NNEKA EUCHARIA OGBONNAH

ID UM72342HEA

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

**Atlantic International University**

**HONOLULU HAWAI**

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Introduction

*An English poet, John Donne said, “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”*

Truly no man is an island. As a tree cannot make a forest, so it is impossible for a man to live alone in this world. All human beings, somehow, we are connected to each other for our own wellbeing and survival. We are social beings because we live in a group, be it as family, village, school, community or as a country. Living together links us together as a society who interacts and share the same culture. Sometimes the society we live in influences our behaviors. For instance, let us take a child that wants to be a lawyer as an example, wanting to be a lawyer might be because his/her parents wanted him to be a lawyer or because of how the society speaks high of lawyers, as well as the respect the society gives to them. Studying how the society we live in influences our behavior, how we think, and how we react to things around us is exactly what the sociologist do.

However, we can say sociology is the study of society, social relations, culture and how human behavior is influenced by their society. Oxford advanced learners dictionary defined it as the scientific study of the nature and the development of the society and social behavior. (Hornby, 2015)

**Question one**

What do you think C. Wright Mills meant when he said that to be a sociologist, one had to develop a sociological imagination?

Sociological imagination or sociological lens is part of a field of sociology which studies about human society. It is a method of understanding individuals, their societies in relation to their history and the world as a whole.

Developing sociological imagination by sociologists as suggested by C. Wright Mills, means that by beholding or watching individuals, their societies and how they communicate, a sociologist should be able to investigate what influences their behavior, culture and attitude. In as much as they are interested in the experiences of individuals and how their experiences are formed by their interactions with social groups and the society they belong to, and they should do so without any biased mind.

However, because sociologists are concentrated on the experiences of people and how those experiences influenced their behaviors, they study them and to know why they act, react and relate with others in certain ways. In other words, the concept of sociological imaginations implies that who you are as an individual is influenced or shaped by your immediate surrounding such as your family, school, friends, religion or even your country.

Moreover, to use sociological imagination is to move your perspective away from yourself and look at things more broadly. For instance, here in Nigeria, in the south eastern part precisely, a sociologist studying how families are influenced by the societal practices, may notice that most families particularly families with children like to use chicken or meat to cook food, specifically rice every festive season such as Easter and Christmas, so as to make the children happy and not to feel left out in joy of the celebrations, even if they cannot afford to spend on meat. These families go the extra mile to do like other families even when it hurts them, instead of celebrating with what they can easily afford, with food and drinks within their means. A sociologist within this context, even if he has never experienced poverty, can relate in the sense that, many people tend to adjust to make themselves acceptable and seem to measure up to the standards of the society. Many people follow or copy a lot of practices without knowing why those practices are, and they do not care to ask why.

In another context, the food type and style is influenced by the society practice and what ingredient is readily available. When thinking about cooking a native soup in Igboland (south eastern part of Nigeria), ‘ofe onugbu’ or ‘bitter leaf soup’, among the very important ingredients are ‘ogiri Anambra’ and ‘okpei Nsukka’. These two ingredients are very wonderful spices that we use to cook the ofe onugbu. Now, moving to the south western part of Nigeria, predominantly Yoruba, a similar ingredient is the ‘iru’. When someone moves from the south western part to the south eastern part, the cooking style of the new society or environment would definitely rub off on the new comers cooking style. We have seen many such instances where people have made do with what they can lay their hands on to prepare their native foods, thus, being influenced by the society they find themselves. This help us to see ourselves and our culture in a new light, and as a product of society and history. Thus sociological imagination encourages sociologist not just to think about people’s lives, but also considering their societal, biological, and historical context because we are a product of our culture.

**Question Two 2**

**Describe a situation in which a choice you made was influenced by societal pressures.**

“None of us exists in an isolation tank. We stand in blood and brains and in familial relationships with our brethren. We exist within the backdrop of experiences provided by our families, teachers, friends, church, social events, newspapers, books, television, film, art, music, science, and self-exploration. The pattern of our personality hat is comprised of the many fine hairs shed by our gargantuan society.”   
― Kilroy J. Oldster.

Indeed our society mostly influences our behavior in one way or the other. Our experiences has the ability to lead us to change how we behave or how we perceive things around us.

