

Principles of Sociology

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Culture, Social Structure and Socialization

CULTURE

- Culture refers to the social heritage of a people, namely those learned patterns for thinking, feeling, and acting that are transmitted from one generation to the next.
- *a) nonmaterial culture: abstract* creations like values, beliefs, symbols, norms, customs, and institutional arrangements.
- *b) material culture: artifacts or objects* like stone axes, computers, automobiles, paintings, electric guitars, hairstyles, stadiums.
- Culture provides this set of meanings that enable human beings to interpret their experiences and guide their actions.
- This common framework of meaning allow us to interact and to be integrated into the wide network of social relations.

- **Norms**
- The ground of common understandings is produced, organized and maintained through different types of norms.
- *Norms* are *social rules* that specify appropriate and inappropriate behavior in given situations.
- The social relations and interaction are arranged by the set of these social rules.
- Norms are human/social creations, but they are experienced as objective and external forces that control human action.
- *Types of norms:*
- 1) **Folkways** (customary ways and ordinary conventions)
- 2) **Mores** (morally supported modes of thinking, feeling and acting)
- 3) **Laws** (formalized norms)

- **Values**

- Values are abstract ideas that define what is desirable, correct, and good in the context of each socio-cultural system.
- Values provide us with criteria and conceptions by which we evaluate people, objects, and events as to their relative worth, merit, beauty, or morality.
- The system of value in American culture includes the values-ideas of achievement and individual success, work and activity, efficiency and practicality, material comfort, individuality, progress, rationality, patriotism, and democracy.
- Values can define the individuals' motives and justify their modes of action.

- **Language, Symbols, Culture**

- Language is the cornerstone of every culture, as it functions as the main vehicle by which people communicate ideas, information, attitudes, and emotions to one another.
- Language is the basic means by which humans create culture and transmit it from generation to generation.
- Symbols are the means through which every culture is articulated and socially expressed. Norms, values, mentalities, beliefs are communicated by symbols.
- Art, music, musical performances, literature, public events, displays, parades, religious icons and services, athletic contests, demonstrations, TV shows, flags, fashion, advertisements are carriers of *expressive symbolism*.

- Symbolism usually reflects the cultural system and social organization.
- Symbolism contributes to the reproduction of modes of thinking, feeling, acting and interacting, as well as the social relations.
- Economic, organizational, legal, technological aspects of society cause great effect on culture.
- **The universals:**
- People in different cultures confront similar problems. Each culture, in some degree, represents a set of solutions to the problems with which almost all human societies have to deal.
- Cultural constants-Universals: food, clothing, settlements, property, travel and transport, fine arts, social stratification, kinship, political behavior, death, religious practices, and infancy and childhood.
- Universals are overall cultural categories and do not refer to the specific content of each culture.

- **Ethnocentrism**

- We are profoundly integrated into our cultural categories.
- Our ways of thinking, feeling and acting seem to be natural, objective, obvious, self-evident.
- This cultural entrapment favors the phenomenon of ethnocentrism.
- Ethnocentrism refers to the trend to judge other cultures, other patterns of social behavior and thinking by the standards of our own culture.
- Ethnocentrism can promote feelings of national/cultural/group superiority and, so, give rise to micro-, and large-scale conflicts.

- **Cultural Relativism**

- We have to examine others' behavior in the light of their values, beliefs, and motives.
- Cultural relativism is the approach that attempts to view the behavior of a people from the perspective of their own culture.
- Cultural relativism pursues a value-free (M. Weber) approach, as it avoids to formulate value judgments on foreign cultural patterns of behavior, and also look for the usefulness of certain habits and relations for the cultural and social survival of a people.

- **Subcultures**

- Subculture consist of a certain set of values, norms, lifestyles that is adopted by a specific social group.
- Subculture differs from the mainstream cultural pattern.
- Subculture can find expression in fashion and specifically in popular music, modes and places of entertainment, personal adornment and hairstyles, and distinctive jargons.

- **Countercultures**

- At times the norms, values, and lifestyles of a subculture are substantially at odds with those of the larger society and constitute a counterculture.
- A counterculture is antagonistic to the mainstream cultural patterns of thought, feeling and action.
- Mainstream culture is challenged by counterculture, as the second promotes different worldviews, life goals, lifestyle.

