

Glossary

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A

Achieved status

The social standing or position of an individual which is solely the result of their own efforts and achievements.

Actor-network theory (ANT)

A material-semiotic approach that regards action, power and the like as network effects: elements in a network help define each other. These networks are heterogeneously composed, containing things and people in combination. Sometimes ANT is described as sociology applied to non-humans. A better phrase would be "sociology which includes non-humans".

Aesthetic of consumption

Is associated with the rise and adoration of consumerism. It exalts in all the aspects of consumption, not just because of the pleasures associated with commodities, but because the consumer is seen as central to society. An aesthetic of consumption assumes that to consume is a good thing.

Affective individualism

refers to the expectation that relationships between individuals within institutions such as the family are based on norms of intimacy and/or romantic attachment.

Anomie

Refers to the condition of normlessness, the collapse of the typical norms that regulate an individual or a society. This can occur during times of social change and crisis.

Ascribed status

An individual's social standing or position which is permanently assigned to them irrespective of their personal qualities or abilities.

Assisted reproductive technology (ART)

is a general term referring to the methods used in non-coital, technically assisted reproduction to improve the chance of conception and achieve pregnancy. ART are used primarily in infertility treatments, and include in-vitro fertilisation and third party techniques such as sperm donation or surrogate pregnancy.

Avatar

In Hindu religion an incarnation; in contemporary online usage a representation of a chosen embodied appearance in "the representation of a chosen embodied appearance in a virtual world.

B

Blasé attitude

A state of mind produced through the growth of big cities in the late nineteenth century in which individuals through living in close contact with many others become immune to urban stimulations and excitement and indifferent toward others. The term was first used by Georg Simmel.

Blended family

Also called a reconstituted family. This family type brings together into one household two sets of children and two adults, at least one of whom is from a previous relationship.

C

Capillary power

Description of power created by Michel Foucault. It sees power as located everywhere and produced in and through all forms of social relations. Capital Refers to the resources associated with business, these include: money, technology and machinery, intellectual property, premises and land. Marxists argue that capital accumulation is the major driver for business and that profits are the basis of this growth.

Capitalism

The term received its most influential analytic clarification in the respective works of Karl Marx (1818-1883) & Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Karl Marx outlined the distinctive features of capitalism as a mode of production and provided a powerful analysis of its logic and an influential critique of its social and economic consequences. Capitalism is a socio-economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned. It is a competitive economic system where there are commodity markets for labour, goods and money. There is an increasing displacement of living labour through the deployment of scientific and technological innovations in

production. The central objective is optimisation of exchange value and profitability to promote increasing capital accumulation. It is a form of economic life that is prone to cyclical crises, one for which a 'steady state' is anathema.

Cases

One of the major building blocks of sociological research (see variables). Research may range across a single case, for example participant observation at a sports stadium, or a great number of cases, for example the millions of forms sent out by government during census year. Cases represent the sites of study, both in terms of physical location (events at a place) and conceptually (the things different types of people do). Cases provide the examples, instances, and types as the subject of research and its findings.

Celebrity

In pure form the celebrity is someone who is famous for being famous. They are mass media creations who act as role models for consumption.

Charismatic leader

A leader who rules through personal exceptional powers and qualities which form the basis of his/her authority. Such a person may be regarded as having divine or supernatural origin.

Citizenship

Status as a member of a political community "usually a nation state" which carries rights and duties. When states control the right to citizenship, withholding acceptance as citizens marginalizes individuals and populations.

Civil society

Broadly speaking, this term describes associations of citizens within democratic societies that give voice to various sectors of society and enhance citizen participation in public affairs but are outside the formal organs and institutions of government. Such groups may include professional associations, labour unions, religious groups, human rights groups, citizen advocacy organizations and activists working for social change.

Class

See social class.

Class consciousness

Usually a reference to the subjective awareness of members of a class of the economic interests of that class, for example working class consciousness of wage exploitation.

The Cold War

The period between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1990s when the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were in direct power confrontation through a competition for military superiority although not actually directly at war.

Collective effervescence

A shared social experience of emotion in a group engaged in ritual together. For example, religious ceremonies or gatherings, or public grieving for a well-known person. Durkheim thought this experience was effective in binding members of a society together.

Collective sentiments

Feelings that humans share and experience through social interaction, beliefs, and values.

Cognitive Imperialism

The imposition of one way of knowing as a norm through a relationship of domination.

