

These handouts typically contain questions relating to the material covered in class. If you can answer the questions on the handouts you should be in good shape when it comes time for tests.

The Sociological Imagination

1. Can you see your daily life, your daily concerns and decisions, your personal problems, your successes and failures in relation to larger social issues? Can you see these things in relation to historical development? How? Can you see yourself in society? Can you see society in you? What are you looking at to see these things?
2. What do we have to consider when trying to answer question one, above? What do “biography, history, and society” have to do with our attempt to answer question one, above?
3. What kind of biographies are there in our society today? What kind of people do you get to interact with? Where do they come from? What were *their* lives like as they grew up? What are their lives like today? How do *they* look at the world? Where do different kinds of people come from? How are they made? Do we know anything about human nature after looking at all the people? Do we know how much of a person is “personality” unaffected by society and social forces, and how much is the result of the person’s experiences in a particular society at a particular time in history?
4. How has history progressed? What’s gone on in the past 50, 100, 500, or 10,000 years to influence what we are like today? How have the major components of society – the ones we spend our lives dealing with (like the economy, education, religion, family, health care, etc.) – related to historical development? How is history made? How do historical changes occur? Which components of society play a bigger role in shaping history today? Which played the big role yesterday? How is your life linked to them?
5. What do we mean by “the essential components of a society”? How are the different essential components related to each other? Can we imagine societies that have different essential components or different relationships between their essential components? Would a different set-up of society’s components change the way we view our personal lives, our personal problems and joys? Do we consider the set-up of society when we view other people’s problems?

The Major Perspectives

1. Why are there different perspectives in sociology? Is there something that is shared between all the perspectives? Is it possible to *prove* that one perspective is wrong while another is right?
2. What does the world look like to people who are on the bottom of socioeconomic ladders? What would an explanation of the world include if you came from a life of poverty (in a society with both wealth and poverty)? Is it just? Is it well-ordered? How is it ordered? Is it likely to change? How? Would you want it to change? What else would you be concerned about?
3. What does the world look like to people who are in the top third of the socioeconomic ladder? What would an explanation of social life include if you came from a life of comfort or power in a society with different social classes? Does it seem just? Does it seem ordered? How is it ordered? Will it change? Does it have to change? Would you want it to change? What would you be concerned about?
4. What does the world look like from where *you* stand right now? What part of the world or social life do you see? What parts *can* you see? What would an explanation of social life include if you focused on what you could see only in your immediate environment? How is it ordered? How do things work? How can you change what goes on? Will you change what goes on? Why or why not?
5. What are conflict theorists, or Marxists? How does *material* play a role in their thinking? What are their concerns with opportunity? Equality? Why is the economy of central importance to conflict theorists? Where does it all start? Where is it going? How is it getting there?
6. Who, according to conflict theorists, suffer from false consciousness? Who use ideologies? Who supports the status quo? How do you get people to reach class consciousness?
7. What are functionalist, or “order” theories? Which components of society and culture do they consider? Which do they ignore? How does order come about in the first place? What do functionalists mean when they refer to *latent* functions of components within a society? Which are more important, manifest or latent functions? Are dysfunctions common? Where do they come from?
8. If the bottom-line is functionality, do societies have needs (which would have to be met for the society to function)? What are they? How can these needs be fulfilled? How do social institutions help fulfill these needs of society?
9. Who are the interactionists? What’s their focus? Are they looking at something the conflict theorists and functionalists might have forgotten about?
10. How is interaction choreographed? How do rules get in our heads? How do expectations get rules into our heads? How do we negotiate rules and expectations? How do you even know who you are, or who anybody else in the room is? Are they persons or role players? What makes one into the other?

