What is Sociology?  

Chapter 1
Learning Objectives

• Basic Concepts
  – Learn what sociology encompasses and how everyday topics are shaped by social and historical forces
  – Recognize that sociology involves not only acquiring knowledge but also developing a sociological imagination

• The Development of Sociological Thinking
  – Learn how sociology originated and understand the significance of the intellectual contributions of early sociologists
Learning Objectives

• Modern Theoretical Approaches
  – Be able to identify some of the leading theorists and distinguish between their theoretical approaches to social life

• How Can Sociology Help Us?
  – See the practical implications of sociology
Basic Concepts

• What is Sociology?
  • Sociology is the scientific study of the connection between the individual and social structure.
  • Sociology examines the underlying patterns in human behavior and our relationships with one another.
  • C. Wright Mills (1959) coined the term *the sociological imagination*.
Basic Concepts

• Social Construction
  – An idea or practice that a group of people agree exists
    • Maintained over time by people taking its existence for granted
    • What people think and do are products of culture and history
Basic Concepts

• Socialization
  – The social processes through which children develop an awareness of social norms and values and achieve a distinct sense of self
    • An explanation for social order
    • Norms reflect divisions of power and class
Basic Concepts

• Agency and Structure
  – Concepts that suggest to what extent an individual's life is determined by social forces
    • Sociological explanations are probabilistic
    • Individuals have the capacity to deviate from patterns, to go against the odds
Basic Concepts

- Social Change
  - How are the times in which we are living different from the times that came before?
    - Social life is dynamic; it is constantly changing
    - Understanding the present relies on understanding the past
The Development of Sociological Thinking

- Sociology is rooted in questions about social change, social conflict, and social problems brought on by industrialization and urbanization.
- Early sociologists continue to influence contemporary sociology.
Auguste Comte

- French philosopher who coined the term sociology
- How do societies overcome chaos?
- Scientific knowledge can be used to improve people’s lives
• Émile Durkheim
  – Used scientific principles and methods to study social facts
  – Organic solidarity comes from the interdependence of society’s different parts and shared values.
• Émile Durkheim
  – Study of suicide examined the anomie that comes when social constraints break down during periods of rapid social change.
• Karl Marx
  – In his materialist conception of history, the driving force for social change and the source of conflict in society are economic.
  – Conflict brought on by the exploitation of the poor by the rich under capitalism will bring social change.
The Development of Sociological Thinking

- Max Weber
  - Values and ideas drive social change
  - Protestant beliefs led to capitalism
The Development of Sociological Thinking

• Max Weber
  – Bureaucracy—a type of organization marked by a clear hierarchy of authority and the existence of written rules of procedure and staffed by full-time, salaried officials
The Development of Sociological Thinking

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1.1</th>
<th>Interpreting Modern Development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DURKHEIM</strong></td>
<td>The main dynamic of modern development is the <em>division of labor</em> as a basis for social cohesion and <em>organic solidarity</em>.</td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Durkheim believed that sociology must study <em>social facts</em> as things, just as science would analyze the natural world. His study of suicide led him to stress the important influence of social factors, qualities of a society external to the individual, on a person's actions. Durkheim argued that society exerts <em>social constraint</em> over our actions.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>MARX</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Marx believed that we must study the divisions within a society that are derived from the economic inequalities of capitalism.</td>
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<td><strong>WEBER</strong></td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Weber focused on why Western societies developed so differently from other societies. He also emphasized the importance of cultural ideas and values on social change.</td>
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Neglected Founders: Harriet Martineau
- Translated Comte’s writings
Neglected Founders: Harriet Martineau

- Expanded scope of sociological research to include neglected institutions, members, and topics, especially those pertaining to domestic life, women, and minorities
The Development of Sociological Thinking

• Neglected Founders: W. E. B. Du Bois
  – First African American to graduate from Harvard with a Ph.D.
  – Known for developing the concept of double consciousness
• Neglected Founders: W. E. B. Du Bois
  – Argued that the color line persisted after slavery
  – Connected race to social and economic stratification
The Development of Sociological Thinking

Figure 1.1
KEY WORKS IN SOCIOLOGY

[Diagram showing key works in sociology with titles and years]
Modern Theoretical Approaches

• Symbolic Interactionism
  – Exchanges of symbols through social interaction
  – George Herbert Mead
    • One’s sense of self develops through interactions with others
    • Interactions with others teach individuals how to act, what to say, and what to think
Modern Theoretical Approaches

• Functionalism
  – Society is made up of parts that carry out functions that contribute to the whole
  – Robert Merton
    • Manifest and latent functions of social institutions
Modern Theoretical Approaches

• Marxism and Class Conflict
  – Conflict is a normal feature of society
  – Individuals and groups use power to promote their interests
  – Power is exerted through force, rules, laws, and ideologies
• Feminism and Feminist Theory
  – Gender relations and gender inequality are central to the study of society
  – Intersection of gender, race, and social class in social stratification and inequality
Modern Theoretical Approaches

• Rational Choice Theory
  – Most behavior is self-interested

• Postmodern Theory
  – Social life has no “grand narrative”
  – Social life is in constant flux
  – Media and communication technologies play important roles in social life
Modern Theoretical Approaches

Microsociology
Symbolic interactionism is microsociology because of its focus on face-to-face interaction

Macrosociology
Functionalism and Marxism are macrosociology because of their study of social institutions, political and economic systems, industrialization, and globalization
How Can Sociology Help Us?

- Awareness of cultural differences
- Assessing the effects of policies
- Self-enlightenment
- The sociologist’s role
In sociology, studying the effects of the economic recession on a student’s ability to secure a job after graduation is a way of studying how ____ affects our lives.

(a) the sociological imagination
(b) our grades
(c) social structure
(d) our work ethic
Many of the things we experience in life that seem to be completely natural, like differences in behavior between men and women, are seen by sociologists to be examples of ____.

(a) biology
(b) social constructions
(c) agency
(d) division of labor
Some sociologists argue that the current problems in America’s inner cities (such as drugs, violence, and fatherless households) area the result of the disappearance of blue-collar jobs in the United States. This argument reflects what idea from the text?

(a) social constraint
(b) rationalization of economic life
(c) distinctiveness of Western society
(d) materialist conception of history
A bureaucracy is a type of organization that depends on which of the following?

(a) office buildings
(b) division of labor
(c) social constraint
(d) computer systems
The ability of individuals or members of a group to achieve aims or further their interests, even in the face of the resistance of others, is called ___.

(a) determination
(b) violence
(c) power
(d) ideology
Healthy older Americans often encounter exclusionary treatment when younger people assume they are feebleminded and thus overlook them for jobs they are fully capable of doing. How would functionalism and symbolic interactionism explain the dynamics of prejudice against the elderly?