

Approach to the Analysis of Social Structure

The analysis of the social structure of the United States will be approached in this course in terms of its treatment as a social system in a technical sociological sense. As a structure this is composed of institutionalized patterns of behavior which define what is expected of people occupying particular statuses such as that of middle class housewife, university student, medical practitioner, or high school senior. These patterns have to be articulated in such a way that the society as a whole can function without too much friction.

Such institutionalized patterns are the "foci" around which the goals and motives of individuals cluster. Unless the society is to disintegrate or change radically there must be a minimum of actual conformity with institutional expectations. The dynamic problems of the social system are those of the analysis of the behavioral mechanisms by which such conformity as exists is maintained and conversely the degrees and types of deviance which exist are accounted for. Institutional structure in the sense of this course must be understood as a relative concept. It is not a hypostatized entity, but a set of relatively stable uniformities of behavior and of the system of sanctions which influence behavior. It is continually changing but at most times relatively slowly. Such a concept provides an essential point of reference for the orderly analysis of social phenomena.

The following definitions of a few important theoretical terms which will be used in the course should prove useful for purposes of reference.

1. Social system: A complex of patterned interaction of a plurality of human individuals which, for the scientific purposes on hand, it is convenient to treat as a system.
2. Social structure: A system of patterned interaction of human individuals so far as the empirical interaction patterns can be assumed to constitute a relatively constant situational framework for the analysis of a given set of dynamic problems.
3. Institution: A complex of patterns defining the legitimately expected modes of behavior of the persons occupying a given status in a social system which, as a complex, is of strategic significance to the functioning of the relevant social system.
4. Cultural patterns: Those patterns relative to behavior and to the products of human action which may be transmitted, from generation to generation independently of biological inheritance, considered as a system of patterns, not of empirical uniformities of action or as a system of physical objects.
5. Social Motivations: Those structured patterns of psychological forces which in the problem context of strategic significance to the social system conceptualize the dynamic forces which motivate behavior so far as it is of strategic significance to the social system.

6. Role (institutionalized) The patterned system of morally sanctioned norms of behavior imputed to the incumbents of a structurally significant status in a social system.
7. Social Group: A plurality of interacting human individuals who in their roles as participants in this particular interaction system constitute an important structural unit in the social system.
8. Social Conformity and Deviance: The modes in which and extent to which behavior and its motivation involve conformity with or deviance from the institutionalized norms defining the appropriate statuses and roles in the social system.