Social Structure

- Social structure consists of the web of social relationships in which people possess certain position(s)/status(-es) and perform social role(s).
- This web of relationships between possessors of positions and roles has largely the quality of stability.
- Social structure consists of the recurrent and orderly relationships that prevail among the members of a group or society.
- Social structures constrain our behavior and channel our actions in certain directions.
- Social structure is not a static, “eternal” social ordering, but it’s characterized by constant, dynamic process of modification and stabilization.
- **Status**
- Status means a position within a group or society.
- Statuses are ready-made, as the range of choice among them is limited.
- Societies limit competition for statuses with reference to gender, age, and social affiliations.
- *Ascribed statuses*: Some statuses are assigned to us by our group or society (Age, gender, race, ethnicity, and family background).
- *Achieved statuses*: We secure other statuses on the basis of individual achievement.

- **Roles**

- Individuals are linked together in groups through networks of reciprocal roles.
- Role refers to the set of rights and duties that is associated with a social status.
- These expectations define the behavior people view as appropriate and inappropriate for the occupant of a status.
- Roles allow us to formulate our behavior mentally so that we can shape our actions in appropriate ways.

- **Role Performance**

- A social role is the expected behavior we associate with a status.
- Role performance is the *actual behavior of the* person who occupies a status-position in social structure.

- **Role conflict** results when individuals are confronted with conflicting expectations stemming from their simultaneous occupancy of two or more statuses.
- **Role strain** occurs when individuals find the expectations of a single role incompatible, so that they have difficulty performing the role.
- **Role exit** occurs when people stop playing roles that have been central to their lives and to their social identities.
- Specific outcomes of role exit vary depending on the centrality, voluntariness, degree of control, and institutionalization of former roles.



- **Groups**

- Groups consist of intricate complexes of interlocking roles, which their members sustain in the course of time.
- Statuses and roles are basic elements for the organization of social groups.
- Sociologists define a group as two or more people who are bound together in relatively stable patterns of social interaction.
- Group members share feelings of belonging, identity, uniqueness and of unity.

- **Aggregates**

- An aggregate is simply a collection of anonymous individuals who are in one place at the same time.
- Individuals shift in and out of an aggregate rather easily and frequently.
- Patterns of social ordering in aggregates are short-lived, as individuals' interaction is transient.

- **Categories**

- A category is a collection of people who share a characteristic (status, a physical feature, behavior pattern) that is deemed to be of social significance.
- Common experiences of persons in categories may function as the ground for the development of social movements or political activity.

- **Institutions**

- Social institutions are these social structures that organize, direct, and execute the essential tasks of living.
- Institutions constitute the standardized solutions (cultural patterns) that orient people in meeting the problems of social living.
- Social institutions are these relatively stable relationships that characterize people in actually implementing these solutions.
- Institutions are not static and fix, but they change, and new institutions emerge.

- **Societies**

- Societies represent the most comprehensive and complex type of social structure.
- Society refers to a group of people who live within the same territory and share a common culture, namely common understandings, values and norms.
- Because these common understandings are widely shared, they bind the separated lives of individuals into a larger whole, making society possible by providing a common framework of meaning.
- The main classification of societies is based on the principal way in which the members of a society derive their livelihood.
- The ways of response to vital needs (food, shelter, clothing) means different socio-economic, political and cultural institutions.

- **Typology of Societies**

- 1) ***Hunting and gathering societies*** represent the earliest form of organized social life. Kinship as the basic social institution. Absence of central institutional power, standing army and extended division of labor. Egalitarian, non-violent societies.
- 2) ***Horticultural societies*** refer to societies where individuals derive their food from plants' cultivation. Social surplus functioned as the ground for the foundation of social stratification. Division and specialization of economic, political, and religious roles. Warfare was acknowledged as an important activity.
- 3) ***Agrarian societies*** refer to societies around 5,000 or 6,000 years ago. Agricultural revolution. Complex forms of social organization. Development of means of production and war. State as political organization was developed and strengthened. Big cities emerged as economic and political power centers.
- 4) ***Industrial societies*** refer to type of societies that emerged about 250 years ago. Machine technologies consist of the productive mechanism. Extended and intricate division of labor. Development of national and international market, upgrade of educational level of population. Metropolitan areas and large-scale bureaucracies.
- 5) ***Postindustrial societies refer to*** “service society”, where more workers find employment in the provision of services rather than the extraction of raw materials and the manufacture of goods. Information as basic economic source and productive means.

Socialization

● **Culture and Socialization**

- Socialization is the process of becoming a social being, a process that continues throughout one's life.
- We are not born as social beings, but become so only in the course of socialization.
- Socialization is a process of social interaction by which people acquire the knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors essential for effective participation in society.
- The reproduction and renewal of culture require the process of socialization.
- Without socialization society could not perpetuate itself beyond a single generation. Individuals would lack those common understandings necessary to align their actions and to bind their separated lives into a larger whole.