Culture and Social Structure

1. What's the difference between culture and social structure? What does it mean to say that one is "a set of cognitive and evaluative beliefs... shared by the members of a social system," and the other is "a persisting and bounded pattern of social relationships among the units in a social system"? Where are beliefs? What are units?
2. What are some of the components of a culture? Are they products? Of what? Once produced, do they remain stable? How?
3. What do power and knowledge have in common and how do these relate to maintaining culture?
4. When do a group of people count as a subculture? How do you become a member of a subculture? How do subcultures relate to the dominant culture? How does the dominant culture keep from becoming a subculture?
5. How deep does capitalist culture reach into what we thought were our personal lives?
6. Can you visualize a social structure, complete with components and relationships between the components? How does the idea of a network help here? What are some of the components in the social structure of a modern society like the United States? How are they interrelated?
7. How else can societies be structured? What have societies looked like throughout history? What might have caused some of the changes? What do different societies today look like in structure?
8. What is the difference between *macro* and *micro* structures? Does one have more of an influence in your life than another? How do they each influence "what kinds of people relate for what purposes at which moments and in which settings"?
9. What are social institutions and why are these so important for a sociological view of human life? What does it mean to say something has become institutionalized?
10. What are social groups, and what roles do groups play in shaping the course of our lives? How much of who you think you are is dependent on *social identity* factors?
11. What are roles, and what do they do in shaping our lives? How much of who you think you are is dependent upon the roles you play? Where do you play these roles? Can you play them any way you like? What limits you?

Stratification

1. How many different ways can you be classified? Do *all* of your group memberships result in a type of meaningful classification as far as stratification is concerned? What would Gerth and Mills say about this? (“...A classification in terms of valued things and experiences [in order] to find out just which people regularly expect to, and do receive how many of the available values, and in each case [to explain] why.”)
2. What are the different social classes in the United States? Which class do you think you belong to? Which class do you really belong to? What is it about the descriptions of the social classes that you like/don't like? Are you letting your likes and dislikes interfere with your ability to do sociology?
3. What counts as a racial group? How many racial groups are there?
4. We often say someone was “in the right place at the right time.” What other things about the person have to be *right*?
5. Where do differences in opportunities due to group memberships come from? How do conflict theorists explain the rise of stratification? What does capitalism do to people in a society as far as stratification is concerned?
6. Can we talk of global stratification? Does it make sense? What factors are involved?
7. How do functionalists explain stratification? Is it one of their main interests? Can we do without major differences in opportunities between *groups* within our society? What are some of the uses of poverty in our society?
8. Can stratification be explained purely *psychologically or biologically*?
9. *How* do those in positions of advantage use their power to maintain their advantage? Do they control the resources? How do they control resources? How wide does this get... do they control property? Tools? Educational resources? Informational resources? Language resources? How do we gain access to their ranks?
10. What do those in positions of advantage do with information and knowledge and opinions and such to help maintain their positions of advantage? Do the disadvantaged also have *ideologies*? How much of what we know about life in our society are myths related to advantage or disadvantage between groups?
11. Are there fair rewards for advantage? Do we *believe* in the system and its structure?
12. What are some of the consequences of group advantage and disadvantage in our society? What happens if you *don't* have the *right* skin color, gender, sexual orientation, body shape, hair type, speaking abilities, education, basic knowledge, values, beliefs, clothing, credit cards, good looks, etc.? Do any of these things play a role in criminal justice, health and health care, family stability, school grades, employment, housing, credit, religious beliefs, wealth, and so on?
13. Can systems of stratification be changed? How have they been changed in the past? How are they being changed now? How might they suffer change in the future?

Socialization

1. How have *you* been made into who you are? (How do you know who you are?) Who would you have been had you been raised under different social conditions?
2. What is a *self*? How many of these do you have? How is a self molded? Do selves come pre-packaged? Are they “in the genes”? What are some of the most obvious things about your self? What are some of the less obvious things about your self? How do you *know* the answers to those last two questions?
3. What is *role-taking*? When do we begin role-taking? Do we ever stop? Why do we refer to significant others in the context of role-taking? Who are generalized others, and how do we “take the role of the generalized other”? What role does the I play in our lives? And the Me?
4. When going through role-taking and socialization (as symbolic interactionists see it), do we have room for negotiation? What do we negotiate? With whom? How successful are we likely to be? What influences how successful we’re likely to be? Does this negotiation change the course of our socialization?
5. What are some of the different ways of looking at socialization? What are some of the differences between psychological and sociological theories of socialization? How can some of them be integrated (for example, psychological theories of moral or cognitive development with sociological theories emphasizing role-taking)?
6. The role-theorists see socialization as a product of scripts. What are these scripts and where are they? What do we get from them as persons? How do we learn the scripts that come with roles? Can we anticipate a script? Do we get explicit training? Do we play it by ear, sort of as an on-the-job training in a role? If we don’t do a good job learning the role, what happens? Are there also positive sanctions? Who sanctions us in either case?
7. What are the main social institutions within which socialization is taking place? Can socialization take place outside institutions? What about media... how is it getting something into our selves? What does it get into us? What about stratification factors like gender or race... does race alone help socialize us? Gender?
8. What makes the peer group so special in terms of socialization? Is it more important than parents? What are some of the different aspects of our selves that we gain from peer groups and parents?
9. Is socialization always a smooth process? What can studies of resocialization tell us about the process of socialization? What else goes on during adult socialization? Does socialization ever end?