Colonialism

Classically, political control of one place (city, region, country) by another. Today, usage has expanded through notions like informal empire to cover constraint exercised by one political unit over another, whether or not this takes the open form of political domination.

Commodification

The Marxist notion that capitalism is able to hide the unjust truths of social relations by substituting commodities (things) for authentic relationships between individuals and groups. It refers to the transformation of relationships between people into goods and services of monetary value made available for sale in the market. For example, prostitution in both its legal and illegal forms represents the commodification of otherwise non-monetary intimate relations between people.

Common sense

Everyday wisdom. Sociologists oppose this form of thinking on several grounds: it is a personalised view of the world, it requires no evidence, it focuses on surface appearances, it admits of no alternatives, and it assumes that things are

"natural". Sociologists look to the bigger picture, and they suggest that reality and the way we experience it may not be one and the same.

Community

Used to denote "natural" informal social bonds between people based on shared location, kinship, occupation or interests. Often used in opposition to the formal social institutions and systems of expertise that have grown out of modernity, such as the nation, the education system, health services, and the military.

Conflict theories

Are theories associated with Marxist and radical scholars. Such approaches are united by their focus on material inequalities within society. They believe that the world is agonistic. Such theories are typically contrasted with functionalist theories.

Competition

It is important to distinguish "perfect" from "imperfect competition." In perfect competition, there are a large enough number of buyers and sellers in a particular market such that no single buyer or seller can affect market prices. There is "price-competition." Imperfect competition includes monopoly, one seller, and oligopoly. In oligopoly, there are several sellers that dominate a market, there are barriers to entry and products are relatively similar. This is the situation of the large corporation and is the central feature of modern capitalist economies. There is no clear-cut theory of oligopolies, but it is agreed that because large corporations are interdependent, they reject potentially fatal price competition and engage in non-price competition, for example, in efforts at product differentiation. Prices in such markets are often fixed by a leading producer and are stable.

Consumer ethic

Conduct based on a private consumer (rather than a public citizen) model. An individualised rather than collective orientation to life, irrespective of the issues confronted. This is the shopper mentality writ large, the social world as shopping mall in which everything is seen as a personal purchasing decision. Topics like health, education and politics are approached as products in a supermarket aisle.

Consumer society

One in which a vast range of goods and services are offered, the means to consume them are widely available, and the desire to do so is socially encouraged. Such societies are based on capitalist economics, mass production, the extension of credit and mass advertising.

Content analysis

A method of collecting, coding and analysing data from mass communications (e.g., newspaper articles, advertising campaigns, films) in physical and digital media. It is a highly quantitative research approach.

Contingent childlessness

occurs because of life circumstances, rather than outright choice or infertility. Contingent childlessness may result from being busy with career, education, financial commitments, partnership break-up, re-partnering and other family changes, or being in a same-sex relationship.

Control and resistance

Refers to the struggles between workers and employers or their managers at work. Managerial control seeks to be in command of the formal and informal aspects of work. Workers typically seek to resist managerial control, although their power to do so varies greatly.

Critical pedagogy

educational practice that focuses on the dismantling of relations of domination and the power of individuals to take action for social justice

Culture industries

A term coined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno who were concerned by the rationalization and standardization of contemporary cultural production. They argued that cultural entities were being turned into commodities and culture itself into an industry. The media served to manipulate the masses into passivity by cultivating the false needs of consumption (to be satisfied by capitalism) and by marginalising the true needs of freedom, creativity and happiness as exemplified in the high arts. Thanks to the culture industries high art loses its autonomy and seriousness and low art its rebelliousness.

D

Definition of the Situation

Created by W.I. Thomas, 1863-1947, a sociologist of the Chicago School, this phrase draws attention to the socially constructed nature of social reality and the fact that this is a social not individual process. This concept is implicit in and underpins phenomenological and ethno-methodological approaches and deconstructionist analysis.

Desacralization

An aspect of the secularization process where there is a decline in the significance of things religious as well as a devaluation of non-scientific explanations for natural and social phenomena.

Deviance

Non-conformity to norms that act as a dominant currency for shaping what should or should not be done in social life. This may be viewed positively, neutrally or negatively and treated correspondingly via reward, indifference or sanction.

Dialectic

A mode of thinking that sees contradictions as the source of greater understandings in the form of thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

Disciplinary powers

A range of techniques of power that do not rely on coercion or force but are constituted through disciplinary knowledge and operate as ways of controlling and training individuals who willingly co-operate in disciplinary practices e.g., in the education or health systems.