Theories of Socialization

- **Macro-level sociological (Functionalism and Conflict theory) approaches to socialization**
- For *functionalists*, the socialization is an indispensable process for the reproduction of the society, in the sense that people internalize the values, norms, and beliefs that ensure that they can and will occupy the statuses and play the roles that make up social structures.
- *Conflict theorists* recognize that socialization prepares people to play various roles in society. Socialization is a process-method to control individuals and ensure that social inequities will be reproduced from one generation to the next.
- For functionalists and Conflict theorists, socialization is a deterministic process, as it ensure the individuals adaptation to social system. These macro-level approaches do not recognize humans as agents, active individuals who can act on and shape their social relations and reality.

● **Social Learning Theory**

- Social Learning Theory emphasize two basic processes of socialization, *conditioning* and *observational learning*.
- ***Conditioning: Reinforcements and Punishments***
- Conditioning is a form of learning in which the consequences of behavior determine the probability of its future occurrence.
- Reinforcements refer to these responses to individuals' behavior that encourage the repetition of this kind of human attitude.
- Punishments refer to these actions that “condemn”, disapprove certain kinds of human behavior and, in such way, pursuit to reduce the probability of re-emergence of this kind of demeanor.
- ***observational learning***
- Individuals learn by observation and imitation of other people's behavior.

- **Cognitive Developmental Theory**

- Cognitive Developmental Theory associates the process of socialization with individual's cognitive development.
- This theory recognizes that learning is a fundamental part of socialization, but the process of learning depends on individual's ability to understand and interpret the world.
- Jean Piaget constructed a four-stage model of cognitive development. Each stage is characterized by different ability of processing information and understanding the social world.

● Piaget's model of Cognitive development

- 1) *Sensorimotor stage* (from birth to about 18 months)
- *In this stage*, children learn directly through their senses and their movements. They cannot distinguish between themselves and their environment. Children acquire, gradually, the sense of their distinct existence from the other people and the objects around them.
- 2) *Preoperational stage* (from about 18 months to 6 or 7 years old)
- In this stage, children learn symbols and language, but they identify symbols very closely with the objects they represent. It's the first stage of development of *representational thought*, made possible by learning symbols and language. Children present an intense self-centered, self-referent attitude (egocentricity).

- **3) *Concrete operational stage*** (from age 6 or 7 until about 11 or 12 years old)
- Children develop their ability to think more abstractly, to do simple arithmetic operations, to separate a symbol from its referent, and to recognize the other people's view.
- **4) *Formal operational stage*** (from age 11 or 12 to adulthood)
- In this stage, persons develop further their abstract and logical abilities. They are in position to deal with a problem from various perspectives. The crucial development of the ability to recognize and evaluate other people's views enables persons to cultivate the sense of their own identity and to develop moral sensibility.

● **Symbolic Interactionism**

- From the symbolic interactionist perspective, the process of socialization depends largely on human actions, such as observation, interpretation, evaluation, communication, and self-control.
- Symbolic interactionists focus on a reflexive behavior, which involves people observing their own behavior from the perspective of others.
- Through reflexive behavior, people develop the sense of themselves.
- Symbolic interactionism recognizes the crucial, active role of persons in the learning process, that consist of the foundation of socialization process.
- The active role of individuals refers to the observation and interpretation of their own behavior and others people's reactions, as well as to the re-orientation and shaping of their demeanor according to their evaluations.
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● **Charles Horton Cooley: The Looking-Glass Self**

- According to Cooley, people transform themselves and their worlds as they engage in social interaction.
- The term of *looking-glass self* refer to a process by which we imaginatively assume the stance of other people and view ourselves as we believe they see us.
- Individuals' ability to take the perspective of another person is a basic requirement of persons' socialization and of all social behavior.
- This mental process is articulated to three phases:
 - a) we imagine how we appear to others.
 - b) we imagine how others judge our appearance.
 - c) we react emotionally on the base of our perception about others' judgments.
- Persons' conception and evaluation about themselves are shaped by their self-images and self-conceptions.
- A **self-image** is a picture that we have of ourselves. This image depends on social context in which we find every time ourselves.
- Our **self-conception** is a more overall and cohesive view of ourselves.

