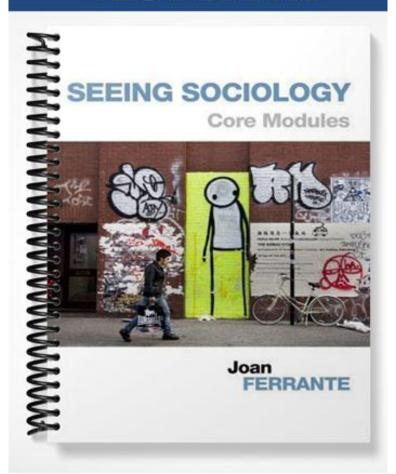SEEING SOCIOLOGY

Core Modules

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SOCIALOGICAL IMAGINATION

Learning Objectives

Module 1.1
You will learn that sociology is a field of study that pushes its students to ask questions about the way human activities are organized. The answers almost always reveal that things are not what they seem.

Module 1.2
You will learn that the sociological imagination allows us to see how the larger forces related to time and place shape our personal lives and the society in which we live.

Module 1.3
You will learn how the writings of the early sociologists shape our understanding of society today.

Module 1.4
You will learn how sociological perspectives guide research and analysis of any topic.

Module 1.5
You will learn the process by which sociologists ask questions and research answers.

Module 1.6
You will learn an observational, investigative method of studying how people construct social order.

Glossary

Module 1.1
social forces – anything human-created that influence, pressure, or push people to behave and think in specified ways.
sociology – the scientific study of human activity in society.
human activity – involves all the things people do with, to, and for one another and what they think and do as a result of others' influence.

Module 1.2
altruistic [suicide]—a state in which the ties attaching the individual to the group are so strong that a person's sense of self cannot be separated from the group.
anomic [suicide]—a state in which the ties attaching the individual to the group are disrupted due to dramatic changes in circumstances.

biography – all the events and day-to-day interactions from birth to death that make up a person's life.

egoistic (suicide) —a state in which the social ties attaching the individual to the group are weak.

fatalistic (suicide)—a state in which the ties attaching the individual to the group are so oppressive there is no hope of release.

issue – a societal matter that affects many people and that can only be explained by larger social forces that transcend the individuals affected.

sociological imagination – a perspective that allows us to consider how outside forces, especially our time in history and the place we live, shape our life stories or biographies.

troubles—individual problems or difficulties that are caused by personal shortcomings related to motivation, attitude, ability, character, or judgment. The resolution of a trouble lies in changing the person in some way.

Module 1.3

bourgeoisie – the owners of the means of production.

class conflict – an antagonism between exploiting and exploited classes.

color line – a barrier supported by customs and laws separating nonwhites from whites, especially with regard to their roles in the division of labor; it can be traced to the European colonization of Africa.

conflict – the major force that drives social change.

disenchantment—a great spiritual void accompanied by a crisis of meaning in which the natural world becomes less mysterious and revered and becomes the object of human control and manipulation.

means of production – the resources such as land, tools, equipment, factories, transportation, and labor that are essential to the production and distribution of goods and services.

mechanical solidarity – a system of social ties based on uniform thinking and behavior.

organic solidarity – a system of social ties founded on interdependence and cooperation.

positivism – the belief that valid knowledge about the world can be derived only from using the scientific method.

proletariat – those individuals who must sell their labor to the bourgeoisie.

social action – actions people take in response to others.

social dynamics – the forces that cause societies to change.

social statics – the forces that hold societies together and give them endurance over time.

solidarity – the system of social ties that acts as a cement connecting people to one another and to the wider society.

sympathetic knowledge – firsthand knowledge gained by living and working among those being studied.