Disenchantment

The development of a consumer society is associated with disenchantment of both workers and consumers. This perspective draws from Max Weber's vision of modernity. On the one hand workers are increasingly constrained in the forms of resistance available to them. On the other, consumers confront crass commercialism. In sum, the citizens of today's society find their means of expression channelled through large-scale bureaucracies (advertising agencies, big business, institutions of state and government, banks and other credit providers).

Division of labour

Breaking up a particular task (whether making something or administering something) into a larger number of smaller units, with each more modest task performed by specialised workers. This brings dramatic productivity gains, but at the risk - À%mile Durkheim urged - of threatening to reduce social cohesion.

Doing family

The ways people construct or create their families by engaging in different sorts of practices (e.g. how people organise meal-times together or how they create a sense of family history).

Domestic labour

Is the unpaid labour that wives perform in the family. Marxist scholars emphasize how domestic labour benefits both men and the capitalist system.

Double life of the family

The idea that family life is not always harmonious and does not always benefit its members, but can be conflict-ridden and dangerous.

E

Ecology

The scientific analysis of the relationship between organisms and their environments and more specifically in respect of this text the relationship between human beings and their modern resource intensive and increasingly wasteful ways of living and their habitat, planet Earth.

Education

The formal, informal or non-formal organization or steering of learning towards specific ends. Emotional labour
Appropriate feelings produced in the course of employment at the employer's direction as a required part of the job. These are particularly characteristic of service industries, for example airline cabin crew, shop salespeople, and hospitality industry workers.

Emotions

In sociology this term describes the feelings that are experienced and expressed with social effects, that is, those that people describe in words, communicate to each other, and which influence their collective and individual actions.

Empirical

Depending upon evidence drawn from experience, observations or experiments. Theories are tested by empirical data.

The Enlightenment

A collection of eighteenth century European philosophies broadly committed to progress, the perfectibility of humans and the pursuit of freedom. Enlightenment philosophers championed reason and science against dogma, superstition and (sometimes) religion. Such tenets heavily influenced early sociology, and it is often argued that Enlightenment thinkers set the model of the secular intellectual. Later (postmodern) sociologists questioned the universality of their pronouncements as well as the extent to which we can speak of "progress" after a century of world wars, genocides, environmental degradations and the like.

Environmental sustainability

Preservation and maintenance of the conditions – the resources, factors, and practices – deemed necessary to ensure the long-term quality of the environment.

Epistemic blindness

Inability to recognize possibilities beyond dominant frames of reference.

Epistemology

A philosophical term that refers to the nature, sources and range of knowledge.

Essentialism

The idea (in contrast to social constructionism) that most of our social behaviour is innate and unchangeable. In its crudest form it is the "This is human nature" argument; in its more sophisticated form it acknowledges that evolutionary heritage is responsible for certain social traits and patterns.

Ethics

Moral issues relating to right and wrong.

Ethnicity

Categorisation of groups on the basis of shared culture, sometimes claimed positively as a source of identity. Also, as the "new racism", used as a ground for discrimination especially in the multicultural societies produced through global movement of peoples.

Ethnocentrism

Using one's own culture as the benchmark against which all others are judged and finding all others lacking by comparison with one's own. Refusing to approach the values, beliefs, and practices of other cultures on their own terms.

Eurocentrism

A form of ethnocentrism which takes European culture and values as the most desirable form. It is often associated with the export of European norms to the rest of the world through the empire building activities of European nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Extended family

Consisting of a nuclear family plus one or more other relatives living together in the same household or in close proximity.

Externalities

Roughly, externalities are side effects, spill over costs or benefits for third parties. Polluting smoke from a steel mill is a negative externality. Thus the (real) costs of producing steel are not included in the supply schedule and social utility is not optimized.

F

Faith

In a religious context faith is an acceptance of the beliefs and principles of a religion as well as an expression of loyalty to that religion. Faith can be seen as the living trust and confidence in a god's or gods' concerns with human affairs.

Family of choice

A non-traditional family arrangement chosen and created by people who want to establish long-term, caring and supportive relationships with one another.

Fictive kin

Arrangements and families of choice unsettle the idea that family is an objective entity that must be defined in terms of a 'heterosexual conjugal unit based on marriage and co-residence' (Jackson, 1999). What this suggests is that although all family types may share some qualitative aspects about the depth and significance of relationships and attitudes toward care and belonging, they are incredibly diverse.

Figurations

Norbert Elias' term to denote the mutual constitution of individual and society – neither can exist without the other (see Homo clausus). It also denotes the fact that social life is anchored in human interdependencies. This acknowledges the complexity of human organisation. Figurational sociology stresses ongoing processes as opposed to fixed states.

