Social Structure and Demographics

Sociology: Theories and Institutions

Theoretical Approaches

- Two key questions are asked in building a theory: what societal issues should we study? & How do we connect the facts?
  - Questions provide the framework for what is observed in a social structure
- Social Structure: system of people within a society organized by a characteristic pattern of relationships.

Functionalism or Functional Analysis

- Study of the structure and function of each part of society.
- Early on, society was viewed as an organism – its parts and systems must work together in harmony for the society to function smoothly.
  - When all parts of society fulfill their functions, society is in a normal state
  - If functions are not fulfilled, society is in an abnormal or pathological state.
- Function: beneficial consequence of people’s actions
  - Functions help keep society balanced
- Dysfunctions: harmful consequences that undermine a social system’s equilibrium
- Manifest Function: an action that is intended to help some part of the system
  - Latent Functions: unintended positive consequences on other parts of society that come from a manifest function.
    - These are unstated and unrecognized
- In health and illness, a sick person is unable to be a productive member of society and is therefore deviating from his function.

Conflict Theory

- Power is defined as a form of influence over other people
- Conflict Theory: focuses on how power differentials are created and how these differentials contribute to the maintenance of social order.
- Power differentials can lead to the dominance of a particular group if that group successfully outcompetes other groups for resources.

Symbolic Interactionism

- The study of the ways individuals interact through a shared understanding of words, gestures, and other symbols
- Revolves around symbols: thing to which meaning is attached to.
  - E.g. – language, hand gestures, body language
  - These are the key to understanding how the world is viewed and the basis of communication
- Symbols may be different across cultures, and learning of these symbols is necessary for successful acculturation

Social Constructionism

- Focuses on how individuals put together their social reality
• Social constructs arise from humans communicating and working together to agree on the significance of a concept or principle.
• These concepts are subject to change as societal norms and opinions develop over time.
• Examples of major social constructs: justice, money, work ethic, dress code, and gender roles.

Rational Choice and Exchange Theory
• Rational Choice Theory: focuses on decision-making in an individual and attempts to reduce this process to a careful consideration of benefits and harms to the individual.
  o Every outcome in a given social interaction can be associated with particular rewards and with particular punishments
  o An individual carefully considers all possible reward/punishment scenarios for each social action and chooses the option with highest benefit to harm ratio.
  o I.e. – like a mental pros & cons list
  o This theory is disputed by the concept of altruism. Why would someone benefit someone else at some cost to themselves?

• Exchange Theory: extension of above theory. This theory focuses only on interactions within groups.
  o Individual will carry out certain behaviors because of anticipated rewards and will avoid certain behaviors because of anticipated punishments.
  o Uses same concept of operant conditioning: approval by others will reinforce that behavior and encourage it to be continued.

Feminist Theory
• Attempts to explain social inequalities that exist on the basis of gender.
• Focused on the subordination of women through social structures and institutional discrimination
  • Gender Roles: behaviors expected of a given gender
    o Feminism attempts to diversify these gender roles
    o E.g. – Women are more frequently objectified – seen as sex objects – than men
  • Glass Ceiling: women have more difficulty attaining top-level administrative positions within a company.

Social Institutions
• Well established social structures that dictate certain patterns of behavior or relationships and are accepted as a fundamental part of culture.

Family
• Influenced by different factors such as culture, value systems, beliefs, practices, gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc.
• Patterns of kinship tend to change over time and area
  o These different patterns have influences on child-bearing, familial loyalty, and incest boundaries.
• Divorce rates rose significantly in latter part of 20th century, but have begun to decline in last two decades.
• Domestic abuse is the #1 cause of injury to American women
Most common in families with drug abuse

- **Child Abuse** and **Elder abuse** are mainly carried out by the caregiver. Physicians are a **mandated reporter** for these. Means that they must report suspected cases of these types of abuse
  - Most common form of abuse is usually neglect
- Domestic abuse does not need to be reported under the law, but shelters and information should be provided to victims of domestic abuse.