Module 1.4

function – the contribution a part makes to maintain the stability of an existing social order.

ideologies – seemingly commonsense views justifying the existing state of affairs, which, upon close analysis, reflect the viewpoints of the dominant groups and disguise their advantages.

latent dysfunctions – unanticipated disruptions to the existing social order.

latent functions – a part's unanticipated, unintended, and unrecognized effects on an existing social order.

manifest dysfunctions – a part's anticipated disruptions to an existing social order.

manifest functions – a part's anticipated, recognized, or intended effects on maintaining order.

negotiated order - the sum of existing and newly negotiated expectations that are part of any social situation.

self-awareness – a state in which a person is able to observe and evaluate the self from another's viewpoint.

social interaction – everyday encounters in which people communicate, interpret, and respond to each other's words and actions.

sociological perspective – a conceptual framework for thinking about and explaining how human activities are organized and/or how people relate to one another and respond to their surroundings.

symbol – anything (a word, an object, a sound, a feeling, an odor, a gesture, an idea) to which people assign a name and a meaning.

Module 1.5

case studies – objective accounts intended to educate readers about a person, group, or situation.

content analysis – a method of analysis in which researchers identify themes, sometimes counting the number of times something occurs or specifying categories in which to place observations.

control variables – variables that researchers hold constant so they can focus just on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

dependent variable – the behavior to be explained or predicted.

generalizability – the extent to which researchers' findings can be applied to the larger population of which their sample was a part.

Hawthorne effect – a phenomenon in which research subjects alter their behavior when they learn they are being observed.

hypothesis – a trial prediction about the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Specifically, the hypothesis predicts how change in an independent variable brings about change in a dependent variable.

independent variable – the variable that explains or predicts the dependent variable.

nonparticipant observation – detached watching and listening by a researcher who only observes and does not become part of group life.

observation—a research strategy that involves watching, listening to, and recording behavior and conversations in context as they happen.

operationalized – for a variable to be operationalized, the researcher must give clear, precise instructions about how to observe or measure it.

participant observation – a method of research in which the researchers join a group, interact directly with those they are studying, assume a role critical to the group's purpose, and/or live in a community under study.

reliability— a standard for assessing an operational definition that emphasizes the ability of a measure to yield consistent results.

research design – a plan for deciding who or what to study and the method of gathering data.

research methods – various techniques that sociologists and other investigators use to formulate and answer meaningful questions and to collect, analyze, and interpret data.

scientific method – a carefully planned research process with the goal of generating observations and data that can be verified by others.

secondary sources or archival data—third-party data that have been collected for a purpose not related to the research study.

self-administered survey – a set of questions that respondents read and answer.

validity – a standard by which operational definitions are assessed that focuses on the extent to which a measure accurately represents what it is intended to measure.

variable – any behavior or characteristic that consists of more than one category.

Module 1.6

ethnomethodology – an investigative and observational approach that focuses on how people make sense of everyday social activities and experiences.

trust – the taken-for-granted assumption that in a given social encounter others share the same expectations and definitions of the situation and that they will act to meet those expectations.

Integrating Media into Your Classroom

To illustrate the difficulty of resisting social forces, use a news segment highlighting the case of a man who decided to take his wife's maiden name as his last name and the difficulty he faced. The YouTube title is "Baby Has No Birth Certificate Following Dad's Name Change" and the link is http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZkAE68XD1c.

Ask students to visit the Centers for Disease Control website on Overweight and Obesity: http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html/. There, they will find an animated map showing the obesity prevalence from 1985 through 2010, along with various obesity-related statistics. Have students create a list of reasons and potential solutions for the current obesity trends, identifying whether the reason/solution focuses on obesity trends as a personal trouble or a issue.

Ask students to listen to the NPR story "Las Vegas: The Suicide Capital of the World" http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98042717. How might Durkheim classify this phenomenon?

To see ethnomethodology at work, ask students to visit http://www.sociologysource.com/home/2011/3/2/doing-nothing-learning-deviance.html

for a description (including a video) of a breaching experiment involving an entire introduction to sociology class of 262 students. Have students discuss how social order was disrupted in this experiment.

Sample Critical Thinking Essays

The following essays are examples from actual students. You may find it useful to share them with your students to initiate discussion, or you may use them as rubrics against your own students' work.