Fordism

The system of mass production introduced by Henry Ford. This involved the introduction of the assembly-line and machine pacing in the manufacture of Model T automobiles. More broadly Fordism refers to an approach to mass production that relies on specialized technologies, standardization and the elimination of craft work.

Fourth Estate

Combines several ideas about the media: that they are an important institution in their own right, a source of power and also a check on the power of those who govern. A free and diverse media is seen as a vital aspect to the healthy functioning of democracy.

Free market

In uncritical general use, a condition where there is little or no government interference. But since markets require rules, and governments have a huge role in establishing these, "a free market" is a market constituted so that entrepreneurial actors are not hindered by laws or regulations aimed to protect employees, consumers, the environment, or public goods not provided by the market. This is defended in the name of "efficiency".

Functionalist theories

Represent a recurring perspective within sociology that understands social processes or institutions primarily in terms of their assumed contribution to the operation of society. Functionalism presumes a normative consensus and unlike conflict theory tends to deny the operation of structural inequalities [e.g., class, gender, racism] and of contested meanings or definitions of given situations. Emphasis is therefore on social integration, order and cooperation.

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Fundamentalism

A religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to what they define as the fundamental principles of the religion, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and an opposition to secularism. It has especially come to refer to any religious enclave that intentionally resists identification with the larger religious group in which it originally arose, on the basis that fundamental principles upon which the larger religious group is supposedly founded have become corrupt or displaced by alternative principles hostile to its identity.

G

Gemeinschaft

(community) Social bonds of emotional depth and total commitment, typical of communities, families and kinship.

Gender

Gender is typically used in contrast to the biological term sex to show the socially constructed aspects of masculine and feminine identities. Gender norms (what is considered appropriately feminine and masculine) change across contexts, cultures and time.

Gender performance

The idea that we perform our femininity and masculinity in the presence of others, much like actors perform their characters on stage in a theatre. Erving Goffman suggested that gender performances involve a "front stage" zone, where we appear publicly, and a private "backstage" zone where we prepare ourselves for our public appearances.

Gender roles

Socially-shaped and shared expectations about which activities, attributes, behaviours and spheres of action are suitable for men and women. The term was developed within sociology during the 1940s as women's increasing labour force participation challenged traditional ideas about the activities best suited to each gender.

Gesellschaft

(association or society) Relatively fleeting, anonymous social relations of emotional distance and limited commitment, typical of modern economic and other contractual exchanges.

Global imaginary

A concept referring to people's growing consciousness of belonging not only to a particular nation but also to an interdependent, worldwide community.

Global warming

Associated in scientific research with an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere of the planet leading to rising average temperatures and other changes in climatic conditions

Globality

A social condition characterized by tight global interconnections and socio-economic-cultural flows that drastically reduce the relevance of most of the currently existing national borders and boundaries. Yet, national and global formations will likely coexist for a long time to come.

Globalisms

Politically charged narratives and ideas that put before the public a particular agenda of topics for discussion, questions to ask, and claims to make.

Globalization

A multidimensional set of social processes that involve the expansion, intensification and acceleration of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space. People, communities, and nations around the world are increasingly being exposed to similar economic, social, cultural, and political forces, flows and processes. These forces have led to increasing global interdependence and interconnection particularly in relation to economic activity – business, markets, trade – but also in respect of communications and cultural exchanges.

H**Hegemonic masculinity**

The form of masculinity dominant in a given place at a given time. Not necessarily adhered to in practice by all or even most men, it represents the most legitimate or ideal form of masculinity. Social and economic changes cause the character of hegemonic masculinity to change across time, sometimes quite markedly.

Hegemony

The monopolisation of meaning by socially dominant groups (often through the media). A term popularised by Antonio Gramsci to explain the mechanism of the apparent consent of the oppressed to their oppression.

Heteronormativity

The culturally biased concept that heterosexuality is the normal or even 'natural' form of human sexual behaviour. It is privileged and all other forms are labelled abnormal or less legitimate. Stigmatisation and discrimination often result.

Homosexuality

The term, invented in the late nineteenth century, to describe sexual activity between two people of the same biological sex. It was originally used as a political tool that claimed homosexuals were a naturally occurring category of human being and therefore deserved to be treated equally.

Homo clauses

A term meaning 'closed person', coined by Norbert Elias to describe the image of individuals as self-contained and cut off from the world around them, which lies behind the fallacy that 'individual' and 'society' are two separate entities.

