

3. Social Structure and Group Behavior

Objectives

- Understand what social structure is and examine its different characteristics
- Explore the relationship between social structure and society
- Interpret and discuss the nature of groups and organizations
- Analyze social interaction among individuals and groups

Vocabulary

achieved status	formal organization	roles	social interaction
aggregate	group	role conflict	social network
ascribed status	primary group	role strain	social structure
bureaucracy	reciprocal roles	secondary group	status
coalition	reference group	social institution	voluntary association

Background

Students are all parts of social structures and contribute to group behavior. Here they learn how the relationships and interactions among individuals and groups form and affect the way people live in society.

Students learn to evaluate social structures—the way a society is organized into predictable relationships—in terms of statuses and roles. As they become familiar with the dynamics of roles, they gain a broader perspective on roles that they personally perform. Like others in modern society, students experience the strain that results when incompatible demands are made on a person trying to fulfill the demands of two or more roles.

Students next benefit from learning about the social structures of a society's institutions. Information about the impact of social structures and the attributes of different types of societies give them a broader perspective on the world.

Students learn the nature and characteristics of groups and organizations and their relationships to the overall social structures of all societies. As they see the value of groups and their varying characteristics,

students discover what group membership can contribute to their lives in terms of opportunities for interaction, goal sharing, and cultivating common identities. Students gain tools to evaluate the groups they are in as they learn about group decision making, leadership styles, and the different types of relationships that can form within groups. They see that some groups can evolve into formal organizations or bureaucracies, each with benefits and limitations.

Students move on to learn that sociologists study the meaning of interactions between individuals using the interactionist perspective. They learn characteristics of five different forms of interaction and examine the ways that social networks link and facilitate interaction among individuals and groups in a society.

Further Resources

Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968.

Blumer, Herbert. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

For Discussion

Review

1. What are the three characteristics of groups?
2. What are three critical principles or rules of bureaucracies?
3. What are the two approaches to social interaction?
4. What are the six most common forms of social interaction?

Critical Thinking

1. What is the difference between ascribed and achieved status?
2. In what situations have you experienced role strain or role conflict? Give an example and elaborate on how you handled the situation.
3. What do you think are the underlying problems that cause conflicts between in-groups and out-groups?
4. In what kinds of cases do you think bureaucratic red tape is necessary and a good thing? In what kinds of cases is it detrimental, or a bad thing?
5. Why is "networking" an important part of finding a job? What networking channels or contacts might you use to find one?

Activities

1. Status? Role? Conflict?!

In groups of three, have students take turns coming up with, representing, and analyzing a random status, its corresponding role, and the kinds of role conflicts that can arise when trying to fulfill such a social condition. Members should discuss their thoughts and feelings about fulfilling the expectations of such a position.

2. Interviewing a Sociologist

Divide students into groups. Ask each group to find and interview experts in sociology to learn about the kinds of current issues, applications, and studies that dominate the field today. Have students report their findings to the class.

3. Internet: Discovering a Society

Direct the students to research web sites providing information on past or present hunter/gatherer, pastoral, or agricultural societies. Ask students to choose one society and then to gather and analyze specific information on its social functions and institutions. Facilitate a classroom discussion on their findings.

4. Special Sources: Follow Your Interests

Ask students to use library resources to research and report on any sociological study rooted in social structures, group behavior, and social interaction that interests them.

Name _____

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As you read Chapter 3 write an answer to each question below.

1. What do status and roles have to do with a society's social structure?

2. How can a society's use of technology be used to determine the kind of society it is? Name six types of society.

3. What are five types of groups and how do they differ from each other?

4. What are some of the good and bad aspects of bureaucracies, according to information in this chapter?

5. What is the relationship between symbolic interactionism and the interactionist perspective?

Name _____

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle the correct answer.

1. What term describes the way in which a society is organized into predictable relationships?
 - a. achieved status
 - b. ascribed status
 - c. social interaction
 - d. social structure
2. What is the position or social standing of an individual within a group or society?
 - a. coalition
 - b. roles
 - c. bureaucracy
 - d. status
3. What do you call the friction caused when two or more statuses held by the same person have incompatible expectations?
 - a. reciprocal roles
 - b. role strain
 - c. role conflict
 - d. social structure
4. What is the organized pattern of beliefs and behaviors that center on fulfilling basic social needs?
 - a. social institution
 - b. social structure
 - c. formal organization
 - d. voluntary association
5. What is a collection of people who just happen to be in the same place at the same time and do not have a lasting pattern of interaction?
 - a. coalition
 - b. aggregate
 - c. primary group
 - d. secondary group
6. What is an alliance of a few members within a group to achieve a common goal?
 - a. aggregate
 - b. bureaucracy
 - c. coalition
 - d. reference group
7. What is a group that individuals use as a standard for evaluating themselves?
 - a. primary group
 - b. secondary group
 - c. reference group
 - d. in-group
8. What is a large, impersonal group deliberately created to achieve specific goals?
 - a. formal organization
 - b. voluntary association
 - c. bureaucracy
 - d. social network
9. What is a large, hierarchical organization of employees in which each member has an assigned task?
 - a. formal organization
 - b. bureaucracy
 - c. social network
 - d. social structure
10. What is the series of social relationships that link a person directly to others and, as a result, indirectly to still more people?
 - a. primary group
 - b. reference group
 - c. social network
 - d. social structure

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. _____ roles have reciprocal roles that define the patterns of interaction between related statuses.
 - a. All
 - b. Most
 - c. Some
 - d. No
2. Each of the following are functions of a society EXCEPT _____.
 - a. arranging activities so citizens get the goods and services they need
 - b. protecting citizens from external threats
 - c. legally assigning statuses and roles to immigrants and children
 - d. motivating people to perform their roles by assigning meaning and purpose to them
3. A type of society that is of medium size and specializes in animal domestication is _____.
 - a. hunting/gathering
 - b. pastoral
 - c. agricultural
 - d. industrial
4. Instrumental relationships within groups _____.
 - a. have little or no purpose
 - b. focus on accomplishing goals
 - c. are expressive and meant to be pleasurable
 - d. are established to lead other group members
5. Group leaders who follow a laissez-faire style of leadership are likely to _____.
 - a. accomplish important group goals
 - b. forge agreements between group members
 - c. encourage members to be efficient
 - d. do little to organize or direct group members
6. Primary groups tend to _____.
 - a. have little mutual understanding among members
 - b. have emotional depth and close association
 - c. last for short periods of time
 - d. be superficial and impersonal
7. According to Max Weber, bureaucracies _____.
 - a. are too authoritarian
 - b. are a sensible way for businesses and governments to organize
 - c. need to be less specialized to be effective
 - d. are identical to primary groups
8. _____ is the view that people who have been promoted in a bureaucracy are working beyond their level of competence.
 - a. Gesellschaft
 - b. Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology
 - c. The Peter Principle
 - d. Parkinson's Law
9. Goffman's Dramaturgy suggests that people try to control the impression they make on others by _____.
 - a. presenting particular sides of their personalities, while hiding others
 - b. presenting negative sides of their personalities, while hiding positive ones
 - c. consistently emphasizing one's values, status
 - d. avoiding social interactions
10. _____ is the form of social interaction that poses the greatest chance for human suffering.
 - a. Exchange
 - b. Competition
 - c. Conflict
 - d. Accommodation

Essay Question

How can learning about the dynamics of social structures and group behavior be helpful to you now and in the future?