Module 1.1 – Name a social force that has affected the way you relate to others. Explain. To date, how have you embraced, challenged, and/or resisted that force?
While I am tempted to write about the social force of technology as it relates to the cell phones, digital cameras, camera phones, iPods, or laptop computers, I am choosing instead to write about the combustible engine powered by gasoline. I can't even begin to imagine what life must have been like without the ability to travel hundreds of miles in a day as opposed to taking a month or more to do so. Cell phones and computers are great and they make the world as small as the room we use them from. Cars, tractors, boats, and planes were inventions that shrunk the world to an unbelievably small size and increased production of good and services. Our society owes everything we are to the invention of the combustible engine. Because of the combustible engine, people can now literally pick up their homes and move them. We can get from New York to Los Angeles in hours, and when you factor in the time zones, it's a matter of minutes in some cases. The engine has changed the way we live, eat, fight wars- and yes- even the air we breathe. Can you imagine what life would be like today without them?

Module 1.2 – Describe something in your biography that is shaped by the time in history in which you were born or by the society (place) in which you live.
In relative terms, I was born not long after the invention of the computer. Personal desktop computers became popular when I was a child, and I was one of the first of my friends to have my very own computer. The time of my childhood marks a time of incredible change in the technologies of communication, as it was the evolutionary debut of not only computers and the internet, but also of cell phones. As I grew up, so the technology grew with me and changed the preferred methods of communication. Had I been born in the early 1900's to a middle class family like my family today, I may have preferred letters and house calls, possibly along with the occasional short landline call as my primary means of communication. However, today I am a product of my society; I rarely use landlines, do not often write letters, and generally use my cell phone or Facebook to communicate with friends near and far. Today's new and ever-changing methods of communication are vast and provide instant gratification for those seeking to get in touch. Whether for formal or informal situations, today there are many different platforms that boast quick and easy communication from Skype and email, to text messages and 4G video chatting. The days of writing letters and waiting for a response

have passed on, along with sending telegraphs, and having to wait at home for that important call on the house phone. For better or worse, I can get ahold of everyone, and everyone can get ahold of me at any given time – day or night.

Module 1.3 – Which one of the six theorists' ideas resonate the most with you. Why?
I find Émile Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity very unnerving. While I love that all the goods and services that come with living an advanced industrial society, the fact that I depend on the "good will" of strangers makes me realize that we are walking on a tight rope that could snap at anytime. A great example of that tightrope snapping is when the economy crashed in 2008. Every country and many households in the world felt the effects of the lending/debt crisis. I also thought that Max Weber's four motivations guiding social action and thought was remarkable way to think about why people think and do the things they do. People are ultimately motivated by tradition, emotion, value rational and instrumental rational forces. Specific thoughts and behaviors vary but the underlying motives are essentially four types.

Module 1.4 – Which of the three perspectives do you find most compelling? Explain.
I think the functionalist perspective best captures my perspective on the cell phone. The cell phone with all its features has made a huge impact in my life and with how I communicate with people so I can readily identify the cell phones functions and dysfunctions. Being able to call somebody while I am doing another activity (like driving or waiting in line) is great. Many times the cell phone has been a life safer for when I have gotten lost. I can connect easily with someone who can help me find my way. The cell offers me so many different ways of communicating-visual, texting, e-mailing. My phone today even has internet access which gives me the opportunity to browse the internet and send e-mails. There are some dysfunctions. While I do try to avoid talking on the cell phone when driving I still do and I know it huge distraction. Driving is dangerous enough without this added to the mix. Often I do not get enough sleep because I check my text and voice messages in the middle of the night. People expect me to answer a text seconds after I receive it.