Hyperreality

According to Jean Baudrillard contemporary consumer society is so saturated by mediated signs that any distinction between the imaginary and the real is abolished – a state of affairs he calls hyperreality. Existence is experienced as a complex web of representations, or simulacra, that refer not to some external reality but only to other representations.

I**Identity**

The sense of self acquired by individuals through socialization and interaction with others.

Identity politics

Debates and actions around the unequal distribution of power in societies on the basis of membership of a social category or group defined by identifiable characteristics, e.g., disability, gender, race, religion, sexuality.

Ideology

Shared ideas, beliefs and discourses in a social system that attempt to order and interpret the world where there are structural inequalities. Ideologies legitimate the position of those in power and thereby further their interests and perpetuate their dominance.

Ideological processes

Social arrangements which enable ideologies to be effective.

Imagined community

Term coined by Benedict Anderson to describe the kind of ideological attachment that connects citizens and states and to explain how national loyalty works.

Impression management

Strategies for presenting the most strategically useful version of "the self" in particular social situations.

Interaction

Social action that occurs in a situation of the recognisable co-presence of at least two persons.

Indigenous populations

Populations that suffer the force and/or effects of colonialism and who maintain a relationship of historical continuity with pre-colonial populations.

Individualism

Embraces various doctrines, beliefs and viewpoints which have as their main focus the centrality of the individual. Principally associated with liberalism, it has political, economic, legal and philosophical forms.

Intermediaries

A term used by ANT to denote the positioning of technologies as simple neutral tools, passive bearers of social forces. Intermediaries have no agency of their own, they do not have their own effects. From this perspective society is purely socially constructed. ANT accuses most sociology of reducing technologies to the level of intermediaries.

K**Kinship**

Historically, kinship refers to people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption.

L**Learning**

Socialization in existing or new ways of knowing, being, thinking, seeing or doing things.

Levelling perspectives

Are a grouping of approaches to consumer society that retain the Marxist critique of capitalism. They view consumer cultures as producing standardization, regimentation and pseudo-individualism. From this perspective consumers are considered 'cultural dupes'.

Liquid perspectives

Are approaches that focus on the creative and interpretive capacities of consumers. Living Apart Together (LAT) is a term for couples who, while committed to each other, decide to have separate homes rather than one shared residence.

M**Market**

A market is a social institution in which people voluntarily exchange commodities (goods, resources, services) and where coordination of those exchanges is accomplished via a system of prices. Market economies, which may be capitalist or socialist, contrast to command economies, in which planning replaces the system of prices. The planner is presumed to have all the relevant information needed to coordinate, allocate and distribute rationally.

McDonaldisation

The extension of principles of mass production and managerial control into the realms of service work and consumption. As a result, the modern world more and more comes to resemble a fast-food restaurant in which standardization, limited choice and surveillance are norms.

Mass communications

Dennis McQuail regards these as modern phenomenon defined by complex organisational structures and large-scale reach. Mass communications are relatively open-ended. They reach a diverse audience simultaneously. The communicator (e.g., news anchor, talk show host) is only known to the audience through this public role.

Material-semiotics

Approaches to technology and society that stress relationality – that meaning is found in interaction, and that various elements are defined in relation to each other. They also combine both the material and symbolic aspects of what they study, stressing physical things and their meanings.

Media

The processes, forms and content of communication between a sender and a receiver. Harold Lasswell set forth the following definition of the study of mass communication: Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect? This still provides a blueprint for sociologists studying media today.

Mediators

A performative take on technology used by ANT to denote all the complex work that technologies do, the effects that they have and the differences that they make. Mediation is drawn upon to make the point that society is a socio-technical accomplishment.

Medicalisation of deviance

A generally observable trend in which various arms of the medical profession increasingly get to diagnose, categorise and treat what is considered deviant behaviour. This reflects a broad shift in western approaches to deviance from punishing the body to curing the mind.

Modernisation

The process of becoming modern, as an individual or as society. Initially defined with close reference to Great Britain, the first modern society; but the success of many non-Western societies (led by Japan) in modernising has forced sociologists to acknowledge that routes to the modern world are less limited than this.

Modernism

A set of Western high cultural practices roughly dated between 1880 and 1940 which, while differing in detail from one domain to another - from the visual arts and literature to art music and architecture - shared some common ground in openly celebrating the nature of the medium being used. Modernism stands in a complicated and contested relationship to modernity, not least because many artists who were labelled as modernists employed their own versions of the traditional-modern dichotomy to denounce and reject much - or for some, all - previous art.