**Education**

- **Aim** is to arm the population with information.
- Includes not only the information and cognitive skills that students learn, but also the **hidden curriculum** of transmitting social norms, attitudes, and beliefs
- Performance in the education system depends on a student’s intrinsic abilities and the educational system itself.
  - **Teacher expectancy:** idea that teachers tend to get what they expect from students
    - Example of a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Lower socioeconomic class is associated with decreased accessibility and quality of education
- Association between education and medicine. Lack of education is a hurdle in accessing and trusting healthcare providers.

**Religion**

- Considered to be a pattern of social activities organized around a set of beliefs and practices that seek to address the meaning of existence
- **Religiosity:** how religious one considers themselves to be
- Large religions can be divided into multiple **denominations** or sects (share certain beliefs/practices, but not others)
  - Denominations usually refers to a church or just a smaller entity
  - Sect had a negative connotation, but is now simply defined as a religious group that has chosen to break off from the parent religion
    - May form into a cult when extreme philosophies are taken on
- Many religious groups are shifting towards modernization by relaxing their historical practices.
- **Secularization:** shift away from religion as society moves towards rationality and scientific thinking
- **Fundamentalism:** maintenance of strict adherence to religious code
- Religion is closely tied with spirituality, both play a role in the meaning of existence.
  - These concepts are important to consider in a patient’s understanding of disease and coping mechanisms

**Government and Economy**

- Systematic arrangements of political and capital relationships, activities, and social structures that affect rule making, rights and privileges, division of labor, and production of goods and services.
- These two institutions impact all other institutions to some degree.
Healthcare and Medicine

- Aimed at maintaining or improving the health status of the individual, family, community, or society as a whole
- In America, physicians are expected to adhere to four tenets:
  - **Beneficence**: physician has a responsibility to act in the patient’s best interests
  - **Nonmaleficence**: *do no harm*; physician has a responsibility to avoid treatment or interventions in which the potential for harm outweighs the potential for benefit.
  - **Respect for Patient Autonomy**: physician has responsibility to respect patients’ decisions and choices about their own healthcare.
  - **Justice**: physician has a responsibility to treat similar patients with similar care, and to distribute healthcare resources fairly.

Culture

- Defined as encompassing the entire lifestyle for a given group. Culture is what makes human societies unique from one another
  - **Ethnography** is the study of cultures

Material and Symbolic Culture

Material culture

- **Artifacts**: material items that are made, possessed and valued.
  - Much can be discerned by a group of people by examining their artifacts
  - Concept is the basis behind material culture.
- Material culture includes the physical items that are associated with a given group
  - E.g. – artwork, emblems, clothing, jewelry, foods, buildings, and tools
- Often most visible during ceremonies like birthdays, weddings and funerals.
Symbolic Culture or Nonmaterial Culture

- Focuses on the ideas that represent a group of people
  - E.g. – mottoes, songs, or catchphrases
- Material culture is often the tangible embodiment of the underlying ideas of symbolic culture.
- Culture is needed to bind a social group over a significant period of time.
  - Governments often use symbolic culture to rally people to action during times of crisis
    - E.g. songs, parades, hero discussions.
  - Schools also have similar mentalities
    - E.g. – School mascots, school colors, and a school song
  - The above cultural artifacts are in place to help create a shared sense of identity
- Symbolic culture has both cognitive and behavioral aspects
  - Informs cultural values and belief
  - Informs cultural norms and communication styles
- Symbolic culture is usually slower to change than material culture
  - Culture Lag created due to this difference in pace

Language

- The most highly developed and complex symbol system used by most cultures.
- Enables us to share thoughts, ideas, experiences, discoveries, fears, plans and desires
- Written language transcends both spatial and temporal boundaries
- Would be difficult to transmit culture without language.
  - I.e. It is imperative to understand a group’s language to understand their culture.