Module 1.5 – After reviewing Roksa and Levey's study, what part of the research process would you label the *most* critical to the quality of the findings? Explain.
Upon reading Roska and Levey's study, I noticed one glaring error: There was one variable that was not clearly operationalized. That variable was occupational specificity which was measured by the percentage of college graduates who acquired a job related to their respective majors. The two researchers did not specify the range of percentages that distinguished majors high, moderate, and low in occupational specificity. As a result it would be impossible for another researcher to repeat their study or to even evaluate it. This glaring problem relates to reliability of a measure which I believe is arguably a most critical factor in the research process. If the

operational definitions within a study are not reliable, the research cannot be considered scientific – meaning that no one outside of the study can know how to repeat the process. When measures are not reliable the chances of coming up with the same findings are significantly reduced.

Module 1.6 – Imagine you were a student in Garfinkel's class. How would you feel about the kinds of assignments he required? Which of the Garfinkel assignments described in this module would you feel most comfortable carrying out? The least comfortable? Why?

I think any of the assignments given would make me feel uncomfortable. All are designed to cause discomfort. The assignment that would cause me the most discomfort was the one that involved the student who was to question her husband about his response for working late and whether he was really at a poker game several days earlier as he claimed. My relationship with my husband is based on trust. When he tells me he is working late, I never give it a second thought. When he plays poker with the guys, I wouldn't dream of questioning him. I would find doing so very difficult. If I could pull it off, I am sure my questioning him would cause some form of breakdown in the relationship. I am sure he would be completely shocked. I am not sure how he would even respond. The point is, Garfinklel's disrupting social order does cause major problems. I would probably be the most comfortable with the bus driver assignment, assuming the driver I questioned is a stranger. I would be much less concerned about a stranger's reaction to my distrust than someone I know well. I found myself laughing when I read about the assignment in which Garfinkel asked students to ask probing questions (e.g., "what do you mean?") as follow-ups to any statement a person makes. I am sure I could not pull that one off because I find it so absurd, I am sure I would laugh and be forced to explain myself.

Possible Write-a-Captions

Module 1.1 – The cell phone is a technology humans invented to communicate with others while on the move. There is no question that this technology or social force has changed the way people communicate. Because most people have their own phone, callers do not have to speak to a 3rd party before speaking to the person being called. So a parent, calling to see if a child playing at a friend's house is coming home, talks to the child directly and misses an opportunity to talk to another parent. On the surface it seems efficient to avoid a third party; on the other hand, the ties among parents are weakened.

Module 1.2 – If you think the person unemployed lost his or her job because of some personal shortcoming like a poor work ethic or laziness then you are framing that person's situation as a trouble. If you think that the person likely lost his or her job because of outsourcing or some other larger economic force (e.g., recession, automation) then you are framing the situation as an issue. When unemployment is viewed as a trouble, the solution lies with the individual perhaps doing something cute

to attract an employer. When unemployment is framed as issue the solution lies with changing economic policies or large scale retraining programs.

Module 1.3 – The two photos illustrate elements of mechanical and organic solidarity. In the 1940s, households cooked and canned fresh fruits and vegetables, often grown in gardens. Most families possessed skills to grow food and to can what they grew. The home canned products were made with someone in mind (i.e., family or friends) and the people who ate the home-canned products knew the person who canned them. The relationship between canner and consumer reflects elements of mechanical solidarity. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the manufactured frozen foods came on the scene. Such food was prepared by strangers for no particular person; those who ate the product did not know the people who grew or processed the foods nor did they possess the skills to produce it. The relationship between consumer and food industry reflects elements of organic solidarity.

Module 1.4 – From a symbolic interactionist point of view we can argue that the people using mobile phones during public events are not full participants in the interaction going on around them. Symbolic interactionists would be interested in how people sitting around them are interpreting the "intrusion" by an outside party and how what the person says is shaped by two audiences—the caller and those sitting nearby.

Module 1.5 – One data gathering method to learn about casinos and the people who frequent them is participant observation. In this case the researcher participates as a patron interacting directly with those targeted for study. That is the researcher could focus his or her observation on employees or clients or the relationship between the two.

Module 1.6 – After a waitress has served her customers their orders, walk up to the table and ask the customers if you could have a taste of the food they just ordered. The reason is that you are having trouble choosing what to order and tasting their food will help you make up your mind on this matter.