Modernity

The condition of being modern. Though definitions abound and differ in detail, each usually contains some mix drawn from the following list: capitalist industrialisation; novel forms of urbanisation and urbanism; bureaucracy as the dominant organisational form; extensive divisions of labour; cosmopolitanism; global extension of trade networks and exploitation of raw materials; active citizenship and the reasoning subject.

N

Nation

The most common use refers to a nation state. That is, the people who share a government and common territory within a named country in which they have citizenship. However the term is also used to describe an ethnically defined community of people who share descent, history, language and culture. In this sense the nation may be nested within a larger nation state and without autonomous political institutions.

Nationalism

Loyalty to and strong support for one's own nation. This may take the form of a patriotism that rejects the value and interests of people of other nations. It is particularly strong in times of war and governments seek to foster nationalism within their own nation.

Neo-liberalism

Constitutes a political and economic ideology which emerged in the 1960s and came to the fore in the 1970s. It equates human well-being with the promotion of economic freedom from regulation and the limitation of state intervention in social and economic life. Emphasis is placed upon the economic and political interest of the individual being best served through free markets and free trade, deregulation, privatization and 'rolling-back' the state. It has had a powerful impact on political and economic policies around the world and has led to significant increases in inequalities in income and wealth distribution within and between nations.

Network society

A term coined by Manuel Castells to describe the contemporary world situation where the globalization of economic activity and culture undermines the autonomy and independent capacity of individual nation states.

New media/new social media

A term used to describe the increasing prevalence of computer technologies, the Internet, gaming and mobile phone devices as means for the delivery of media content. The prefix "New" is used to dissociate these technologies from traditional media forms such as print and television due to their relative novelty and the levels of interactivity between producer and user.

New racism

Using cultural differences of ethnicity to further racism in a different guise. The result is still prejudice, discrimination, and social inequality.

New religious movements

A new religious movement appears as a religious, ethical or spiritual grouping that has not yet been recognized as a mainstream denomination or church. These new religious bodies may be in a relatively high state of tension with wider society, especially when they are seen to have a novel belief system.

Norms

A constellation of values that shapes social life, a common pattern. Most commonly realised only when they are breached.

Nuclear family

Is a view of the family that assumes common residence, shared economic resources, and a married, heterosexual couples who share parenting. The concept of the nuclear family is criticised by most contemporary theorists.

P**Ontology**

The study of being, of existence. This has strong relevance for thinking about reality.

Ontological security

Ronald Laing's term. It means being secure in one's own being. More broadly it could be said to be the state of knowing one's self and one's place in the world. Anthony Giddens uses it to mean confidence in oneself and one's surroundings remaining stable.

The one sex model

A way of thinking prior to the eighteenth century in which female and male were understood not as opposite sexes but as different versions of the same 'sex'. Man's sexual organs were understood as the same as women's but as fully developed and extended instead of 'tucked up' inside.

The other

Sometimes written with a capital "O" or inside quotation marks it describes the situation of minorities who are marginalized by definition of being "other" to the dominant and mainstream knowledge, culture, or "race".

Q**Qualitative research**

Has a focus on a single or a few cases and uses many variables to describe and explain these examples. Participant observation is the classic form of qualitative research. This type of research is characterised by the use of notes, texts and detailed writings to provide rich accounts of relatively narrowly defined areas of study.

Quantitative research

Has a focus on many cases and uses few variables. The survey is the classic form of quantitative research. This type of research is commonly associated with the use of numbers, in particular statistical formulae. Numbers are used in this way because of their capacity to condense data as an aid to the study of broadly defined areas of social life.

R**Race**

Categorisation, without scientific support, which claims to distinguish human groups on the basis of physical characteristics and, sometimes, associated social traits. The grounds on which claims of racial superiority and inferiority are made.

Racializing

The process through which ideas and beliefs about "race" shape social relationships and cast political and economic inequality in terms of racial or ethnic identity. In short, the mechanism by which "race" is translated into action and becomes an effective social category.

Religion

Religion is the social institution that revolves around the area of life people regard as sacred. It consists of any socially organized pattern of beliefs and practices concerning ultimate meaning that assumes the existence of god or gods. The sociology of religion is the study of the behaviour and institutions of groups influenced by religious beliefs.

Recalcitrant workers

are individually or collectively troublesome to managers and struggle to resist forms of control. Much of the sociology of work has focused on understanding recalcitrant workers.

