Chapter One

The Sociological Point of View
Section One Objectives

- Define sociology.
- Describe the sociological imagination
- Distinguish sociology from other social sciences.
Section 1: Examining Social Life

- **Sociology** is the social science that studies human society and social behavior.

- Sociologists study human behavior while in groups (Sociological Perspective).
  - Sociologist study the norms (rules) and values of society.
  - Helps us gain a better understanding of ourselves and our social world.
  - Show connections between the individual and the group.
Section 1: Examining Social Life

Question

What does it mean to have a sociological imagination?
Social Imagination

- A *sociological imagination* is the ability to see the connection between the larger world and one’s personal life.
Section 1: Examining Social Life

**Sociological Perspective**

- Look beyond commonly held beliefs to hidden meanings in human actions.
- See beyond own day-to-day life by viewing world through others’ eyes.

**Sociological Imagination**

- Capacity to range from impersonal and remote [topics] to intimate features of human self.
- To see relations between the larger world and personal life.
Question

How is sociology similar to and different from other social sciences?
Social Sciences

• Social Sciences – the disciplines that study human social behavior or institutions or functions of human society in a scientific manner
  • Anthropology
  • Psychology
  • Social Psychology
  • Economics
  • Political Science
  • History
  • Sociology
Section 1: Examining Social Life

SIMILAR:
Examines the relations between society and culture, the individual economics, politics, and past events which are all the focus of one or more of the social sciences.

DIFFERENT:
Sociologists are mainly interested in social interaction and tend to focus on the group rather than the individual.

DIVISIONS HAVE BLURRED:
Sociologists borrow from the various social sciences.
How is Sociology different?

• Psychologists describe, understand, predict, control/modify INDIVIDUAL behavior and mental processes.

• Sociologist study the interactions of GROUPS!
Section 2: Sociology: Then and Now

- Late 19th Century was a time of social change.
- French and Industrial Revolutions.
- Farms to Factories = loss of community values.
Section 2: Sociology: Then and Now

- Sociology did not develop until the 1800s
- Rapid social and political changes in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution
- Growth of cities, new urban populations produced a multitude of social problems
- Over time, it became more difficult to ignore the effect of society on the individual
- Sweeping political, social, and economic changes
- Scholars questioned traditional explanations of life and attempted to prove their beliefs using a variety of methods
Auguste Comte

• Father of Sociology
  • **Positivism** – belief that knowledge should be derived from scientific observation

• Studied basic issues of order and change:
  • **Social Statics** – the study of social stability and order
  • **Social Dynamics** – the study of social change
Herbert Spencer

- Social Darwinism
- Social change and unrest are natural occurrences in evolution toward stability and perfection
- Coined the phrase
- “survival of the fittest”
Karl Marx

• Believed the structure of society is influenced by how its economy is organized
• Class conflict – ongoing struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat
  • Bourgeoisie – class owning the means for producing wealth
  • Proletariat – working class; labor
Emile Durkheim

- Concerned with problem of social order
- Held functionalist view of society
- Study what is directly observable
- 1897 study on *Suicide*
Max Weber

- Study the effects of society on the individual
- **Verstehen** – understanding social behavior by putting yourself in the place of others
- **Rationalization** – the mindset of emphasizing knowledge, reason, and planning
Harriet Martineau

- Pioneer in feminism
- “lack of economic power kept women dependent”
- *Society in America* – linked slavery and the oppression of women
Jane Addams

- American social reformer – 1880s social gospel
- Co-founder of Hull House in Chicago
- Won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931
What are Theoretical Perspectives?

• Sets of assumptions that are accepted as true.
Question

How do the three main theoretical perspectives in sociology differ in their focus?
What do you See?

A perspective is a particular point of view or a particular way of looking at an issue.
Section 2: Sociology: Then and Now

**Functionalists**
See society as a set of interrelated parts that work together to produce a stable social system; focus on functions and dysfunctions.

**Conflict Theorists**
Focus on forces in society that promote competition and change; see social change as an inevitable feature of society.

**Interactionists**
Focus on how individuals interact in society and on the meanings individuals attach to their own and others’ actions.

**THREE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**
Functionalism

- Views society as an integrated whole.
- Contributions of all parts of society (Family, Economy, and Religion).
- Social change = Eventual stability.
- Manifest = Intended
- Latent = Unintended
- Values/Cooperation/Consensus/Democracy
Conflict Theory

- Class, Race, and Gender struggles.
- Conflict/Competition/Constraint
- Power = Control the ability of others
- A society involves the constraint and coercion of some by others.
Symbolic Interactionism

- Groups use shared symbols as the interact.
- Symbols stand for something else with agreed upon meaning.
- Symbols are learned from others.
- Can you have internal conversations?
- **Dramaturgy** - Human behavior is an “act” - “All the world is my stage”!
Why are **patterns** important?

- Social Structure is the patterned interaction of people in social relationships.
- Conformity is the key!
- All groups encourage conformity; the members of a group have been taught to value the group’s ways.
Chapter Wrap-Up Understanding Main Ideas

1. What is the main focus of sociology?
2. What does it mean to have a sociological imagination?
3. What are the differences between sociology and other social sciences?
4. Identify the major early sociologists.
5. What are the three main theoretical perspectives in sociology, and which of the founders of sociology is connected to which perspective?