

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Unit: I Introduction

Module Name: Sociology as a Social Science

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Name of the Presenter: Dr. Sachin Savio Moraes

Notes:

Sociology is a Science and its part of the branch of Social Science

Today we shall dwell on Why it is a Social Science?, How is Sociological knowledge different from other common knowledge and how it is a part of Scientific knowledge and hence it is a Science.

Sociology as a Social Science

Subject matter of Sociology is Society and its various aspects: Like anthropology, economics, political science, and psychology, sociology is a social science and the focus is on Society and Culture, just like a biologist whose focus is on plants and animals.

Sociology is Generalising: A generalization is just that: a statement of a tendency, rather than a hard-and-fast law. For example, the statement that men are more likely than women to commit suicide does not mean that every man commits suicide and no woman commits suicide. It means only that men have a higher suicide rate, even though most men, of course, do not commit

suicide. Many people will not fit the pattern of such a generalization, because people are shaped but not totally determined by their social environment. That is both the fascination and the frustration of sociology.

Sociology is different from Natural Science: sociology as a social science is very different from a discipline such as physics, in which known laws exist for which no exceptions are possible. For example, we call the law of gravity a law because it describes a physical force that exists on the earth at all times and in all places and that always has the same result. If you were to pick up the book you are now reading—or the computer or other device on which you are reading or listening to—and then let go, the object you were holding would definitely fall to the ground. If you did this a second time, it would fall a second time. If you did this a billion times, it would fall a billion times. In fact, if there were even one time out of a billion that your book or electronic device did not fall down, our understanding of the physical world would be totally revolutionized, the earth could be in danger, and you could go on television and make a lot of money. For better or worse, people are less predictable than this object that keeps falling down. Sociology can help us understand the social forces that affect our behavior, beliefs, and life chances, but it can only go so far. That limitation conceded, sociological understanding can still go fairly far toward such an understanding, and it can help us comprehend who we are and what we are by helping us first understand the profound yet often subtle influence of our social backgrounds on so many things about us.

Sociology as a Social Science uses the method of Science: When we say that sociology is a social science, we mean that it uses the scientific method to try to understand the many aspects of society that sociologists study. An important goal is to yield generalizations—general statements regarding trends among various dimensions of social life.

1. Although sociology as a discipline is very different from physics, it is not as different as one might think from this and the other “hard” sciences. Like these disciplines, sociology as a social science relies heavily on systematic research that follows the standard rules of the scientific method.

Introduction to Next Point

At this point a reader might be saying, I already had heard that men have a higher suicide rate than women. Maybe our social backgrounds do influence us in ways I had not realized, but what beyond that does sociology have to tell me?"

Students often feel this way because sociology deals with matters already familiar to them. Just about everyone has grown up in a family, so we all know something about it. We read a lot in the media about topics like divorce and health care, so we all already know something about these, too. All this leads some students to wonder if they will learn anything in their introduction to sociology course that they do not already know.

Sources of Knowledge

Our usual knowledge and understanding of social reality come from at least five sources: (a) personal experience; (b) common sense; (c) the media (including the Internet); (d) "expert authorities," such as teachers, parents, and government officials; and (e) tradition. These are all important sources of our understanding of how the world "works," but at the same time their value can often be very limited.

1. Personal Experience: Although personal experiences are very important, not everyone has the same personal experience. This fact casts some doubt on the degree to which our personal experiences can help us understand everything about a topic and the degree to which we can draw conclusions from them that necessarily apply to other people. Example: I was tested positive for coronavirus the experience of my treatment towards the cure would be different from Amitabh Bachchan. Why? Think I live it up to you.. But the point is our experience cannot be used to generalise others.

2. Common Sense: If personal experience does not help that much when it comes to making predictions, what about common sense? Although common sense can be very helpful, it can also contradict itself. For example, which makes more sense, haste makes waste or he or she who hesitates is lost? How about birds of a feather flock together versus opposites attract? Or two heads are better than one versus too many cooks spoil the broth? Each of these common sayings makes sense, but if sayings that are opposite of each other both make sense, where does the truth lie? Can common sense always be

counted on to help us understand social life? For Example Is Covid-19 Pandemic having a positive impact? Common sense tells us No... But when we researched we did find that families have come together sharing more personal time, there has been less pollution and online industry is booming and so are pharma companies. So, What we all “knew” was obvious from common sense turns out not to have been so obvious after all.

3. Media: If personal experience and common sense do not always help that much, how about the media? We learn a lot about current events and social and political issues from the Internet, television news, newspapers and magazines, and other media sources. It is certainly important to keep up with the news, but media coverage may oversimplify complex topics or even distort what the best evidence from systematic research seems to be telling us.

4. Expert Authorities: Expert authorities, such as teachers, parents, and government officials, are a fourth source that influences our understanding of social reality. We learn much from our teachers and parents and perhaps from government officials, but, for better or worse, not all of what we learn from these sources about social reality is completely accurate.

5. Traditions: A final source that influences our understanding of social reality is tradition, or long-standing ways of thinking about the workings of society. Tradition is generally valuable, because a society should always be aware of its roots. However, traditional ways of thinking about social reality often turn out to be inaccurate and incomplete. For example, traditional ways of thinking in India is that to be fair is to be beautiful.

Introduction to Last Point

If we cannot always trust personal experience, common sense, the media, expert authorities, and tradition to help us understand social reality, then the importance of systematic research gathered by sociology and the other social sciences becomes apparent.

The Scientific Method

As noted earlier, because sociology is a social science, sociologists follow the rules of the scientific method in their research. Most readers probably learned these rules in science classes in high school, college, or both. The scientific

method is followed in the natural, physical, and social sciences to help yield the most accurate and reliable conclusions possible, especially ones that are free of bias or methodological errors. Although there are some bias in Social science because of the subject matter. By and large Sociology like the rest of the Sciences employs the Scientific method that consist of Steps

In following the scientific method, sociologists are no different from their colleagues in the natural and physical sciences or the other social sciences, even though their research is very different in other respects.

Conclusion

- As a social science, sociology presents generalizations, or general statements regarding trends among various dimensions of social life. There are always many exceptions to any generalization, because people are not totally determined by their social environment.
- Our knowledge and understanding of social reality usually comes from five sources: (a) personal experience, (b) common sense, (c) the media, (d) expert authorities, and (e) tradition. Sometimes and perhaps often, the knowledge gained from these sources is faulty.
- Like research in other social sciences, sociological research follows the scientific method to ensure the most accurate and reliable results possible. The basic steps of the scientific method include (a) formulating a hypothesis, (b) measuring and gathering data to test the hypothesis, (c) analyzing these data, and (d) drawing appropriate conclusions.

Reference: Education, O. L. (2020, July 1). http://open.lib.edu/Sociology/Chapter/2_1_Sociology_as_Social_Science/. Retrieved from http://open.lib.edu: http://open.lib.edu/Sociology/Chapter/2_1_Sociology_as_Social_Science/