Values, Beliefs, Norms, and Rituals

- **Values**: what a person deems important in life
  - Dictates ethical principles and standards of behavior.
- **Belief**: something that an individual accepts to be truth
- **Cultural Barriers**: When cultural differences impede interaction with others.
- **Norms**: societal rules that define boundaries of acceptable behavior
  - Govern the behavior of society and provide a sense of social control
  - Exist for behavior, speech, dress, home life, etc.
- **Ritual**: formalized ceremony that involves specific material objects, symbolism, and additional mandates on acceptable behaviors.
  - Can be associated with specific milestones, with holidays, or with regular activities.

Evolution and Human Culture

- Culture serves as a method of passing down information from generation to generation
  - In prehistoric times, most likely served as a conduit for teaching future generations on how to create tools, hunt, domesticate animals, and grow crops.
  - Also creates a sense of loyalty and allegiance which may help in explaining altruistic behavior.
• Created a sense of *us vs them* which may have served a role in the dispersion of populations across the globe.

• Evidence that shows that some genetic traits may have been favored based on cultural values and beliefs.
  - *E.g.* – humans are the only animals that are able to digest milk after adolescence. May have resulted from Northern Europeans heavy reliance on cattle farming.

**Demographics**

• The statistics of populations and are the mathematical applications of sociology

**Common Demographic Categories**

**Age**

• “Graying of America” due to baby boomer generation getting older.
• Fasting growing **age cohort** in the US is the >85 group
• **Ageism**: prejudice based on a person’s age
  - Seen across all ages. *E.g.* – young people are inexperienced in work force and old people are perceived as frail and less intelligent.

**Gender**

• Social construct that corresponds to the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits that are typically associated with a biological sex.
• Gender differences tend to emphasize the distinct roles and behaviors of men and women in a given culture.
• **Gender Inequality**: intentional or unintentional empowerment of one gender to the detriment of the other.
• **Gender Segregation**: separation of individuals based on perceived gender
• Sex is biologically determined (XY is male, XX is female)
• Gender relates to set of behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits
  - Most have to genders, but some cultures have more than two.

**Race and Ethnicity**

• **Race**: social construct based on phenotypic differences between groups of people.
  - Not strictly defined by genetics, instead classifies individuals based on superficial traits like skin colour
• **Racialization**: definition or establishment of a group as a particular race
• **Racial formation theory**: suggests that racial identity is fluid and dependent on concurrent political, economic, and social factors.
• **Ethnicity**: social construct that sorts people by cultural factors
  - *E.g.* – language, nationality, religion, etc.
  - One can choose whether or not to display ethnic identity, while racial identities are always on display.
• **Symbolic Ethnicity**: specific connection to one's ethnicity in which ethnic symbols and identity remain important, even when ethnic identity does not play a significant role in everyday life
  - *E.g.* – Irish-Americans celebrating St. Patrick’s Day
• There is evidence that shows that different races are not always offered the same level of care escalation in a medical emergency.
  o Many public health outreach programs that are geared towards closing the gap in health disparities
    ▪ Doing so through education, screening, and treatment

**Sexual Orientation**

• Defined as the direction of one’s sexual interest. Usually divided into three categories: homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual.
• Involve a person’s sexual feelings and may or may not be a significant contributor to that person’s sense of identity.
• Coming out has shown to have therapeutic effects: associated with decrease in depressive and anxious symptoms which is measured through a drop in cortisol levels.
• It is believed that human sexuality may be more fluid than previously believed
  o Kinsey Scale: Describes sexuality on a scale of 0 (heterosexuality) to 6 (homosexuality)
    ▪ Few people actually fell into the categories of 0 and 6
• LGBT: sexual and gender identity minorities that are grouped together.
  o HIV is more prevalent in gay men from urban area
  o Lesbians receive less screening for cervical cancer and may not be screened for other STI’s
  o Transgender have multiple risks, including the use of “street hormones”
  o Significantly higher risk of bullying, victimization and violence
  o Have higher rates of suicide
  o In adults, higher prevalence of depression and anxiety
  o Gay men have increased rate of eating disorders

**Immigration Status**

• Often barriers that affect immigrants’ interactions with social structure and institutions
• Language barriers make it difficult for immigrants to access healthcare or take control of their healthcare decisions
• Racial and ethnic identity may be more pronounced in first-generation immigrants, and the same biases and prejudices against certain races and ethnicities might be enhanced due to one’s immigration status
• Intersectionality: the interplay between multiple demographic factors, especially when it leads to discrimination or oppression
• Undocumented immigrant status is also a major barrier for immigrants to access healthcare since they are fearful that they may be deported.