Social Psychology

1. What is it that we are doing when we *name* one another in terms of statuses? How do these status designations influence our expectations for actions? When do we start naming ourselves? What are we doing when we name ourselves in terms of a status? Which of our statuses are ascribed? Which are achieved?
2. When interacting with people, how much power do we have to negotiate the expectations that people have about who should behave in which manner? Where does this power come from? How often do we use it?
3. What are some of the main components of any interaction scene? What kind of selves are involved? Do these selves have to be able to reflect upon themselves? Does this self-reflexivity help control their actions? What do we mean by control here? Which aspects of the context are most important?
4. How do we know what's going on when we enter a situation? Where do our definitions of the situation come from? Does it tell us something about ourselves? Does it tell us something about the meaningful and meaningless objects in the situations? What if you're confused... where do you look?
5. How do we get others to have impressions of us like we want them to? Do we have to role-take first? Do we control our front regions? Do we give other people access to our back regions? How vulnerable are we in interaction sequences? To what?
6. How do roles influence our interactions with people? Do the different roles you play mean there are many selves in you? Why do many people like to think that there is only one true self in them? Is there something threatening about having many sides, no one of them more true than another? Does it mean that when playing a role we're not being authentic? What is authenticity?
7. How do we deal with unflattering labels?
8. Can you imagine a life in which you are not a member of various groups? What would it look like? Would other people toss you in the loony bin?
9. How do group memberships tie you into larger aspects of the society? What do group memberships do to your behaviors (habits), your values, attitudes, ways of talking, friendships? What do group memberships do to the way you refer to yourself, or your self-esteem, or your identity within society?
10. How do we look at people from the vantage point of being a specific group member? What do our in-groups do to our views of other in-group members? To our views of out-group members? Do stereotypes do more good than harm? Are stereotypes inevitable? Is prejudice inevitable?
11. Do small group memberships influence us in a different way than large group memberships? Do formal groups have a different effect on us than informal groups? Who are our reference groups?
12. What influence do we have on the groups we belong to?

Research Methods

1. How do you know the difference between myth or B.S. and reality?
2. What is science and how does science contribute to our understanding of social life?
3. How can you tell a scientific report of something from a non-scientific report? What are some good clues? How much of your knowledge of the world has come from non-scientific sources?
4. What's the difference between *correlation* and *causation*? What are some of the ways that correlations are presented in the media? Do they often sound like causation reports? How do you tell them apart?
5. What's a theory? Can we have science without theories? What's a hypothesis? Can we have hypotheses without data? What's an opinion? What's a belief? What is faith? Do belief and faith rely on data?
6. What differences are there in investigating the *characteristics* of some phenomenon (say, racism), the *causes* of the phenomenon, and the *consequences* of the phenomenon? Which can be done using *quantitative* methods? Which can be done using *qualitative* methods?
7. What kind of scientific work do sociologists do? Are there ethical issues that researchers have to be aware of?
8. How do you do a survey? Who do you survey? What kinds of questions do you use? How are they asked? What are some typical problems that researchers doing surveys run into? What are the problems relating to internal validity? External validity? Reliability?
9. How can observational research be done scientifically? What's the use of participant observation? Can it be done well? What are some of the advantages of participant observation? Disadvantages? Is it better to be a known observer or an unknown observer? Can you ask questions? Use informants? Take notes? Can you avoid your own biases?
10. What does an experiment look like? Are these often used in sociology? Why not?
11. What can census data tell us? Where do we find it? Hasn't it all been analyzed already? Where do we look to see what's already been done by researchers in the past?
12. Is the Internet a good tool for research in sociology? How do you find something valid on the Internet?

