

# Chapter 1 – What is Sociology

No single, correct way of thinking sociologically.

Sociological analysis takes place through an ongoing conversation or debate between a variety of different perspectives on any given issue or problem

Peter Hamilton (2002) 'mapping' of the field of sociology. Suggests central traditions or perspectives:

- **Rational Scientific** (as science) – sociological analysis of any issue or problem is scientific to the extent that it is systematic (collection and analysis of information and data, making observations that are recorded and compared, developing theories and generalizations to explain data and a concern to relate what is said by past sociological research). Value-free. Objective. Quantifying a personal situation allows one to be objective?
- **Political tradition** – sociology seen as inherently political because it deals with the organization of society. It's organized around the idea that all social scientific knowledge is produced from a particular value position (subjective) and social standpoint and this must always be taking into account in assessing its validity. Using it to make a change in the social world. Active change in society. Create a revolution.
- **'Expressionist'/interpretive tradition** – detached from both science and politics and concerned with grasping the meaning of human social life (influenced by anthropology). Humanity based approach. Challenge scientific for lack of sensitivity. Get involved. Understanding something by involving/experiencing it yourself

## Feminism and Gender

- **Feminist theory** – an umbrella term referring to the wide range of theories that place women and the Centre of social analysis. Began in 1960s
- Prior, sociology ignored women and was only concerned with the male dominated public world of work and politics
- 1960s saw new generation of female sociologists, which placed women at the centre of their analysis, which had an immense contribution upon sociological theory, methods and researched. MORE

**Functionalism** - the theory that all aspects of a society serve a function and are necessary for the survival of that society. Sees society as a body. Conventional views of family. Social structure.

**Conflict theory** - theory by Marx in which he sees modern society (capitalization) founded on domination, exploitation and alienation. Social order only maintained by domination and power rather than consensus. Claims society is in state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. Macro level

## Post modernity

- Changes that have taken place in society from about 1960s onwards.
- Saw changes in the significance of structure and material relations.
- Role of consumption became more important – occupation or profession doesn't define identity but our clothes brands and phones do.
- There is no longer an assumed fixed identity of social classes. Identities are seen as more diverse.
- **Postmodernist** – a theorist who argues a new social order is replacing modernity in advanced industrial societies
- Individuals in control of own decisions/breaking down of barriers. Individualism.

## Public Sociology

- An approach to sociology which seeks to engage a wider audience
- Michael Burawoy 2004 contrasted it with professional sociology which is primarily concerned with addressing other sociologists
- There are 4 sociological traditions, orientations or perspectives –professional, critical, policy and public.
- Burawoy says not to identify which orientation is preferred but instead to establish an ongoing dialogue between all. 'Unity based on diversity' to create a better understanding
- Some don't agree it should be public. For whom and what purpose is sociological knowledge useful and to what extent do you share it with the public

## **Origin**

- Mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, it was optimism as a new science that would help humanity progress.
- "Take off" period late 18<sup>th</sup> cent when 2 French philosophers (August Comte & Claude Henri Saint-Simon) coined the term 'sociology' and argued for a science of society
- Industrial and French revolution at this time.
- Technological changes, industrialization, rapid urbanization, changing family structures, change in social relationships and increase response to science
- **Enlightenment** – questioned traditional beliefs and religious beliefs and institutions ceased to dominate all aspects of life. Challenged institutional dominance of church

## **Establishment**

- 1880s – 1910
- First person employed to undertake sociological research in 1887 France
- Max Weber continued sociological studies. Was first to point out that science was to tell us how something occurred and what we might do to influence its occurrence in the future not answer the question of what we should do
- Here sociology established itself as an academic discipline with concerns about how societies change, how order is maintained, equality, economics and culture

## **Interpretivist sociology development**

- Early 20<sup>th</sup> cent 1920s-1930s
- Slowly introduced to universities across Europe and UK
- Seen as a discipline to improve human condition by describing social problems and discovering solutions to them
- Concerned with problems of poverty and urbanization

