Culture and the Origins of Social Stratification

MINORITIES AND CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

Chapter 1 - The Study of Minorities and
Chapter 2 - Culture and Social Structure

OBJECTIVE:

1. Continue introduction of students to the sociological perspective for the study of race and ethnic relations

2. To present the concept of the stranger as a social phenomenon as the focus through which to understand majority-minority interaction

3. To acquaint students with the basic concepts of minority groups, ethnocentrism, social behavior, and the difficulty of achieving objectivity

4. To present the concept of the Dillingham Flaw and its relevance to acceptance of diversity
SIGNIFICANT POINTS

1. Numerous studies have found that if people perceive strangers as similar to them, they are more attracted to them. This perception of similarity is more important than actual similarity. Social distance indices are an excellent measurement of how similarity perceptions translate into interaction patterns.

2. The initial response to strangers is *categoric knowing*, the generalization based on visual and possibly verbal input. Curiosity is often replaced by fear, suspicion, distrust, or resistance. Whereas the native perceives the stranger in a very abstract, typified way, the stranger perceives the native in very concrete terms. For the stranger, the unfamiliar surroundings cannot be taken for granted, so everything is problematic.

3. Three major sociological perspectives shape analytical study of minorities.
--- Functional theory emphasizes societal stability and interdependence, with dysfunctions seen as temporary maladjustments.

--- Conflict theorists stress the inequalities maintained through false consciousness and exploitation.

--- Interactionists focus on social interpretations and personal interaction patterns.

Minority and subordinate groups share certain characteristics:

1) unequal treatment;
2) visibility;
3) group consciousness;
4) ascribed status;
5) endogamy.

Women, though a minority group, do not fit the last category nor do the aged or handicapped fit the fourth.
Race, subject to varying interpretations by social scientists, has historically been based on biological considerations.

Ethnicity refers to sharing a common cultural heritage based on national origin, language, religion, and/or other cultural attributes.

6. Ethnocentrism, a normal tendency to use one’s own group as a basis for comparison, commonly resulting in a preference for one’s own way of doing things, is an important factor in understanding the response of a group of strangers. Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism are variations of ethnocentrism, with a biased focus on the history and cultural influences of either Western or African civilization.

7. Because we are all products of our culture, objectivity in the study of race and ethnic relations is most difficult, if possible at all. Still, a conscientious effort to keep an open mind, to question all assumptions and opinions, is necessary.

8. The Dillingham Flaw, its name inspired by the judgmental errors of a congressional commission (1907—1911) is any inaccurate comparison based on simplistic categorizations and anachronistic judgments.
Its most common manifestation is in criticism of slow acculturation of today’s immigrants as different from the Americanization of past immigrants.

9. According to C. Wright Mills, ethnocentrism and subjectivity often prevent us from realizing that what appear to be simply personal troubles often transcend local settings and reflect instead structural changes and institutional contradictions.

10. Intergroup relations continually change, the result of migration, technology, war, economics, or attitudinal shifts. Throughout the world, even in recent years, numerous groups have gone through varying interaction patterns. Race and ethnic relations are a dynamic social phenomenon, about which more is still being learned.

Sociology, and understanding of social behavior requires a “sociological imagination.” C. Wright Mills: “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.”
When the cherished values of an individual, or society, are threatened, they experience a crisis. It is, through utilization of the sociological imagination that the sociologist can render assistance.

The norms, the values, the foundations for the stable social interaction sought by most is to be found within culture, and within society.

Clear understand of these essential points is requires in a sociological study of race and ethnicity.

**Conflict commonly occurs as a result of differing Norms and perceptions of Deviance between dominant and subordinate groups; discuss identity markers and master status:**

Society functions, for better or for worse, by the acceptance and utilization of social behavior that is acceptable to most of its members. Commonly acceptable behavior allows the
members of a society to interact in a manner that is
generally more free of conflict and that enhances the
abilities of the members of a society to interact successfully for their mutual benefit.

Remember the following terms:

1) Nature - we were biologically constructed to function in certain ways

2) Nurture - we were trained by society, or parents, or others to function in certain ways

John Cuber did extensive work in the nature vs. nurture area and determined that we are all subject to what is know as the **Unique Individual Experience** -- not everyone has the same things happen to them as they proceed through life and we are all molded by all the unique things that
happen to us on an individual basis.

Whether social action is directed by nature or nurture, sociological study of society focuses on micro or macro -- micro -- effect of social action on personal life macro -- effect of social action on groups, organizations, governments, entire societies

This all leads up to an understanding of Culture - which consists of the values of a group, the norms they follow and the material goods they create

DISCUSS MATERIAL AND NON-MATERIAL CULTURE

THERE ARE SOME CULTURAL UNIVERSALS:
While they are not universal all cultures have:

Norms / the behavior we might most commonly encounter

A norm is the level of conformity with expected behavior. For example, you're expected to behave in certain ways in certain situations.

The levels of norms are:

1) Mores - these are the most intense expectations and include behavior that becomes a crime if deviance occurs. For example, cannibalism in America violates a More.