In my first degree, I studied Communication and Language Arts. Upon graduation and after the compulsory National Youth Service year, I got a job as journalist at a media house Lagos, south west of Nigeria. I worked for two years and when I got married, I had to move to the other end of the country, Enugu, in the south eastern part, where my husband worked and resided. My husband and I could not really agree on my staying back at Lagos, so I had to quit my job with the hope of finding another job in Enugu.

For three years I was jobless. At a time my husband suggested to me to take up a teaching job, I refused because I was not trained as a teacher. I thought of start a business, but to start a business in our country without much capital was a serious issue because one would end up in frustration. One day, I went up to one of my friends that was a teacher and narrated my story of not having a job and plans to go into business. She told me her own story. She said, “Nne, I studied chemical engineering but due to how Nigeria is right now, unemployment is everywhere, instead of staying at home, my friend who is also a teacher advised me to join her in the teaching profession, and that is how I went to the college of education and purchased the form for a professional diploma in education (PDE). That was how I changed my career”. She concluded by saying “I have come to love the profession and I am satisfied”. She continued and encouraged me to try a teaching job available in one of the private primary schools her friend runs. This friend linked me with the school, after putting me through the basics of teaching. My first teaching assignment was to handle the nursery 2 class, a class of 4 years old children. For me that was love at first sight, as I have come to love teaching children in the kindergarten classes. My friend’s words, when she said, “so if I can do it, I am sure you too can. I will help you to find a school to start with”, gave me the needed push and courage to take the first step towards career change. The low employment rates and lack of jobs, even for trained journalists like me, in a society like ours pressured me into looking for another career path. It is not necessarily because the teaching profession is very lucrative and well paid, but the love and passion I have for it has allowed me to keep moving on. This was how I changed career and eventually went to purchase the application form and earned my professional diploma in education.

**Question 3**

What do you make of Karl Marx’s contributions to sociology? What perceptions of Marx have you been exposed to in your society, and how do those perceptions influence your views?

Conflict theory is a situation in a society where there is perpetual conflict because of competition due to limited resources. The theory maintained that social order is uphold by domination and power in the society rather than by coherence and consensus. According to Ashley “the tensions and conflicts arises in the society when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society and these conflicts becomes the engine for social change” (Crossman 2022) However, Karl Marx was regarded as the father of communism, and also known as a historian. He was the one that created conflict theory. He believed that every society always have two groups, the wealthy group or what is call the possessive group and the oppressed group. The two groups were always uneven because whenever one group rose to power, the other group lost and this leads to conflict and fighting because of scarcity of means of production or resources. The scarce resources is not only tangible good, it can also be power.

Moreover, Karl believed that, in a capitalist society, by and by there would be a revolution, a revolution that will lead to savage and also lead to significance imbalance in wealth between the owners of the factories and their workers there by cause or produce revolutions, poverty, discrimination and domestic violence. In other words, those with wealth and power try to hold it by all means mainly by oppressing the poor and powerless. No wonder Sinn said, “the oppressed group was constantly reminded of what they were lacking, of how they we unequal and the other group was more privileged and more resources and they were the enemy, and what will eventually happen would be that enough people will be frustrated with the dominant and oppressive group and they would rise up and take control” (Sinn, 2022)

However, conflict theory is of the opinion that there would never have a point of equilibrium because of inequality in the society, and it would never be balanced. For example, in times of social revolutions, the social equilibrium or social order is lost.

According to Marx, these inequality would lead to the collapse of capitalism and it would be replaced by communism. Communism is a system of government where by natural resources and all property is owned communally and distributed equally according to the needs of the people instead of owned by private or corporate individuals.

Karl believed that it is a more equitable system than capitalism. Let us take what is happening in Nigeria presently as an example, in south eastern part of the country, in the Igbo speaking states precisely, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has declared a weekly sit-at-home protests by every citizen in the region to protest the unlawful detention of the organization leader, who is known to protest and speak strongly against the many acts of injustice and inequality by the Nigerian state against the Igbo people of the south eastern part of the country. In Nigeria, the natural resource which is for the wellbeing of all is in the hands of the people in power. Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) through their leader and others have constantly criticized and protested the corruption, nepotism, bigotry and tribalism heavily showed by the government and those in power.

