

28/02/17

Week 1 Lecture 1

Inequality, violence, deviance, race, ethnicity, gender, sex

- Technology is simultaneously changing and being changed by people.
- Time as a medium through which this change is processed.
- The things we do will have unforeseen ramifications in the future.
- Things are not what they seem- we think we're in control but we aren't.
- In sociology, sociologists must consider agendas and biases that may skew data or statistics.
- Coffee has **symbolic** value, and symbolically implies things such as social interaction, identity, globalisation, history and politics.
- Sociology is the scientific study of human life and social groups. It is the systematic study of the ways people are affected by, and affect, **social structures and processes** that are associated with groups, organisations, cultures and societies. An assumption of sociology is that humans are not free agents, and that we are conditioned and socially constrained. Sociologists are concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way, assessing the connections and relationships between **macro, meso and micro** levels of society. E.g. there is evidence of **macro forces impacting individual endeavours**- divorce rates increasing in the 70s due to feminist movements, Family Act 1975 legislation changing, and hence divorce becoming less stigmatised in society.

The sociological imagination is to see the strange in the familiar, and to possess a consciousness of the following phenomena:

1. Everyday experiences and their connection to historical forces and social structures
2. Interplay of **agency and structure**
3. The relationship between private and public life.

The development of sociological thinking

- Early 19th century, classical sociology developed: Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte and Max Weber
- **Auguste Comte (1798-1857)**
 - Coined the term “sociology”
 - Wanted to apply mathematical-like laws or theory to the social world to predict, measure and improve society.
 - Positivism: science should be concerned only with observable entities that are known directly to experience.
 - Law of three stages= theological, metaphysical and positive.
- **Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)**
 - “Sociology should study ‘social facts’ (intangible things, e.g. media, religion, economics, politics) not individuals”
 - Believed these social facts constrained individuals and their agency.
 - Approach the study of social facts with a scientific attitude- being free of bias/preconception and consulting the senses.
 - “The Division of Labour in Society” (1893) explored the types of solidarity and union that hold society together- functionalist perspective
 - Proposed the paradigm of an Organic vs. Mechanical solidarity
 - Organic solidarity= interdependence, modern
 - Mechanical solidarity= fixed roles, collective consciousness (pre-modern)
 - Anomie= feeling of aimlessness, despair and dread caused by modern life. Disruption and lack of discretion
 - Functionalism= a system whose different parts work together to create stability and solidarity => Structural functionalism
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883)**
 - Historical materialism, capitalism, class struggle.
 - Capitalism- class relations characterised by conflict, exploitation and alienation of the working class
 - The relationship becomes more unbalanced over time, and will ultimately lead to revolution
 - The Communist Manifesto (1848)
 - History suggests a likelihood of revolution.
 - Rejected functionalism’s emphasis on consensus
 - Conflict theory= competition for resources. Conflict theory focuses on the importance of division
- **Max Weber (1864-1920)**
 - German, focused on social action rather than constructs
 - Concerned with rationalism, and the bureaucracy that accompanied modern development which he believed dehumanised individuals.

- Symbolic interactionism: the role of language, meaning and interpersonal interaction in everyday life. The idea that we rely on shared symbols while interacting, and the role of social interaction in creating society and its institutions.

1/03/17

Week 1 Readings

1. Willis E. (2004) 'The Nature of Sociological Explanation'

- **Reflexivity**= circular relationships between cause and effect. Bidirectional, with both the cause and effect affecting one another in a relationship in which neither can be assigned as causes or effects. It involves considering one's own place in the social world, not as an isolated and asocial individual but as a consequence of one's experience of the membership of social groups.
- Sociology= seeking causes for problems in the fact of people's membership of social groups and the ways these groups are related to each other.
- Sociological and social problems: **Sociological problems** demand explanation and are cast in the form of a question inciting intellectual curiosity. **Social problems** need to be address, e.g. unemployment. If unemployment were to be considered through a sociological lens, we would investigate what it is about the way our society is currently organised that does not provide enough paid work opportunities.
- The way people position themselves in proximity to one another, the way people colonise space, often follows a pattern, e.g. elevators.
- "The Stranger" (1959) Georg Simmel- "What is it about the quality of being a stranger to a social setting that prompts certain patterns of behaviour." – what is it about long journeys that make people reveal intimate details about themselves? Perhaps it is the expectation that they will never again encounter that person releases them from typical constraints.
- Gray 1995, group most resistant to the "quit" campaign is young females aged 15-19, where those who smoke has been increasing.

- When people meet for the first time, one of the most important ways in which they locate each other in the social world is by asking what kind of work they do.
- Are national identities being rendered less important under the impact of globalisation? Are communities looking more to local identification as they retreat from the global?
- **C. Wright Mills (1959)**- sociology is a quest for the sociological imagination → this imagination focuses on the place of the individual in the larger scheme of things. It draws a distinction between personal struggles (threat to cherished values) and public issues (threat to public value and the way social institutions are organised).
 - Mills posed three major questions on the macro level of societal analysis.
 1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole and how do the parts relate to one another and to the whole?
 2. Where does it stand in human history and the development of humanity as a whole?