2) Customs - these are things we generally do, or avoid, but that are not necessarily criminal if deviance occurs. For
example, toe nail clipping in public violates custom.

3) **Folkways** - regional or ethnic activities are an example; For example, beer halls that are part of life in Germany would not be acceptable folk culture in Westchester County, New York.

Norms can, and do, collide. The culture of the dominant group in a society may be in conflict with that of subordinate groups. And the conflict issues are global as well.

TODAY’S WORLD HAS BECOME A GLOBAL COMMUNITY IN MANY WAYS. EASY EXPOSURE TO OTHER CULTURES THROUGH

-- TRAVEL

-- MASS MEDIA

-- ELECTRONIC MEDIA
DISCUSS THOMAS THEOREM: IF PEOPLE DEFINE SITUATIONS AS REAL, THEY BECOME REAL IN THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

SUCH FAST AND FREQUENT ENCOUNTERS DIFFERING NORMS LEAD TO INCREASING LEVELS OF:

**Culture Shock:** Encountering, possibly within our own culture, but more commonly in another culture, something that seems so foreign it is difficult to understand and very difficult to accept.

*India story*

**Cultural Relativism:** What may be acceptable, or good, in one culture may be considered unacceptable, or bad, in another. For example, standards for pre-marital sex vary from culture to culture (may be punishable by death in some cultures but is widely...
tolerated and accepted in our own):

Saudi Arabia story
Culture shock and cultural relativism lead to cultural conflict which commonly arises from:

ETHNOCENTRICISM: using one’s own culture as a standard for the judgment of other cultures.

Sometimes we judge our own culture to be best and other things, from other cultures, are judged to be inferior or unacceptable; but not always.

Ethnocentrism is the process for comparative judgement, using your culture as the central measure for the judgement; it may or may not result in judgement in which your culture is judged best.

Venezuela Story
Cultural Differences cause problems because we are conditioned to treat those who are different with suspicion and/or contempt; there are various perspectives on how we deal with these differences:

**Felson: Blame Analysis** - attempts to transfer, to others, the blame for a group not performing as well as other groups in the same society; tends to link cause and blame; tends to shift the burden and reduce attempts to understand what is really going on and is, therefore, not productive in advancing progress for the group in question. Blaming, and defending, the group(s) in question should not be the goal; understanding of cause is essential.
Miner: Ethnocentrism and cultural relativity and perspective are all portrayed in terms that are inverted; he's really talking about typical Americans here, but as might be viewed by an outsider with no knowledge of the medicine cabinet, the hospital (latipso), etc.

Meyer: How we are taught, how we learn, how we are controlled; studied obedience and disobedience and how they can be measured; raises questions about ethics and responsibility in research techniques.
DISCUSS RACE & ETHNICITY VS. SOCIAL CLASS

Racial and ethnic boundaries are broken through two primary processes:

Assimilation (cultural in nature) and amalgamation (biological in nature). Through the sharing of ethnicity, particularly in popular culture, and inter-racial marriage the boundaries gradually and slowly fall.

Amalgamation. Physical and biological mixing that results in the gradual blurring of difference color and physical characteristics.

Also, through PLURALISM: CULTURAL – TWO OR MORE CULTURALLY DISTINCT GROUPS LIVING IN ONE SOCIETY IN HARMONY; STRUCTURAL – TWO
MORE MORE GROUPS IN SUBSOCIETIES WITHIN
SOCIAL-CLASS AND REGIONAL BOUNDARIES or
MULTICULTURALISM - are these more likely in
America today?

Racial and cultural prejudice (opinions or attitudes one
groups holds of another which may be both positive and
negative) persists despite empirical evidence that there is
no justification for such prejudice. The current trend
(beginning in the last half of the 20th century) is away from
prejudice. Norms change, publicity over racial and ethnic
issues changes, and most importantly popular culture
changes. For example in the 1930s and 1940s, minorities
were rarely present in the media and almost all racial
depictions in film and entertainment were extremely
prejudicial, providing near caricatures of blacks. By the
late 1950s and 1960s that had begun to change and representation of race in the media became much more positive. The nature of the social constructions changed.

So, why does prejudice persist?

1) Scapegoating - the transfer of feelings of futility, aggression, and blame to another group; blaming the faults of yourself, or your group, on the "scapegoat;" results in an irrational transfer of blame to others.

2) relative deprivation - in other words, this allows you to say, and view others from the perspective of: "I'm OK, but you're not!" Raises individual self esteem whether or not it is justifiable.

3) provision of cheap labor -- if you oppress other groups, and "keep them down" they provide a plentiful cheap labor pool.
KEY TERMS

Abstract Typifications
Afrocentrism
Minority Group
Ascribed status
Categoric knowing
Conflict theory
Racism
Dillingham flaw
Dominant group
Endogamy
Ethnocentrism
Eurocentrism
False consciousness
Functional theory
Interactionist theory
Reciprocal typification
Reference group
Social construction of reality
Social distance
Social Identity Theory
Symbolic interaction
Values
Ingroup
Outgroup
Racial Group