Social Structure and Interaction

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Social Interaction
- Elements of Social Structure
- Bureaucracy
- Social Structure in Global Perspective

A Look Ahead

- What makes up society?
- How does social structure shape individual action?
- How do sociologists describe traditional versus modern societies?

Social Interaction

- **Social interaction**: the ways in which people respond to one another
- How we interact with people is shaped by our perception of their position relative to our own
- Meanings we ascribe to others’ actions reflect norms and values of the dominant culture
  - Ability to define social reality reflects a group’s power within a society

Elements of Social Structure

- **Social structure**: way in which a society is organized into predictable relationships
- Occupying these positions shapes how we think and act and what resources we have access to
**Statues**

- **Status**: refers to any of the full range of socially defined positions within a large group or society
  - A person holds more than one status simultaneously

**Ascribed and Achieved Status**

- **Ascribed status**: assigned without regard for a person’s unique talents or characteristics
- **Achieved status**: social position that is within our power to change
- **Master status**: status that dominates others and determines a person’s general position in society

**Social Statuses**

**Social Roles**

- **Social role**: set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status
  - Significant component of social structure
- **Role conflict**: occurs when incompatible expectations arise from two or more social positions held by the same person; or when individuals move into occupations not common among people with their ascribed status
Social Roles

- **Role strain**: difficulty that arises when the same social position imposes conflicting demands and expectations
- **Role exit**: process of disengagement from a role central to one's self-identity in order to establish a new role and identity
  - Ebaugh's four-stage model: doubt; search for alternatives; action stage or departure; creation of new identity

Groups

- **Group**: any number of people with similar norms, values, and expectations who interact with one another on a regular basis
  - Play a vital part in a society's social structure
  - **Primary group**: small group with intimate, face-to-face association and cooperation
  - **Secondary group**: formal, impersonal group with little social intimacy or mutual understanding

Comparison of Primary and Secondary Groups

- **Primary group**
  - Generally small
  - Relatively long period of interaction
  - Intimate, face-to-face association
  - Some emotional depth to relationships
  - Cooperative, friendly
- **Secondary group**
  - Usually large
  - Relatively short duration, often temporary
  - Little social intimacy or mutual understanding
  - Relationships generally superficial
  - More formal and impersonal

In-group**: any group or category to which people feel they belong

**Out-group**: any group or category to which people feel they do not belong

Conflict between in-groups and out-groups can turn violent on personal as well as political level
Groups

- **Reference group**: any group individuals use as standard for evaluating themselves and their own behavior
  - Two basic purposes: set and enforce standards of conduct and belief; serve as standard against which people can measure themselves and others
- **Coalition**: temporary or permanent alliance geared toward common goal
  - Can be broad based or narrow

Social Networks

- **Social network**: series of social relationships that link individuals directly to others, and through them indirectly to still more people
  - Networking is valuable when job hunting

Adolescent Sexual Networks


Virtual Worlds

- People can maintain social networks electronically
- Virtual world participants can create an **avatar** (online character representation)
- Collective action made possible through social networking potential of Internet is only just beginning
- Can help preserve real-world networks interrupted by war and other dislocations
Shirky’s Four Steps Toward Increased Internet Interaction

- Steps
  - Sharing
  - Conversation
  - Collaboration
  - Collective action

Social Institutions

- Social institution: organized pattern of beliefs and behavior centered on basic social needs
- Can view them as fulfilling essential functions
  - Five major tasks (functional prerequisites)
    1. Reproduce membership
    2. Reproduce culture
    3. Produce and distribute goods and services
    4. Preserve order
    5. Provide and maintain a sense of meaning and purpose

Social Institutions

- Can also view them as reinforcing inequality
  - Major institutions help maintain privileges of most powerful individuals and groups within society while contributing to the powerlessness of others

Social Institutions

- Others view them by focusing on our everyday interactions to understand how we think and act the way we do
Bureaucracy

- Bureaucracy: component of a formal organization that uses rules and hierarchical ranking to achieve efficiency
- In an industrial society, elements of bureaucracy enter into almost every occupation

Characteristics of a Bureaucracy

- Max Weber emphasized similarity of structure and process found in otherwise dissimilar enterprises
  - Ideal type: construct or model for evaluating specific cases
  - Ideal bureaucracy displays five basic characteristics

Characteristics of a Bureaucracy

- Division of Labor
  - Alienation: loss of control over our creative human capacity to produce, separation from the products we make, and isolation from our fellow workers
  - Trained incapacity: workers become so specialized that they develop blind spots and fail to notice potential problems
Characteristics of a Bureaucracy

- Hierarchy of Authority
- Written Rules and Regulations
  - Goal displacement: overzealous conformity to official regulations
- Impersonality
- Employment Based on Technical Qualifications
  - Peter principle: every employee within a hierarchy tends to rise to his or her level of incompetence (Peter and Hull 1969)

Bureaucratization as a Way of Life

- Bureaucratization: process by which a group, organization, or social movement increasingly relies on technical-rational decision making

The Spread of Bureaucratization

- McDonaldization: process by which the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control shape organization and decision making in the U.S. and around the world
- Weber thought the only way to beat bureaucratization was to become more bureaucratic

From Bureaucracy to Oligarchy

- Iron law of oligarchy: describes how even a democratic organization will eventually develop into a bureaucracy ruled by a few (an oligarchy)
- Actions that violate the core principles of bureaucracy can seep in
  - Ascribed statuses such as gender, race, and ethnicity can influence how people are treated
Bureaucracy and Organizational Culture

- Classical theory of formal organizations: workers motivated almost entirely by economic rewards (also known as scientific management approach)
- Human relations approach: emphasizes role of people, communication, and participation in a bureaucracy

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

- Ferdinand Tönnies appalled by rise of industrial cities
- Gemeinschaft (guh-MINE-shoft): small community in which people have similar backgrounds and life experiences
- Gesellschaft (guh-ZELL-shoft): large community in which people are strangers and feel little in common with other residents

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

- Durkheim interested in transition to modern society
  - Mechanical solidarity: refers to collective consciousness that emphasizes group solidarity
  - Organic solidarity: refers to collective consciousness that rests on need a society’s members have for one another

Technology and Society

- Gerhard Lenski argued that a society’s level of technology is critical to way it is organized
- New social forms arise as technology changes
Technology and Society

- Preindustrial Societies
  - Hunting-and-gathering societies: people rely on whatever foods and fibers are readily available
  - Horticultural societies: people plant seeds and crops
  - Agrarian societies: primarily engaged in production of food

Technology and Society

- Industrial Societies
  - Industrial society: depends on mechanization to produce its goods and services
  - Rely on new inventions and energy sources
  - Individuals, villages, and regions become interdependent
  - Education emerges as social institution distinct from family due to need for specialized knowledge

Technology and Society

- Postindustrial Societies
  - Postindustrial society: economic system is engaged primarily in the processing and control of information
  - Main output is services rather than manufactured goods
  - Differential access to resources has hidden consequences

Postmodern Life

- Postmodern society: technologically sophisticated, pluralistic, interconnected, globalized society
  - Stories: people hold different, often competing, sets of norms and values
  - Images: reality is constrained by the images we construct
  - Choices: we pick and choose our reality
  - Networks: globally linked into vast, interrelated social, cultural, political, and economic system