**Demographic Shifts and Social Change**

• Changes in the makeup of a population over time
  o E.g. – American population has doubled since 1950, population age is increasing, ethnic and racial diversity is increasing
• Population projection attempts to predict changes in population size over time
  o Assisted by historical measures of growth, understanding of changes in social structures, and analysis of other demographic information
Population Pyramids: provide a histogram of the population size of various age cohorts.

**Fertility, Mortality, and Migration**

- **Fertility Rate**: average number of children born to woman during her lifetime in a population
  - Been on downward trend in America, but still above 2
- **Mortality Rates**: number of deaths in a population per unit time
  - Deaths per 1000 people per year
  - Has dropped significantly in last century due to healthcare advancements in developed countries
  - Significant impediment to population growth in third-world countries.
- **Crude rate**: the total rate for a population
- **Migration**: Immigration is the influx of population into a new geographic space. Emigration is movement away from a geographic space.
  - US has larger net immigration than emigration
  - Increases the racial and ethnic diversity
  - Motivated by both pull factors (positive attributes of geography) and push factors (negative attributes of geographical location)

**Demographic Transition**

- A specific example of demographic shift which refers to changes in birth and death rates in a country as it develops from a preindustrial to industrial economic system.
- **Stage 1**: preindustrial society; birth and death rates are both high
- **Stage 2**: improvements in healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, and wages causes death rates to drop
- **Step 3**: Improvements in contraception, women’s rights, and shift from agriculture to an industrial economy causes **birth rates** (births per 1000 individuals per year) to drop.
  - Children must go to school and may need to be supported by parents for a longer period of time. Thus families have less children.
- **Step 4**: Industrialized Society; birth and death rates are both low
- **Malthusian Theory**: focuses on how exponential growth of a population can outpace growth of the food supply and thus lead to social degradation and disorder
  - Catastrophe is when third-world nations industrialize and undergo demographic transition would cause the population growth of the planet to far exceed the food capacity of it. Thus mass starvation would occur

**Social Movements**

- Organized either to promote or to resist social change
- Often motivated by perceived **relative deprivation**: decrease in resources, representation, or agency relative to the past or to the rest of society.
- Social movements that promote social change are **proactive** while those that resist are termed **reactive**.
  - Proactive E.g. – women’s rights movement, civil rights movement, environmentalism movement
  - Reactive E.g. - antiglobalization, counterculture, white supremacist movements
• Social movements may establish organizations to further their goals

**Globalization**

• Process of integrating the global economy with free trade and the tapping of foreign markets.
• Spurred by improvements in global communication technology and economic interdependence.
• Leads to a decrease in geographical constraints on social and cultural exchanges
• E.g. of Positive effects: availability of food
• E.g. of negative effects: worldwide unemployment, rising prices, increased pollution, civil unrest, and global terrorism
• Groups such as the world health organization, American Red Cross, and Doctors without borders supply aid to populations in need around the globe.

**Urbanization**

• Dense areas of population that create a pull for migration.
• Economic opportunities offered in cities and the creation of a large number of “world cities” has fueled an increase in urbanization over the last few decades.
  o Half the world’s population lives in Urban areas.
• Health challenges such as water sanitation, air quality, environmental hazards, violence and injuries, infectious disease, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity are linked to urban societies.
• **Ghettos**: areas where specific racial, ethnic or religious minorities are concentrated.
  o Usually due to social or economic inequalities.
• **Slums**: more extreme case that is an extremely densely populated area with low-quality housing and poor sanitation.