Soc 201 Lecture Notes on Social Structure

Levels of Sociological Analysis

Macrosociology
1. Focuses on large-scale features of social life
2. Investigates the effects of large-scale forces on societies
3. Is used by both functionalists and conflict theorists

Microsociology
1. Places emphasis on smaller social elements
2. Is concerned with small groups and social interaction
3. Is used by symbolic interactionists.

The Macrosociological Perspective: Social Structure

Social structure: the patterned relationships between people that persist over time.
- To a great extent, the individual's attitudes and behaviors are determined by location in social structure.
- The major components of social structure are culture, social class, social status, roles, groups, and institutions.
  - Social status: positions an individual occupies.
  - A status set consists of all statuses an individual occupies.
  - Ascribed statuses are positions an individual either inherits at birth or receives involuntarily later in life.
  - Achieved statuses are positions earned or accomplished through at least some effort on the individual's part.
  - Status symbols are signs that identify a status.
  - A master status cuts across other statuses an individual occupies.
  - Roles are behaviors, obligations, and privileges attached to a status.
  - Group consists of people who share similar values, norms, and expectations, and who interact regularly and consciously.

Social institutions
- family, religion, law, politics, eco-nomics, education, medicine and the military are the organized means each society develops to meet its basic needs and establish the context in which people live.
- Each institution has its own set of roles, values, and norms.

The functionalist view
a. Social institutions are established ways of meeting universal group needs.
b. Five functional requisites: replacing members, socializing new members, producing and distributing goods and services, preserving order, and providing a sense of purpose.

The conflict view
a. Social institutions are the primary means by which the elite maintains its privileged position (e.g., effects of education on inequality)

Changes in social structure
*Social change occurs in response to technological change, the spread of new ideas, and evolving values.
*Globalization, providing increased contact with other cultures, is a major source of change in social structure.

**What holds society together?**

Social cohesion refers to the degree to which members of a society feel united by shared values and other social bonds.

**Emile Durkheim**

a. *Mechanical solidarity* - the collective consciousness people have due to performing the same or similar tasks - is the kind of integration found in nonindustrial societies.

b. *Organic solidarity*, or social integration in industrial societies, rests on the division of labor in industrial societies that gives rise to a collective consciousness based on interdependence.

**Ferdinand Tonnies**

*Gemeinschaft society, "intimate community" in which people know each other personally and share a sense of togetherness, marked traditional societies.

*Gesellschaft society, dominated by impersonal relationships, individual accomplishments, and self-interest, is replacing the earlier form because of the impact of industrialization.

**The Microsociological Perspective: Social Interaction in everyday Life**

A. This level of analysis emphasizes face-to-face social interaction.

B. Symbolic interactionism

*examines the symbols people use to define their worlds, how they look at things, and how that affects their behavior.

*Stereotypes: ideas about others shaped by assumptions based on their sex, race, age, and physical appearance.

a. They affect both beliefs and behavior toward people.

b. They tend to bring about the behavior that fits the stereotype.

C. Stereotypes and behavior (Mark Snyder 1993)

**Dramaturgy (Goffman)**

*uses the analogy of the stage to analyze everyday social life.

*People enact roles on both front stage, where performances are given, and back stage, where people rest from their performances.

*Problems in role performances*

a. *Role conflict*: when expectations attached to one role are incompatible and in conflict with those of another role.

b. *Role strain* occurs when someone feels conflicts within a role.

Impression management: a person's efforts to manage the impressions others have of her or him.

**Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel)**

* analyzes how people make sense of everyday life by trying to uncover people's background assumptions that lie at the core of their reality and form their worldview.

* social construction of reality refers to what people define as real because of their backgrounds.