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
- <u>Social Structure:</u> 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.
- <u>Function:</u> beneficial consequence of people's actions
    - Functions help keep society balanced
- <u>Dysfunctions:</u> harmful consequences that undermine a social system's equilibrium
- <u>Manifest Function:</u> an action that is intended to help some part of the system
    - <u>Latent Functions:</u> 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
- <u>Conflict Theory:</u> 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

- o 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
  - o 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.
  - o 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)
  - o Denominations usually refers to a church or just a smaller entity
  - o 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.
  - o 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.

- 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.

Social Institution	Needs Met by Institution	Statuses	Values	Norms
Education	Transmit knowledge and skills across generations	Teacher, student, dean, principal	Academic honesty, good grades	Doing homework, preparing for lectures, being kind to other students
Family	Regulate reproduction, socialize and protect children	Father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, grandparent	Sexual fidelity, providing for children, keeping a clean home, respect for parents	Having as many children as one desires, being faithful to one's spouse
Religion	Concerns about life and death, the meaning of suffering and loss, desire to connect with a creator	Priest, pastor, rabbi, imam, worshipper, teacher, disciple, missionary, prophet, convert	God and holy texts (Bible, Torah, Qur'an, and others) should be honored	Going to services, following teachings of the religion, applying beliefs outside of worship
Government	Maintain social order, enforce laws	President, senator, lobbyist, voter, candidate	Transparency, accountability, professionalism	Acting in the best interest of constituents, debating political issues
Economy	Organize money, goods, and services	Worker, boss, buyer, seller, creditor, debtor, advertiser	Making money, paying bills on time, producing efficiently	Maximizing profits, *the customer is always right*, working hard
Medicine	Heal the sick and injured, care for the dying	Doctor, nurse, pharmacist, insurer, patient	Hippocratic oath, staying in good health, following care providers' recommendations	Beneficence, nonmaleficence, respect for autonomy, justice

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

Benefits of culture from evolutionarily perspective

- 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.

- o 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.
  - o 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
  - o 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
  - o 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.
  - o 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
  - o E.g. – language, nationality, religion, etc.
  - o 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
  - o 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.
  - 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
  - **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.
  - HIV is more prevalent in gay men from urban area
  - Lesbians receive less screening for cervical cancer and may not be screened for other STI's
  - Transgender have multiple risks, including the use of "street hormones"
  - Significantly higher risk of bullying, victimization and violence
  - Have higher rates of suicide
  - In adults, higher prevalence of depression and anxiety
  - 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
  - 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
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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.