## **Functionalist theory dominance**

- **Functionalism** – a theory of society that explains society in terms of the role of culture in establishing consensus between social groups and the contribution each component of society makes to the functioning of the whole
- 1940s-1960s after WWII
- US dominated developments in sociology
- Focus shifted to a concern from a micro-perspective (social interactions at the level of individuals and small groups) to a macro-perspective (focus on large scale institutions and structures)

## **Rise of conflict theory**

- 1970s
- Increased social movements in US (black civil rights, environment, youth hippies) transformed the cultural scene as these rebelled against the conservative social values of past generations
- Increased alienation of industrial life and stress towards human spirituality and creativity
- Created division and disagreement
- Different theories began to dominate sociology
- Most rapid expansion in universities
- Establishment in Australia UNSW
- Focus on issues relating to power and inequality

## **Feminist sociology**

- Increase women in workforce and education
- Realization of gender blindness of sociology – highlight of necessity to include women in social studies

## **Post modernity**

- 1980s – 2000s
- Importance of culture, language and symbols
- Realization that knowledge is a source of power
- Today we analyse where current social trends are taking us
- Distinction between modernity and postmodernity is technological developments which have caused social transformation
- Belief in progress, industrial production, consumption, individualization and risk.

# Chapter 15 – Sociological Theory

**A theory** – the conceptual framework for the way we organize our perceptions of the world around us and explain it – it is as ‘way of seeing’

2 types of sociology: classical and contemporary– distinction of boundaries aren’t very clear

## **Classical**

- Declared to constitute sociologies foundations,
- Although times where very different and use of ideas aren’t commonly used
- Early writers had strong emphasis on concept of progress
- Classical theory needs to be seen and only part of an enormous work of sociological theorizing and research

Transformation on universities into mass education systems stimulated creation for classical core theorists who would convey the essence of the sociological imagination.

Contemporary sociological analysis will have some kind of relationship to work of one or combinations of the ideas from the 4 main sociologists most referred to:

## **EMILE DURKHEIM**

Aimed to seek the explanation of social life in the nature of society itself. Claims:

- Misconception to see society simply as the sum of all individuals within it.
- The ‘individual’ itself does not exist
- Human beings were born into already existing social structures, language, culture, tradition and world view
- Society cannot be seen in terms of individual behaviour as it takes place within the framework of **social facts** (a force outside the individual, such as common beliefs, ideals, morals which shapes ones consciousness)(exist in the interactions of people)
- Human being only become human by their adaptation to the ways of doing things around them when they are brought into the world
- One cannot/should not ignore the restrictions placed upon the autonomy by social relations
- One can observe a **social census** – a collective conscience consisting of common beliefs and sentiments
- Social life cannot be explained in terms of rational individual pursuit of self interest (criticism of individualism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of egotistic self) as one also has to take into account emotional and non-rational dimensions of social order
- **Religion** was an example of how society was held together. It dominates society by being something superhuman and superior and binds us to objects and each other to give a shared identity
- He highlighted historical development from **mechanical solidarity** in pre-modern societies - based on people’s basic similarities of beliefs and values. They had a collective consciousness and Retributive law – considers punishment as best punishment for crime. Towards **organic solidarity** in modern societies – social form held together by people’s **interdependence** - need for each other’s services, supports and activities. Vast individual differences as result from specialization. Only some things we have in common and they don’t unit us. Restitutive law – restoring and repairing, preventing

Reason for this change:

- **Dynamic density** – number of people in society and the degree of interactivity between them.
- Increases lead to competition increases and pushes societies to find more effective ways of doing things. E.g. division of labour and specialization which then leads to organic solidarity

Problems with division of labour:

1. Enforced division of labour – changes too fast leads to situations where economic power or status determining who performs what economic role instead of actual qualifications
2. **Anomie** – too much individualism and specialization. People are isolated become reduced to the repetition of meaningless tasks. Causes dislocation. Lack of the usual social or ethical standards in an individual or group.