● **Self-Evaluation**

- Self-conception includes a description of ourselves and also our evaluation of ourselves.
- Two basic dimensions of self-evaluation are *self-esteem* and *personal efficacy*.
- **Self-esteem** refers to the belief that one is a good and valuable person.
- Self-esteem comes from three mental processes:
 - 1) Reflected appraisals
 - 2) Social comparisons
 - 3) Self-attribution
- **Personal efficacy** relates with the belief that someone is capable to attain his/her goals.

● George Herbert Mead: The Generalized Other

- According to G.H. Mead, we proceed to a mental reflexive relation with ourselves by taking the position of another person and look back on ourselves from this standpoint.
- At the same time, we are the subject and the object of observation.
- This reflexive process, this internal conversation relies on language and largely contributes to the development of the self.
- Mead formulated the theory of three-stage development of sense of selfhood.
- a) The “*play*” stage: Children take the role of only one other, important person at a time and try to imitate the person’s behavior (*significant other*).
- b) The “*game*” stage: Children assume many roles and recognize the expectations that are associated with these various social roles.
- c) The “*generalized other*” stage: Children recognize that they belong to a wider web of social relations, and that these relations are arranged by certain patterns of behavior. Individuals have to follow the attitude of their social unit. Society as a whole (*the generalized other*) functions as the role model for individuals.

● **Erving Goffman: Impression Management**

- Impression management is the process by which individuals attempt to control their self-presentation in the context of everyday social interactions.
- Our social self is shaped by other people's ideas of us.
- Self is not something that we possess, but a product of our performances and of others' appraisals and interpretations.
- Self is a "dramatic effect".
- Goffman proposed a "dramaturgical approach", as he utilized theater as an analytical analogy in order to understand the various role performances into which people are engaged in their daily lives.
- Role performances are main vehicles for socialization and construction of selfhood.

● **Definition of the Situation**

- According to **W.I. Thomas**, the term of definition of the situation refers to the interpretation or meaning we give to our immediate circumstances.
- The processes of signification and interpretation of social situations are of great importance for socialization.
- Commonly accepted definitions of various social situations permit us to communicate with one another and to act on our social world.
- Culture can be defined as the shared definitions of situations that individuals acquire as members of a society.
- Individuals are socialized by learning the commonly accepted definitions of social reality, that definitions that are transmitted from one generation to the next.
- The definition of social situation is a crucial process, as these definitions construct our social reality, human experience, our patterns of perception, evaluation, feeling and acting.
- The socially constructed social reality defines also the range of choices concerning our social action.

● **Agents of Socialization**

● **Family**

- Usually, the first social environment for young children is the family
- The structure of family and parents' roles define largely the process of socialization.

● **Peer group**

- The peer group functions as a crucial factor of socialization.
- Child's peers affect his/her emotional, cognitive and social development.
- Peers' behavior contributes to the shaping of child's behavior and attitude.
- Peer group set standards of evaluation and patterns of behavior, that differ from parents' models.

- **School**

- The institution of school utilize certain “tools” by which contributes crucially to child’s socialization:

- **a) Teaching**

- **b) Praises and reprimands /sanctions-penalties**

- **c) familiarization with bureaucratic structures**

- **d) promotion of social values**

- **e) promotion of representations of power and authority**

- **Mass Media**

- Mass media (television, radio, Internet, music, movies, comic books, video games, books, magazines, and newspapers) play important role in socialization because they provide models for behavior.

- Mass Media promote/propose schemes of understanding, evaluation and interpretation of our social worlds.

● **Social Communication**

- Communication refers to the process by which people transmit information, ideas, attitudes, and mental states to one another.
- The ability of communication is both prerequisite (for) and consequence of socialization.
- Communication is the main mechanism by which human “enter” in society and culture.
- By communication and social interaction, individuals learn values, norms, beliefs, all the main components of culture and social condition.
- Communication allows us to establish “commonness” with one another. This common “ground” functions as the base of socialization and development of social relations.
- Communication includes all those verbal and nonverbal processes by which we send and receive messages.

- **Verbal Communication**

- According to Noam Chomsky (1957), the basic structure of language is biologically channeled, forming a sort of prefabricated filing system to order the words and phrases that make up human languages (language acquisition device).
- Children have only to learn the peculiarities of his or her society's language.
- Language development does not depend only by biological factors. Environmental, socio-cultural factors play crucial role in individuals' ability of using language.
- Language development relies on social communication and interaction. Verbal communication supports the social interaction and the socialization process.

- **Nonverbal Communication**

- Nonverbal communication plays a n important part in social communication. Nonverbal communication systems:
 - a) *Body language*
 - b) *Paralanguage*
 - c) *Proxemics*
 - d) *Touch*
 - e) *Artifacts*

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