Resacralization

A return to and search for sacred, spiritual or symbolic aspects of everyday life. This is often seen as a response to secularization and desacralization processes.

Resistance

is the capacity of workers and consumers to actively oppose managerial and corporate initiatives.

Retail therapy

The relief of personal troubles through purchases. Even though these troubles may be the result of public, institutional and structural issues they are "resolved" by individual consumption acts.

Revenge effects

A phrase used by Edward Tenner to denote the unintended (and frequently negative) consequences of a technology.

Role

A collection of attributes and expected behaviours associated with specified social relationships and positions that individuals are expected to perform. Frequently used in sociology in association with a theatrical metaphor of social life.

S**Sacred**

The sacred is extraordinary and awe-inspiring, beyond the profane realm; it evokes an attitude of reverence. For Émile Durkheim nothing is inherently sacred or profane but rather it becomes such after being defined and labelled by individuals and groups.

Sanctioned ignorances

What one has to forget, repress or deny in order to continue to believe what one wants to or has to believe in.

Scarcity

Is the notion that there are insufficient material or immaterial resources for their equitable allocation across society. Notions of scarcity either emphasize the harshness of nature or the power of social relations and vested interests (as in Marxist accounts). Marxists argue that with an equitable distribution of resources (e.g., in a communist society) the problem of scarcity would largely disappear. Schooling Formal education received at a school.

Secularization

The process by which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.

Self

Sense of individual personhood originally defined by psychologists and subsequently adopted and developed in sociology to explain how and why individuals experience themselves as social beings.

Semiotics

Is concerned with communication. It is the systematic study of signs and their meaning. Signs can include all manner of things, including images, clothing and words.

Sex/gender distinction

developed in the 1970s, this separates the biological attributes that make a person male or female (sex) from the social aspects of masculinity and femininity that we express as boys, girls, men and women (gender). The distinction has lost ground within sociology given the difficulty of fully separating biology (nature) from society (nurture).

Sexual Revolution

Refers to a western social movement that began in the 1960s. It agitated for greater acceptance of sexual expression outside the bounds of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Such expressions included: sex outside and before marriage, and the acceptance of homosexuality and other types of sexuality.

Sexuality

The social patterning of sexual expression and behaviour. Different societies at different times have regulated sexual behaviour in different ways. All societies have privileged some forms of sexuality over others (see heteronormativity).

Signifier/Signified

For Ferdinand de Saussure a sign can be seen to be made up of two parts: the signifier, or form of the sign (the printed or spoken word, the image of a woman); and the signified, or concept that is conjured by the signifier.

Social class

A fundamental form of social stratification grounded in economics. Mainstream sociology defines class in terms of relations of distribution, radical sociology defines class in terms of relations of exchange and Marxist sociology defines class in terms of relations of production.

Social constructionist

explanations Contrast with essentialist explanations. They assume that the phenomenon being explained is produced in society and through the social interactions of many individuals.

Social Democratic

A political philosophy that pursues social and economic equality through state intervention.

Social dynamics

The working of social processes to produce particular outcomes.

Social inequality

Disparities in status, income, life chances and so on between different social groupings (for instance classes, ethnic groups). The definition, measurement and policy implications of social inequality depend upon its imputed cause - distributional, exchange based or production based relations - over which there is considerable debate.

Socialization

The process by which humans learn the norms and ways of behaving for their society. It begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Social justice

Refers to ongoing struggles to eliminate or ameliorate the multitudinous inequalities in society. Many of the struggles for social justice are organised as the struggle for rights and equity (e.g., gay rights, women's rights, human rights).

Social movements

A concept of a solidarity association on the basis of opposition to one or several forms of inequality, for example the women's movement, the indigenous peoples movement, Gay liberation. The World Social Forum has come to be known as the "movement of movements".

Social norms

customary rules specifying what beliefs and behaviours are and are not acceptable in a society.

Social reproduction

Refers to the familial, institutional and cultural mechanisms by which the social structure is continued, inequalities and all. Education is a central element in the process of social reproduction.

Social status

A Weberian concept that defines status as social prestige, compared to class as ownership of economic assets, and power as the exercise of political force.

Social stigma

is a term usually attributed to Erving Goffman. It describes the possession of physical and/or social characteristics that may devalue an individual's identity in the eyes of their community.

Sociological imagination

C. Wright Mill's term. He urged that all social scientists should exercise the sociological imagination. This means fostering the ability to trace the links between biography (the individual) and history (culture); those things that connect the intimate environment of milieu with the broader one of social structure.

