

Understanding Society – SOCI10001

Lecture 1

“The first wisdom of sociology – things are not what they seem.”

When we start understanding the world around us, our understanding of the world changes.

- Is this data reliable? Is this scientific data?
- Who created the resource? WHY?
- Is this reality or is this a reaction to something confronting
- Sociologist then uses his/her tools to understand them

How sociologists view coffee - its not just coffee, for some people it's a routine, socially symbolic – plays importance in a social way “lets get coffee” insinuates more. Coffee as a drug (caffeine) – addictive, isnt viewed the same way as a drug in society. Coffee as identity as consumers – type of coffee (latte, espresso etc) part of identity as people. Coffee culture. Coffee associated with work, main occupation for young people – making/serving coffee. Globalization – Starbucks – social and economic relationships that stretch across the globe. Network of capitalism that links people in developed & developing countries – resources from developing countries and used to serve mostly the western world. Coffee & history, politics. – No alcohol, but can create a social & political sphere much bigger than just a cup of coffee. Fair trade – human rights, globalization and climate change – people are engaged in political choices through coffee.

Next to oil, coffee is the most valuable commodity in international trade.

What is Sociology?

Relationships, culture, interactions, behaviour, diversity

“The scientific study of human life, social groups, whole societies and the human world as such” – Giddens

“The systematic study of the ways in which people are affected by and affect the social structures and social processes that are associated with the groups, organisations, cultures, societies and world in which they exist” – Ritzer

The social contexts in which we find ourselves influence our actions, attitudes and understandings of the world. Influenced by the media, profession, age, gender – social structure eg choosing outfit.

Influenced by structure but maintain agency - capability to act and do things.

“The sociologist, then, is someone concerned with **understanding society in a disciplined way**. The nature of this discipline is scientific (...) As a scientist, the sociologist tries to be objective, to control personal preferences and prejudices, to perceive clearly rather than to judge normatively.” – Berger

The Sociological Imagination

“The sociological imagination enables us to grasp the history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise.” - Mills

Shifting from one perspective to another – political to the psychological, single family to national budgets, the theological school to the military establishment, from the oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. Connecting the little to the big - shedding new light. Allowing us to make these connections is the *sociological imagination*.

Mills asks us to connect 'private troubles' with 'public issues'.

Eg – losing your job, private issue. Employment rates decreasing significantly, public issue.

Australian Law changed in 1975 made it easy to get divorces – previously one party had to be a "fault" which was taken to court. "Non-fault" divorces were introduced.

Love

Love is personal – true love, soul mates etc. Physical proximity plays a huge role on attraction – even in online relationships, you may meet online but have to meet in person.

To Have a Sociological Imagination

To understand that what happens to us often relates to broader social trends & contexts. What changes and what persists over time.

See the strange in the familiar, link what happens in our individual lives to the larger social, economic and political dimensions. Why is the world like this? Different to psych because it looks at the relationship with the social and the individual more than just the individual.

People studying other people – different understandings. Complex. "In science, when human behaviour enters the equation, things go nonlinear. That's why Physics is easy and Sociology is hard."