Groups & Society

The individual relates to society within groups which are part of the SOCIAL STRUCTURE—the pattern of relationships among basic component parts in a social system. Social interactions between groups and individuals studied in symbolic interaction theory, ethnomethodology, dramaturgical approach, exchange theory with the norm of reciprocity.
Social Structure includes status:

- Statuses: status is a position we hold in society. Ascribed status is the one you are born with (male/female); achieved status is one you earn or achieve (college graduate); master status an important status that people organize their lives around. Social class is the category of people who hold the same status in an unequal society. YOU OCCUPY A STATUS.
Roles

Roles: role is a set of expected behavior patterns, obligations and privileges attached to a social status. YOU PLAY A ROLE. Roles include role expectations (the accepted social norms that prescribe how a role should be played); role performance (how you play the role); role strain (contradictory expectations in a single role); role conflict (two or more of one person’s roles require contradictory demands)
Groups:

- collection of people interacting with shared expectations. NOT an aggregate or a category
Kinds of groups

- PRIMARY GROUPS—small number of people who interact directly, intimately (families);
- SECONDARY GROUPS—people who interact temporarily, anonymously, impersonal (formal organizations);
- REFERENCE GROUPS—a group with a standard we refer to, make reference to or want to emulate. Size of groups makes a difference. Small groups of dyads, triads and up to seven people can engage in same conversations. Above ten people subgroups and leaders emerge. Leadership styles include authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire; instrumental or expressive.
- INGROUPS/OUTGROUPS, reference groups, social networks. Group cohesiveness and “groupthink.”
Formal Organizations:

- kinds of large, secondary groups that are deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives. Organization kinds include: voluntary, coercive, utilitarian.

Informal structures: opposite of organization includes informal social networks which depend on rumors and gossip
Bureaucracy

BUREAUCRACY is a kind of formal organization with a hierarchical authority structure that operates under explicit rules & procedures. Max Weber said that increasing levels of bureaucracy lead to increasing change in social structures—the “rationalization” of society. Bureaucracies need division of labor, hierarchy, rules, impersonal, record keeping, administrative staff, career structure
Bureaucracy’s Problems

- Socialism depends on government bureaucracy to regulate goods & services. This created economic inefficiencies. Capitalism depends on market to regulate the flow of goods & services but government bureaucracy needed to regulate excesses.

- Dependence on rule in bureaucracy can lead to blind adherence which is “trained incapacity”—goal displacement where bureaucrats get so caught up in following rules and filling out forms that forget purpose of organization.

Service without a smile; invisible woman—condescending chivalry, supportive discouragement, benevolent exploitation.
Oligarchy

- Oligarchies result when there is rule by a few at the top and authoritarian despots. Robert Michels called this the “iron law of oligarchy”—democracy and large organizations are incompatible. Max Weber called this an “iron cage”.
Institutions

- Defined as the stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, roles and groups that develop around a social need—like education, religion, economy.

- Characteristics of institutions include: they are resistant to change which ensures social stability; they are interdependent which means they work together to uphold the social structure; they change together; they are sites of social problems.

- Corporations—a group and bureaucratic institution that has the status of a real social entity.
Society

- Defined as a population that occupies the same territory, is subject to the same political authority and participates in a common culture.

- Sociocultural evolution is the tendency of a society’s social structure and culture to grow more complex over time. With the creation of surplus wealth, there is increasing specialization in a division of labor.
Close vs. distant

- Gemeinschaft societies—are where people have a sense of community and know each other and are close; Gesellschaft societies—are where people have associations and are strangers to each other.
- Mechanical solidarity is where people form groups and society based on their similarities; Organic solidarity is where people form groups based on their differences.
Types of Societies

- Hunting and gathering, example the Pygmies. Subsistence economies; groups rarely exceed 40; hunt animals & gather indigenous foods for eating; members related by kinship & marriage; no political institution; religion is animism, the belief in unseen spirits of nature. Simple social structure.
Herding

- Pastoral, example the Turkana. Economies based on domesticated animals which ensure food and create surplus wealth. Animals traded for commodities like gold or weapons which means political structures develop—hereditary chieftainships, slavery, religion as monotheism. Judaism, Christianity & Islam all originated in pastoral societies (Bible’s Psalms).
Agriculture

- Horticultural societies. Economies based on cultivation of plants, but based on “slash and burn” technologies rather than cultivation with plows and draft animals.

- Agricultural societies, example the Northern Indian family. Economies based on invention of plow and domestication of animals were able to rework land and stay in one place. Cultivation of large fields meant creation of surplus wealth, division of labor. Advanced agricultural societies led to FEUDALISM—a small landowning elite and many worker peasants.
Industry

- Industrial societies, example early Europe and U.S. Economies based on invention of mechanized production, Industrial Revolution 250 years ago. Factories, urban cities, CAPITALISM emerges from feudalism. Democracy takes over monarchies.
Post-industry

- Post-industrial societies, example today. Information and services now centerpiece of production. Technology and formal knowledge needed.
Transition

- Transitional societies are in-between stages of development. Called “developing societies,” “the developing world,” the Third World, examples found in Latin America, Africa, Asia