Deviance

1. How would a conflict theorist define deviance? How would a functionalist define deviance? How would an interactionist define deviance? How would a statistician define deviance? How do you know what's normal and what's deviant? Is deviance always illegitimate?
2. Do rules matter? Does power matter? Does consensus matter? Does God matter?
3. Which is more natural, deviance or the lack of deviance?
4. How would a functionalist (like Durkheim or Merton) explain where deviance comes from in the first place? What is *anomie*? How does Merton's anomie differ from Durkheim's? In Merton's view, what are persons adapting to? How do most of us adapt?
5. How do order theorists like the social control theorists explain where deviance comes from? Which systems have to be built into society to contain behavior? How do some of the systems become internal? Which factors make it more likely that persons will conform to norms and rules (according to social control theorists)?
6. How would conflict theorists explain the development of deviance? How do Marxists explain criminality? What role does capitalism play in defining, developing, and maintaining deviance and crime?
7. How does an individual person become deviant? What would the interactionists look at?
8. Who is involved in labeling deviant behaviors and deviant persons? What does the "successful application of labels" imply? Who is involved in making a label become successfully applied? How do we negotiate deviance? What are some of the techniques we use to avoid deviance labels?
9. What change occurs when something goes from primary deviance to secondary deviance? How do stigmas affect persons? Why can't the stigmatizing information stay in the back regions? Are mental illnesses stigmas? Are they illnesses?
10. Who are moral entrepreneurs? Moral provocateurs?

Health Care and Medicine

1. What are some of the interests of *macro*-oriented sociologists when examining health care in society? What would the conflict theorists among them be interested in? And the functionalists?
2. Are health and illness always scientific constructs? How might sociological stuff influence what counts as illness within a society? How might sociological factors influence our thoughts about health? Which sociological factors are involved in this? Which people are involved in this?
3. How might sociological factors actually influence a person's health and risk of illness and death? Which sociological factors are we talking about here? *How* do factors like race, gender, age, or class contribute to rates of illness?
4. Do people in different social classes view health and illness the same? Why not?
5. How complex is the health care system in our society? What are some of the components involved in it? What parts of it does a typical person get to interact with?
6. Who has access to health care in our society? Why isn't access equally divided? Who has access to preventive medicine? Who uses which routes of preventive medicine and which routes of health care?
7. How are people socialized into the sick role? Who helps socialize sick persons? How does one play the sick role properly? What are the rewards of conforming to the sick role? Are there differences in the way people from different social classes play the sick role? Are sick people deviant?
8. How do doctors learn how to act like doctors?
9. What goes on between doctors and patients? What is the role of doctor? What is the role of patient? How do patients help keep doctors in their role and how do doctors help keep patients in *their* role?

Sociology of Education

1. What are some of the interests of *macro*-oriented sociologists when examining the education system in society? What would the conflict theorists among them be interested in? And the functionalists?
2. Is the education system supposed to prepare people for a certain kind of life? Which kind of life? Is it supposed to control people to accept a certain kind of life?
3. Does it matter if people don't do as well as our standards? Where is grade inflation coming from? Does grade inflation serve a purpose? Do people with higher levels of education differ from people who don't achieve higher levels of education?
4. Who has access to a good education in our society? How does one get a good education in our society? For whom is it important to get a good education in our society? What *is* a good education?
5. What is de-facto segregation? How does it occur?
6. Do girls do better than boys at English in U.S. schools, but worse at math? If so, why?
7. What are textbooks for? Who decides what's in a textbook?
8. What is the role of teacher? What is it supposed to be? What is the role of student? How do students influence the way teachers play their role, and vice versa?
9. What role do sanctions play in the school system? Would a school without punishment work? How do teachers decide when to reward and when to punish students? Which are most effective? What is it that's being rewarded and punished in schools?
10. What is the self-fulfilling prophecy? How can a self-fulfilling prophecy influence the achievement of pupils in a school classroom? What factors might influence a teacher's prophecies?
11. What are some of the problems and advantages of taking a consumerist view of education, especially to college education?
12. Who really wants a college education? Why? What are the others doing in the classes? What kind of college education do people want today (does it differ based on sociological variables like social class, gender, or race)?