Sociology

The study of group life in (modern) society. Sociology traces the (often hidden) relations between the private and the public; the individual and the collective; the personal and the systemic; the specific and the general.

Socio-technical systems

Are large-scale arrangements of connected technologies, experts and institutions.

Socius

An individual considered in his or her social relations, as distinct from an individual as a biological creature or as a purely rational being. The word 'sociology' is partly derived from this Latin term.

Sovereign power

The monopolistic capacity of the nation-state as sole authority to make law and war.

The state

Term used to describe the foundation and apparatus of political governance. It usually describes government institutions within a defined territory called the 'nation state' which hold the monopoly of law making within that territory and war making outside it. State formation is a key point in the history of societies because the centralization of power that results allows more complex social arrangements to develop.

Surplus

Is the notion that there is an excess or even overabundance of material or immaterial resources. Notions of surplus tend to examine the impacts on consumers in a society awash with choice and commodities.

Surveillance

Systematic scrutiny of personal information to supervise, manipulate or control people. These capacities are enhanced by modern technologies and by dedicated data-management agencies (both state and corporate). Surveillance is seen as a fundamental element in the maintenance of social order and in the government of populations.

Symbolic Interactionism

Micro-level sociological theory emphasizing the construction of society through everyday interaction and communication between individuals. It focuses on the ways that actors perform roles and social identities and negotiate meaning. It is sometimes criticized for neglecting social structure in its concentration on individuals, action, and culture.

Symmetrical family

A nuclear family form in which parents have an egalitarian relationship and share interests, tasks, responsibilities and childcare.

T

Technological Determinism

The idea that technology is the driver of history and the main cause of social change.

Technology

Typically thought of as physical devices which help us do things. Sociologists tend to move their thinking about technology beyond mere artefacts to also think about their design, their use and their overall impact within a socio-technical system. They also add three other definitions of technology: activities, knowledge and modes of organisation.

Theory

From the Greek "to look at". The point of theory in sociology is to help us organise and make sense of aspects of the social world. Theory, then, is tied to comprehension and explanation. Frequently theories contain generalisable propositions.

Totem

A totem is a material symbol (a plant, animal or object) of a social group, particularly a clan or tribe. The totem is seen as sacred.

Totemism

A system of religious belief which attributes divine properties to a particular type of plant, animal or object.

Traditional-modern dichotomy

A term to capture classical sociologists' efforts to understand modernisation. Though different writers inflected this dichotomy differently, they shared a profound sense that modernisation brought qualitative change to the societies they inhabited, turning their known social worlds upside down.

U

Urbanisation

The processes through which an increasing proportion of a national population lives and works in towns and cities. This marks a shift from a rural agriculturally-based society to a metropolitan (post-) industrial one.

V

Variables

One of the major building blocks of sociological research (see cases). Research may focus on few or a great number of variables (see qualitative research and quantitative research). Variables provide the mechanisms for describing and explaining the case or cases under scrutiny. Variables provide the aspects, dimensions, and features of analysis or comparison. For example a survey on youth attitudes towards alcohol might include variables on age, gender, educational attainment, weekly alcohol consumption, place of residence and income.

Verstehen

The term is closely associated with sociologists like Georg Simmel and Max Weber. It is typically translated from the German as 'understanding'. It denotes the attempt to understand an actor or group by their own terms of reference; by the way they construct meaning in their own social world.

Virtual community

Unlike communities of old that were place-based and involved face-to-face contact, these are associations of people that have formed through the spread of electronic communications networks, for example web rings, blogs, social

networking sites and hacker communities. They are often seen as confirmation of Marshall McLuhan's prediction of the emergence of the "global village".

Virtual identity

is created and performed online, often on social networking sites, and it notes for the ease with which people may try out new identities or create them to deceive others.

W**Work**

Has at least two aspects, paid and unpaid. Paid work is the core of social life insofar as it produces all the commodities (goods and services) of capitalist societies. Paid work, or production, has tended to be seen as the wellspring of technological and social innovation. Feminists have argued that unpaid work, in particular the domestic labour undertaken by women, is equally important to the reproduction of social life.

Work ethic

Is a set of principles that emphasize austerity, deferred gratification, saving and duty. It is typically contrasted with the aesthetic of consumption and the consumer ethic.

X**Xenophobia**

A passionate and even phobic dislike of foreigners simply because they are perceived as "other" (and therefore threatening) to members of one's own nation