Today’s lecture: general overview

1. What is sociology? With particular attention to Mills’s discussion in “The Promise”
2. Opening up the diversity of sociology
3. Being sociological about the question of “Is sociology a science?”
4. How is sociology useful?

What is sociology?

• Attempts to give
  to entire academic disciplines usually destined to
• Example of a textbook definition that fails: “Sociology is the scientific study of interactions and relations among human beings” (McIntryre, The Practical Skeptic)

Your textbook’s definition:

The study of human groups and societies, giving particular emphasis to analysis of the industrialized world. Sociology is one of a group of social sciences, which include anthropology, economics, political science, and human geography. The divisions between the various social sciences are not clear-cut, and all share a certain range of common interests, concepts, and methods.
defining sociology

- Mills: sociology studies “the interaction of
  – b: one person’s story
  – h: a society’s story
- Mills’s definition emphasizes the role of
  in shaping
- You experience , but your
  is shaped by a
- A broader “” is needed
  to understand this interaction

Example: you, UW college student, USA, 2002

- Being a college student is part of your biography,
  but compare to to see how
  this fact of biography has been shaped by history:
  1. How is a college education?
  2. How did seem to you?
  3. What do you think going to college ?

Sociology’s focus on the
interaction between biography
and history will be seen in the
various that will label

Textbook example:
the diversity of sociology

• diversity of : what are the different that sociologists can examine?
• diversity of : what is the of the basic social unit (" ") we are considering?
• diversity of : different ways of thinking about what is within a given domain of study?
• diversity of : what are the different that sociologists can use to study research questions?

opening up “the diversity of ”

1. centered on (as in, what are the effects of being , or what are the effects of being )
2. centered on (as in, what are the different ? of political unrest?)
3. centered on settings (as in, the sociology of , sociology)

opening up “diversity of ”

• m sociology: sociology as it examines individuals’ immediate social surroundings and experiences
• m sociology: sociology as it relates to
opening up “diversity of”

- the rest of the first half of the course can be thought about as introducing different perspectives on social life
- different perspectives sometimes offer of phenomena and are sometimes more differences in what aspects of phenomena are
- m theories: theories about phenomena in a

Of the “modern theoretical approaches” discussed in book

- “symbolic interactionism” will be discussed in week on
- “functionalism” has, but will a brief appearance when we talk about
- “Marxism and class conflict” will strongly our discussion of
- feminist theory will strongly inform our discussion of

opening up “diversity of”

- quantitative methods emphasize the
  among social phenomena
  – Quintessential quantitative sociology:
- qualitative methods emphasize observing and gathering
  – Quintessential qualitative sociology:
Is sociology a science?

- Sociology textbooks usually include in their definitions of sociology or a whole section something about sociology being

- The good thing about this is that it highlights that sociology is a

- But think about: why might sociology textbook writers emphasize the

  of sociology

“Is [blank]ology a science?”

- Within our society, science is a source of

- Whether [blank]ology is publicly regarded as a science has real

  for the

  that [blank]ology gets

- This is why being as a

  science is something

Sociological questions that one might ask instead of “Is [blank]ology a science?”

1. How has science come to within our society that it has?
2. Why do some people argue that [blank]ology ?
3. What does this debate have for ?
Battles over social definitions of reality

- Thomas Theorem: “If people define situations as ______, then they are ______.”
- The point is usually not which side is correct, but instead:
  1. that the outcomes of ______ about reality have
  2. that these outcomes are determined as a result of ______

Is sociology useful?

- #1 Sociology provides useful concepts for understanding what happens in the social world and why it happens
  - Example: ______: the belief that something sets into motion a process that actually causes ______

Is sociology useful?

- #2: Helps you to understand relationship between one’s life, larger social currents, and society as a whole

- Warning: sociology may help you understand aspects of ______, but it is also larger than ______
sociology and your life

• No one’s is enough to provide a good picture of
• Sociological statements are inherently (that is, about )
  1. Few (no?) like the
  2. The Uncle Joe Principle: The entire enterprise of sociology is not invalidated

Is sociology useful?

• #3: Sociology critically examines many simple-and-easy explanations about social life
• Sociologists are particularly leery of explanations, which typically run into the of patterns
  – Example:

Is sociology useful?

• #4: Sociology can help anticipate and assess the effects of various social policies
• u consequences: efforts to change one aspect of society often have