



Core Concepts

Basic Definitions

Sociology	The systematic study of human society and social interaction.
Society	A group of people living in a defined territory who share a common culture.
Culture	The shared beliefs, values, norms, and material objects that define a group's way of life.
Social Structure	The organized pattern of social relationships and social institutions that together compose society.
Social Interaction	The process by which people act and react in relation to others.
Social Change	The transformation of culture and social institutions over time.

Key Elements of Culture

Values	Culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful and that serve as broad guidelines for social living.
Beliefs	Specific ideas that people hold to be true.
Norms	Rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members. (Mores, Folkways, Laws)
Symbols	Anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture.
Language	A system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another.
Material Culture	The physical objects created by a society that influence the ways people live.

Socialization

The lifelong process of learning the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to your social position.
Agents of Socialization: Family, school, peer groups, mass media, workplace, religion.
Types of Socialization: Primary (early childhood), Secondary (later childhood/adolescence), Adult.

Theoretical Perspectives

Major Sociological Perspectives

Functionalism	Views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Emphasizes social functions of institutions. Key figures: Durkheim, Parsons, Merton.
Conflict Theory	Sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change. Examines power struggles. Key figures: Marx, Weber, Dahrendorf.
Symbolic Interactionism	Focuses on micro-level interactions and the meanings individuals attach to objects, events, and behaviors. Key figures: Mead, Cooley, Goffman.
Feminist Theory	Analyzes gender inequality and the social construction of gender. Examines the intersection of gender, race, class, and other forms of oppression. Key figures: Martineau, Addams, Gilligan.

Key Concepts within Theories

Manifest Functions	The recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern (Functionalism).
Latent Functions	The unrecognized and unintended consequences of any social pattern (Functionalism).
False Consciousness	A way of thinking that prevents a person from perceiving the true nature of their social or economic situation (Conflict Theory).
Class Consciousness	The awareness of one's social and/or economic rank in society (Conflict Theory).
Looking-Glass Self	A person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others (Symbolic Interactionism).
Dramaturgy	The idea that people's day-to-day lives can be understood as resembling performers on a theater stage (Symbolic Interactionism).

Research Methods

Research Approaches

Quantitative Research	Emphasizes objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques.
Qualitative Research	Exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying opinions, reasons, assumptions, and motivations. Provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research.

Common Research Methods

Surveys: Questionnaires or interviews administered to a sample of people to gather data about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.
Experiments: Controlled studies that examine the cause-and-effect relationship between variables.
Participant Observation: Researchers immerse themselves in a social setting to observe and understand social interactions and cultural practices.
Secondary Data Analysis: Analyzing existing data collected by others, such as government statistics or historical records.
Content Analysis: A systematic analysis of the content of communication, such as books, articles, or media.

Key Research Concepts

Hypothesis	A testable statement about the relationship between two or more variables.
Variable	A characteristic that can vary in value or magnitude across different cases.
Independent Variable	The variable that is hypothesized to cause or influence another variable.
Dependent Variable	The variable that is hypothesized to be affected by the independent variable.
Correlation	A statistical measure that indicates the extent to which two or more variables fluctuate together.
Causation	A relationship in which one variable (the independent variable) directly causes a change in another variable (the dependent variable).

Social Institutions

Major Social Institutions

Social institutions are established sets of norms and subsystems that support each society's survival. They structure social behavior.
Family: Regulates reproduction, provides care and socialization.
Education: Transmits knowledge and skills, socializes individuals.
Economy: Produces and distributes goods and services.
Government/Politics: Exercises power and authority, makes and enforces laws.
Religion: Provides meaning and purpose, promotes social cohesion.

Functions of Social Institutions

Providing Social Cohesion	Institutions create shared values and norms that bind individuals together.
Maintaining Social Order	Institutions establish rules and expectations that regulate behavior and prevent chaos.
Meeting Social Needs	Institutions provide essential services and resources that individuals and society require.
Transmitting Culture	Institutions pass on cultural knowledge, values, and traditions from one generation to the next.
Promoting Social Change	While institutions often maintain stability, they can also be agents of social change.