A. What is Sociology?

"The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden." - Pierre Bourdieau

I. Sociology is a Perspective

The sociological perspective involves two features:

- Seeing the general in the particular
- Seeing the strange in the familiar

The main thinking tools of sociology:

**Reason** and **Imagination**

"You can’t do much carpentry with your bare hands and you can’t do much thinking with your bare brain." – Dennet
1. Sociology is...

1a. Sociology is the science of society...

1b. Science is the art of “reality testing” through the study of “pattern association” using thinking tools.

1c. Reality (and therefore society) is illusory...

“Things are not what they seem.” - Peter Berger

1. Sociology is...

a. Sociology is the science of society
b. Science is art of “reality testing”...

1c. Society is a network of significant others in relation to the self...

1. Sociology is...

a. Sociology is the science of society...

b. Science is art of “reality testing”...

c. Society is a network of significant others in relation to the self...

d. The Self is a conscious organism that can contemplate its own existence among many significant others. The self is reflexive and aware of its own being. We T-H-I-N-K about ourselves and our relations to others consciously, and plan mutual behavior to the benefit of all.

The SELF is the basic unit of analysis (the smallest part) of the scientific observation of society (sociology)...

1e. The “Unit of Analysis” in Sociology is the SELF

An ANALOGY:

Self is to Society as...
- Atom is to Physics
- Molecule is to Chemistry
- Cell is to Biology

BUT

Human beings (“selves”) are not as predictable as molecules, atoms and cells! Why not?

With consciousness comes choice and free will – but how much? Where does the fate of society and culture meet your own free will? ARE WE TRULY FREE?

2. Self ↔ Society

a. The Sociological Imagination:

“The vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society.” - C. Wright Mills, 1959, *The Sociological Imagination*

**Self ↔ Society**

Biography ↔ History

b. **S.O.C.I.**

- an *acronym* – a word formed from the initial letters of a name (e.g. LOL)
- also, a *mnemonic* – a memorization trick for learning
S.O.C.I.

S = Self-Awareness is gained through self-teaching which involves contemplation of yourself in terms of the:

- **S** = Self-Awareness
- **O** = Occupancy
- **I** = Identity
- **C** = Copying

Occupancy in your mind of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, and Social Norms that are learned from significant others;

Copying in your own words and actions of those ideas & values in as you participate in Social Roles

Reflection upon and understanding of this process leads to an awareness of your:

Identity, or a sense of meaning about the norms and roles you choose to accept and fill during your life within groups of significant others, or social institutions, to which you belong.

(Ed Powell, Univ. at Buffalo sociologist)

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2. Self ↔ Society

c. IDENTITY = deciding on and pursuing ROLES that satisfy YOU (not others, or “society”).

But, this is not an individual experience. It is a collective one.

Interaction within a network of significant others guides the decisions you make throughout life and helps you gain Self-Awareness.

How do you “self-teach” to find your Identity?

Do what you love doing.

"The aim of life is to know thyself." - Socrates
"The unexamined life is not worth living." - Aristotle

In order to understand yourself, you must make the connection between your biography and the history of the social era from which you get the ideas that make up your mind. This is also related to personal and social problems.

Self ↔ Society
Biography ↔ History

(C. Wright Mills, 1959, The Sociological Imagination)

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SARTRE: “FREEDOM IS WHAT YOU DO WITH WHAT’S BEEN DONE TO YOU.”
Central Sociological Concepts

Social Norms

When people interact, social norms develop. Norms are shared ideals for behavior.

A norm is a prescription for collective action, an agreed upon way of behaving, a social consensus.

IDEA = THOUGHT

Norms occur in the “conscience collective” of society.
(Source: Emile Durkheim, early French sociologist).

Question:
- Describe some basic social norms.
- Are all norms “good”? Give an example of a norm that leads to social problems.

Central Sociological Concepts

Social Roles

By our nature, we imitate and we learn from our institutional interactions our social roles, or social behaviors actually performed by individuals.

BEHAVIOR = ACTION

The word and concept (originally French, rôle) borrows from the field of theater, “acting” on the “stage of life,” so to speak.

Questions:
- What role are you “playing” now? What are its expected behaviors?
- What other roles have you “played” in your life?
- Are you always aware of the roles you are playing?

Central Sociological Concepts: Social Institutions

Social interaction takes place in the context of social institutions.

Social institutions are the purposeful organization of individuals into social groups and categories.

The universal social institutions are:

Family
Religion
Economy
Education
Politics

the five institutions (“FREEP”)

Institutions define our social lives, and involve nearly every aspect of our personal lives as well. So, big changes in our institutions mean big changes in our personal lives.
3. The Origins of Sociology

a. What socio-historical forces changed in Europe in the 1800s to prompt people to think sociologically?

1. Industrialization
   Agriculture → Manufacturing

2. Urbanization
   Countryside → City

3. Political Change
   Monarchy → Democracy

b. Who noticed these historical changes and developed sociology into a science?

   He invented the term “sociology.”

   For Comte, science represents a stage in history:
   i. Theological stage
      Focus: Religious belief explained everything
   ii. Metaphysical stage
      Focus: Philosophy applies reason (logos)
   iii. Scientific stage
      Focus: “Positivism” – a purely scientific understanding of the world. [Social Problems stem from Social Forces.]

2. Emile Durkheim (France, 1858-1917)
   Durkheim made sociology into a science by studying social facts and forces. Made famous for his studies of anomie and suicide, religion, and the division of labor in society.

   Theory: “Structural Functionalism”
   Science-Type: Logical Empiricism

   **Structural-Functional Theory**
   (Durkheim and followers) Focus: Social Order

   i. Social structure: any relatively stable pattern of social behavior (like institutions).
      - Metaphor: if society is an organism, like a human body, its structures are the organs.
   ii. Social function: how structure keeps society operating well.
      (dysfunction = social problem)
      Example: the social structure of education provides knowledge for people to gain skills and get jobs. Also, one educational function is to develop skills of social integration in individuals.
3. The Origins of Sociology

Who developed sociology into a science?

b3. Karl Marx (Germany, 1818-1883) recognized the great inequalities in the new industrial society (the haves and have-nots). For Marx, economic institutions are the basis of society.

(Theory Connection: “Social-Conflict”
Science Type: Historical Materialism)

Social-Conflict Theory
(Marx and followers) Focus: Social Power
Society is an arena for group conflict which generates inequality, but also creates change. Inequalities of this kind include rich v. poor, men v. women, racial conflicts, religious conflicts, etc. But they always involve large categories, or classes, of people.

b4. Max Weber (Germany, 1864-1920) is known for his groundbreaking research on religion and capitalism, the social classes, and bureaucracy.

(Theory Connection: “Symbolic-Interactionist”
Science Type: Interpretative/Pragmatic)

Symbolic-Interaction Theory
(Weber and followers) Focus: Social Meaning
Society is a product of everyday interactions of individuals, or “micro-level interaction” (v.s. the “macro-level” big picture perspective of the previous theories).

How people interpret social life and norms is equally as important as the intentions of the norm’s creator.