

Sociological approach to understanding human life

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Sociology is the systematic, sceptical and critical study of the way that people do things together. It's not a science that simply lists facts and figures about society. Instead it becomes a form of consciousness, a way of thinking, a critical way of seeing the world. It welcomes you to challenge the obvious, to question the world as it is taken for granted and to de-familiarising the familiar. This is what empowers critical thinking which triggers the development of the understanding of the human life.

The aim of this essay is to outline the sociological approach to understanding human life, to explore the different sociological perspectives, to question the reliability of the different forms of research and to emphasise the key elements that make sociology different to other ways of exploring the human life. Finally I shall be illustrating its approach with regards to my biography. Peter Berger's distinctive approach to understanding human life was characterised by seeing the general as the particular.

This meant that sociologists can identify general patterns of social life by looking at concrete examples of social life. The genesis of this approach is when we realise how the general categories into which we happen to fall shape our particular life experiences. Berger feels that the general impact of society on the actions, thoughts and feelings of particular people are made evident in the way that societies view change over time. For example the views on inequality have changed since the start of the 21st century.

Another sociological approach to sociology is seeing the strange in the familiar, "the first wisdom of sociology is this, things are not what they seem", Bauman. This is the approach where you have to "de-familiarise

the familiar” , which means that when your approaching to understand human life you have to look at it with a sense that people do not decide what to do but instead society guides their thoughts and deeds. So in essence sociology sets out to show the patterns and processes by which society shapes what we do.

C. Wright mills approach to understanding human life was to show that most of our problems were not caused by us but from society. He felt that “ The sociological imagination“ was a way of understanding that social outcomes are shaped by social context. He claims that some things in society lead to certain outcomes. “ when a society becomes industrialised , a peasant becomes a worker . “ Therefore the things we do are shaped by the situation we are in, the values we have. I believe that all three approaches differ ut where they all overlap is in their belief that a person must be able to pull away from the situation and to think from an alternative point of view. To acquire real knowledge is to go against the status quo. 1. ‘ The first wisdom of sociology is this: things are not what they seem (sociology global intro p. 5) 2. C. Wright Mills. 1959. ‘ The promise’ in The Sociological Imagination New York: 3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._Wright_Mills 4. Macionis, 5th edition , chapter 1 5. Berger, Peter Invitation to sociology . New York , 1963 With regards to perspectives in understanding human life there are two which are prominent.

The first is the functional perspective, this recognises that our lives are guided by social structures. It therefore organises sociological observation by identifying various structures of society and investigating the function of each one. This is a building block for theories that see society as a complex <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-approach-to-understanding-human-life/>

system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. One of the problems I have with this perspective is that it evokes that society is organically stable, I also questions how we can assume that society has a natural order when social patterns change from location and time.

The second sociological perspective is the conflict perspective . this analysis points out that, rather than promoting the operation of society as a whole , social structure typically benefits some people while depriving others, for example the rich in relation to the poor. So sociologist such as Marx that belong to this school of thought try to understand society at the same time change it . The problem here is that as this perspective highlights inequality and undermines unity among members in a society.

The aim of this perspective is to pursue politicalgoals, it overlooks scientific objectivity. The other side of the sociological approach to understanding human life is to conduct sociological investigation in order to find out what is sociologically true. There are many different areas of thought which have different angles on what is scientifically true. Positivism suggests that sociological/scientific truths are based on empirical evidence. So for example Berger approach of seeing the general within the particular would coincide here.

The reliability of sociological truths do have limitations , for example Peter Berger social patterns change constantly, what is true in one society and in one particular time may not hold truth in another. As opposed to the laws ofmathematics, they are universal truths and are immutable. This all evaporates to the argument of common sense versus scientific evidence,

and leads to conclusions that sociology should adopt a more humanistic discipline when it comes to understanding human life. This is what differentiates sociology when it comes to other ways of exploring human life.

This is because sociology pays more tribute to subjectivity, public opinion and examines how individuals behave to social constraints. This is something which is not evident in a scientific truth or theory. I shall now be making sense of my biography using sociology. The first step will be to consider my biography in a broader view. I have a very healthy family structure with both my parents happily married. Although we are catholic my parents have had a liberal approach in bringing me up. We have been a victim of crime when we were living opposite a council estate where they stole my father's car.

I am half Colombian, middle class and male. I believe that this trait has made me part of the sociological movement of Colombians who have immigrated to the west and choose to not be judged on the stereotypical Colombia (drug dealer) but on the context of our character. I believe in terms of historical context I am part of the second generation of immigrants, this means that I have been given the opportunity to go to university, take advantage of great healthcare and go to top state schools where I have been able to mix with upper middle class children.

I chose to use a historical context because in "the sociological imagination", Mills claimed that we can only understand human life by "locating himself within his period". This is because he felt that human choices are dictated by the times in which you live. Given the calibre of education I received at 6th form as was able to acquire a placement at a top carbon brokerage in the

city . So I have never been effected by the economic downturn in this country . I was bought up in the 90's the decade where computers/internet became accessible to most people.

My parents always encouraged me to learn as much as possible online, aiding me to have extensive financial acumen, making me effective at myinternship. I could of easily have stayed at this job but I decided to go to university. I am not a hundred per cent which social norms caused me to do this, was it to be perceived as an intelligent individual with a degree , was it effective government propaganda in order to have less under 21 in the job market or was it to simply promote inequality.

A lot of people argue that going to university promotes this because only middle class children who have themoneyto pay the fees , who have been to top school that have aided their application or have the support of theiracademicparents are in a head start position compared to ethnic minorities from run down institutions whose parents have no idea of what upper education entails.

In conclusion I feel that sociology has an effective approach to understand human life. It uses a humanistic science which develops as society does. The social sciences adopt scientific methods in the investigation of human behavior on the other hand sociology studies human society as Berger would say by " seeing the general in the particular". Furthermore sociology encourages us to question the familiar , helping us to separate fact from fiction.

You could argue that this is what has triggered the great minds such as Albert Einstein. Sociology also helps us to differentiate opportunities and constraints that shape our lives, like I did in my biography where I have had the opportunity to attend a reputable state school which has opened many doors for me but I have also faced constraints with being stereotyped as a Colombian drug dealer.

Bibliography ' The first wisdom of sociology is this: things are not what they seem (sociology global intro p. 5) C. Wright Mills. 1959. ' The promise' in The Sociological Imagination New York: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._Wright_Mills Macdonis, 5th edition, chapter 1 Berger, Peter Invitation to sociology. New York, 1963