in division of labor

Durkheim, cont.:  
• Organic solidarity refers to the social cohesion found in industrial and maybe post-industrial societies, in which people perform very specialized tasks and feel united by their mutual dependence
• Rely on one another like the organs of the body function interdependently
• Practical cohesion, not on morality or shared values
Tönnies: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

- Gemeinschaft (German for commune or community) is a traditional society in which social relationships are based on personal bonds of friendship and kinship and on intergenerational stability
- Relationships are based on ascribed rather than achieved status
- Social solidarity and control are maintained by the community
- Strong sense of belonging, little privacy

Tönnies: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

- Gesellschaft: (association) a large, urban society in which social bonds are based on impersonal and specialized relationships, with little long-term commitment to the group or consensus on values
- Most people are strangers, little perceived as in common with each other
- Relationships are based on achieved statuses and interactions among people are both rational and calculated
- In the US, this means we must take care of ourselves

Applying these concepts to homelessness...

- Gesellschaft societies like ours hold the value that people can/should take care of themselves
- How does this attitude affect how we approach the problem of homelessness?
- Does it result from character flaws, drug abuse, cross-generational low incomes, falls in economic status due to instability in our economy, or unequal opportunities?
- A multifaceted problem that needs a multifaceted approach
Social Interaction: the Microlevel Perspective

- Social interaction in a given society has certain shared meanings across actions and we expect certain behaviors:
- Civil inattention is when we look at others just long enough to acknowledge the other’s presence, then look down
- The fact that we do this demonstrates a pattern of interaction, or interactional order—which regulates the form and processes of social interaction, but not the content

But social interaction guides aren’t all the same

- Different segments of society have different patterns
- Race/ethnicity, gender, and social status matter
- Women often have a different perception of routine meetings on the street, fearing for their safety
- African-Americans also have different perceptions of meetings
- Dominant class people often regard the poor & working class as less worthy of attention

Social Construction of Reality:

- The process by which our perception of reality is largely shaped by the subjective meaning that we give to an experience
- When we see what we expect to see, we are engaged in the social construction of reality
- Ever watch a game with a fan of the other team? You might be watching the same game, yet you see something different
- Perceptions and behavior are influenced by how we define the situation
Social construction of reality:
- The definition of the situation is our analysis of the social context we are in.
- Can result in a Self-fulfilling prophecy: a false belief or prediction that produces behavior that makes the originally false belief come true.
- If you are told you aren’t a good student, sooner or later you will have poor grades because you believe it and stop studying.

Social construction of reality:
- Thus, when we look at any social problem, we have a multiplicity of viewpoints to consider.
- Dominant group members often have the ability to establish how other people define reality, how things should be.
- But not everyone perceives life the same, and the viewpoints of the marginalized should be included, too, in any attempt to investigate or remediate problems.

Ethnomethodology:
- The study of the commonsense knowledge that people use to understand the situations in which they find themselves.
- Investigated sometimes by “breaching the rules,” (breaching experiments) with researchers acting naïve in order to create confusion regarding people’s social expectations.
- Effect of gender, race, ethnicity, and age not always taken into account in such work.
Dramaturgical Analysis:
- The study of social interaction that compares everyday life to a theatrical presentation
- Our audience (society) judge our performance and most of us try to play our role, not slip out of character
- We want to control others’ impression of us

Impression management: presentation of self
- Refers to people’s efforts to present themselves to others in ways that are most favorable to their own interests or image
- See Ace-Bomber encounters scenarios (p. 165)

Face-saving behavior: strategies we use to rescue our performance when we experience a potential or actual loss of face

Face-saving behaviors include:
- Studied non-observance: one role player ignores the flaws in another’s performance to avoid embarrassment for everyone involved
- Acer-Bomber strategies included minimizing the good grades when interacting with those with poor grades, or blaming the professor
Social interaction as theater:

- **Front stage**: area where a player performs a specific role before the audience
- **Back stage**: area where a player is not required to perform a specific role because it is out of the view of a given audience
- Need for impression management is highest when participants are most divergent
- The approach helps us analyze how we play roles, but has been criticized by Goffman as too superficial

Sociology of Emotions:

- Emotions are biologically given to an extent, but society determines how we express emotion and what we should be feeling at various times and places
- **Feeling rules**: shape the appropriate emotions for a given role or specific situations
- Also apply to our occupational roles: if you drive an explosives truck, you should be able to not express fear (Any other roles?)

Sociology of Emotions:

- **Emotional labor**: all jobs place some burden on human emotions, but emotional labor occurs only in jobs that required personal contact with the public or the production of a state of mind in others
- Employees must display only specific and carefully selected emotions
- Examples?
Sociology of Emotions

• C. Wright Mills noted that emotional labor can produce estrangement from one’s true feelings
• “Sell our personality” dehumanizing
• Gender, social class, and race/ethnicity affect how emotion is expressed in our society, what is expressed, when, how
• This suppression of true feelings and substitution with scripted feelings is also emotional labor, and can be wearing

Nonverbal Communication:

• The transfer of information between persons without the use of words
• Visual cues, vocal features, environmental factors
• Facial expressions, head movements, body positions, other gestures
• May be intentional or unintentional

Functions of Nonverbal Communication:

• Supplements verbal communication
• Regulates social interaction
• Establishes the relationship among people in terms of their responsiveness to and power over one another
• *Demeanor:* how we behave or conduct ourselves; is relative to social power
• *Deference:* the symbolic means by which subordinates give a required permissive response to those in power, confirms inequality
Facial expressions, eye contact, touching

• Gender-based patterns (dominance, subordinance)
• Women have been socialized to smile, frequently do so even when not happy
• Women’s jobs often require being pleasant, more so than men’s jobs
• Men seek to show they are reserved and in control
• Women maintain more eye contact in conversations, but men stare more

Facial expressions, eye contact, and touching:

• Eye contact can signal domination
• Example: Domestic workers are supposed to show deference by averting their eyes when they talk to their employers
• Touching: boys are touched more roughly than girls, women touch more frequently than men (this might be related to occupation)
• Women may hug each other to indicate emotion, men are more likely to touch to give directions, assert power, etc

Personal Space:

• The immediate area surrounding a person that the person claims as private
• An invisible boundary, if others invade, we retreat
• Intimate (18 inches), Personal (18 inches to 4 feet), Social (4-12 feet), Pubic distance (beyond 12 feet)
• Also affected by age, gender, social class, culture
Personal Space, Power differentials:
• Adults invade the personal space of a child
• Children can get away with invading the personal space of adults more than other adults
• Need for personal space increases with age and may start to decrease again at about 40
• As with all forms of nonverbal communication, this is influenced by gender, age, race, social class, and the personal contexts in which they appear

Future changes in society, social structure, and interaction:
• Rapid changes in the US over the past decades
• More possible statuses to occupy than any other time in history
• Both achieved and ascribed statuses are important as they affect others’ views of us
• More technology and more consumer goods are not necessarily having a positive affect
• We have yet to successfully solve the problem of homelessness at micro and macro levels

End of Ch. 5