**Sociology Supplemental**

**Agents of Socialization and Social Structures**

Introduction:

If you have taken another sociology course from me, this will be something of a review for you. Regardless, you need to be very familiar with these concepts because they form the foundation of the sociological process. Each theoretical perspective examines a portion of these or all of these closely as they relate to the broader topic which they wish to understand. For example, if I want to understand the concept of prejudice, whether it is racial prejudice or the prejudice that leads a young woman to accept or reject a romantic advance from a young man, I have to understand where the prejudice began and what forces reinforce its existence. The answer to both of these is found in agents of socialization and social structures. If I do not understand them, I cannot understand prejudice.

Agents of socialization are the micro-level, or interpersonal forces, that shape in part how an individual views, interprets, and reacts to the social world around them. Symbolic Interactionism is the primary theoretical perspective we use to understand this process. Symbolic Interactionism encompasses the learning process of social interaction, the interpretation of behaviors in social interaction, and how we find approval or disapproval in our social interactions thus shaping our future behaviors. It also involves the examination of the meanings of symbols, language (both verbal and nonverbal), and interactions. Those meanings are given to us by agents of socialization.

Social structures are the macro-level forces in society, all societies, that perform the functions that allow society to exist and continue to exist. Structural Functionalism examines the functions and dysfunctions of social structures and operates under the premise that society seeks a balance. When society is out of balance or dysfunctional, structural functionalists believe and can show that society will seek to regain the balance by making adjustments to the structures. Conflict Theory is another macro-level perspective that primarily focuses on structures. Conflict Theory sees society as a continual struggle between groups. Those groups can be represented by social structures or groups within structures. Conflict theorists believe that even if a struggle is resolved, the next struggle is already beginning.

You need to know the following lists in **bold** as well as have a general understanding of the descriptions of each term. Memorize them!!!! You will have a quiz. Pay special attention to the details in *italics*.

The nine main agents of socialization are:

**Primary Caregivers**: These are your parents, grandparents, or whoever it was who gave you your *first care and provision in early life*.

**Religion**: Provides the individual with *moral absolutes, emotional comfort and answers about the world* that cannot be provided by society and science, not that those two things are mutually exclusive. Religion gives the individual norms of behavior toward other individuals and between the individual and society and even the planet.

**Neighborhood**: Chosen by primary caregivers largely based on class and ethnic lines, the neighborhood serves to socialize the individual to the *norms of their class* group and a broader set of norms that may contradict what is taught by primary caregivers.

**Daycare**: An *extension of school*, daycare socializes the individual to group norms and ideals of citizenship and social behavior. Daycare may cause weaker attachments to primary caregivers and long term behavioral problems. Academic gains made through early daycare exposure are mostly gone by third grade.

**Toys**: Chosen by primary caregivers, the main function is *gender socialization* but also allows the individual to learn and imitate the roles of others and the expectations of the roles you are given.

**Peers:** Including your siblings, they are the people close to you in age who are the first group that allows you to *resist the socialization efforts of your parents/primary caregivers.*

**School**: Generally determined by class, school provides the individual with the ideal *norms of the middle class* (social elites place their children in schools that reinforce the norms of social elites, and homeschooling/ private schooling/charter schools are chosen by parents to resist the norms taught in public schools by both the employees and the peers. Schools teach the norms of *group collaboration, good citizenship and conformity*.

**Media**: Chosen first by primary caregivers but influencing the individual over the lifecourse, media includes television, music, print, social media, etc. It functions to acquaint the individual with the *norms in broader society and the world.*

**Workplace:** Socializes the individual through adulthood, providing the individual with identity and social reinforcement with regard to *norms and expectations in a variety of roles both present and anticipated in the future*. For example, a female adjunct faculty member is socialized about class and professional expectations and also about what is expected of full-time faculty in anticipation of a future in that role. This may differ from the expectations or norms for a male adjunct faculty member or a secretary for the department. The workplace becomes a source of new peers, media sources and additional schooling, as well.

The main social structures are:

**Culture:** consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society.

**Material:** clothing, food, tools, etc.

**Non-material:** customs, values, norms, holidays, beliefs, and language. **Language is the most important of these.** Without language, culture cannot exist.

**Class:** Way of organizing society by an individual’s means.

**PPP:** *Power, Property and Prestige*; this measure of class is used by pre-industrial societies

**SES**: *Socio-economic Status*; this measure of class is used in industrial societies and societies later, comprised of measures of education, income, and occupational prestige. Class is not merely possessions, but indicates an ability to exercise one’s power. While a professor may not make a large salary, their level of education and the prestige that comes with their job gives them more power than their income would necessarily indicate.

**Groups:** Two or more people together, either formally or informally, for a specific purpose and with a sense of common identity and shared values.

**Roles:** The specific behaviors required of an individual because of the position one holds in a group. Mother, teacher, preacher, doctor are examples.

**Status:** A position one occupies in society

**Ascribed:** A position that society gives to you based on a characteristic out of one’s control; race, gender, age, and sex are examples of ascribed status

**Achieved:** A position that one takes in society by choice or by a process; educational attainment, age (yes, it’s both), occupation, are examples

**Institutions:** Structures in society that perform consistent functions in all societies, though they may not perform those functions in the same way. These are macro-level structures, not the small-scale groups of people. For example, we mean FAMILY in society, not an individual’s family (this is the Agent of Socialization family).

**Family** Functions include procreation, recreation, economic production, and caring for the sick and aged

**Religion** Functions include emotional comfort, support of the government, social solidarity

**Economy** Functions include the manufacture and distribution of goods and services

**Education** Functions include passing on skills and knowledge and supporting the government’s agenda

**Government** Functions include passing and enforcing laws, legitimately wielding force, and resolving disputes between individuals

**Media** Functions include passing on knowledge, reinforcing cultural norms, and supporting the government’s agenda

A person’s life experience can be predicted based on Agents of Socialization and Social Structures which comprise one’s **social location**. Social location is the position in society one occupies relative to others in society. For example, a white woman outranks a black man, but an Asian man outranks them both. All statuses and roles combine to determine social location (sex, gender, race, ethnicity, education, religion, age, sexuality, and so many other factors). This prediction of social location is not absolute, because personal choice, psychology and chance also play a part.

You have another sheet with the theoretical perspectives on it and tables to help you apply those theories. Use these two documents in conjunction with eachother to gain a more thorough understanding of the sociological process. You have a third sheet with the Steps of Sociological Objectivity on it. You need to study each of these to be ready for your first Quiz which will cover this base knowledge. You will take it with a college proctor by the due date given in the syllabus.