Furthermore, another example is the educational system in Nigeria. In Nigeria, both primary, secondary, and tertiary education is in the hands of the wealthy people. In other words, the wealthy has more opportunity to go to school than the children from the poor background because they cannot afford to pay for the school fees to the extent that one of the governors voiced out while addressing the public that education is for the rich. The public schools are poorly funded and this forces those who can afford it to send their children to expensive private schools. That reminds me of a song we used to sing when we are in primary school years back. It goes thus, “akwukwo na ato uto, ona arahu na mmuta, onye were ntasi obi o ga amuta akwukwo ma obulu na nne gi na nna gi enwee ego ma oburu na nne gi na nna gi enwee ego”. (Which means that going to school is sweet and fun, it is hard to learn, but if you persevere, you will succeed if your parents are rich.) Even today there are plenty of children out there hawking while their mates are in the school.

**Question 4**

Do you tend to place more value on qualitative or quantitative research? Why? Does it matter what topic is being studied?

Qualitative research is a research method that focuses on obtaining data through open ended and conversational communication. It works with non-numerical data and also deals with “what” and “why” people behave in certain manner in a society thereby getting an in-depth understanding of social worlds. Keith defined it as an ''empirical research where data are not in the form of numbers''. (Punch, 2022) The research is based on something that is experienced or observed by researcher. It could be in form of in-depth interview, videos, focus groups, case study research, record keeping, qualitative observation, ethnographic research and others. On the other hand, quantitative research focuses on collecting numerical data as well as analyzing the data. It is basically used to find patterns, averages, predictions, as well as cause-effect relationships between the variables being studied.

Furthermore, placing value on qualitative or quantitative for me depend on the type of research and research purposes. I prefer qualitative research because since gathering of information is through non-numerical data and aid in an in-depth of understand what and why people behave in a particular way. Using the method during research process help me to gain more knowledge about the content of the research since I will be the one observing through in-depth interviews, focused groups, analyzing of content sources and data collected. For instance, let us consider Onyema’s stores looking to improve in its patronage, systematic observation revealed that more men are visiting the store than the women. Using qualitative method of research such as conducting an in-depth interview of potential customers will help me to understand their feelings. However, interviewing female customers, visiting the nearby stores and supermarkets, and selecting them through random sampling will do the magic. It could be that the store does not have enough items for women, that there were more male product than women products or it could be that the customer attendants is only female and their attitudes toward female customers are not welcoming to them. Interacting with the female customers personally will aid in understanding why they are not visiting Onyema’s store. However, the topic of the study does not matter, it depends on what the researcher is looking for or the information he is trying to find out.

**Question 5**

Which theory do you think better explains how societies operate—structural functionalism or conflict theory? Why?

In sociology, many perspectives are used to understand human society. Structural functionalism and Conflict theory are among the perspectives. In conflict theory, society is in perpetual conflict because of competition due to limited resources while structural functionalism sees society as a structure that consists of different parts to meet the biological and social needs of individuals who make up that society. So as Karl Marx created conflict theory, Herbert Spencer was the one who created structural functionalism. According to him, different parts of the body cannot function well without other parts of the body likewise, all parts of the society such as social institutions like the economy, political systems, healthcare, family, education, media, political institutions, and religion are necessary to make the society function. It is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. In other words, each institution has a particular function that contributes to the society or else the system becomes dysfunctional, this will not only affects that institution but also the whole social system as well. I believe this is why Spencer said that societies progress just as the bodies of humans and animals progress.

Moreover, Emile Durkheim, also one of the founders of sociology agreed with Spenser by adding that in the society, people performed many duties and their potential to carry out their duties depends on others being able to carry theirs. In other words, each part of the society influences the other there by working hand in hand for the wellbeing of the society.

Furthermore, despite the fact that structural functionalism is very impactful because it looks at every aspect of society, how it functions, and how that helps society function and it helps to combine all aspects of society to meet the needs of the individuals in the society. I still believe that, the theory that better explains how societies operate now is conflict theory. Our society operates according to conflict theory rather than structural functionalism theory. Although structural functionalism best described how the society should operate for the betterment of the people but the reverse is the case in our society today. For example, in the present Nigeria, corruption, bigotry, self-centeredness are the order of the day. The wealthy and those in power dictates what happens thereby oppressing the poor and powerless. What we are experiencing in Nigeria today is unequal social system related to race, tribe and class. The wealthy and the politicians, and the people that hold the power are oppressing the powerless in the society. People are struggling to protect their rights from law makers and the politicians. The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. They forget that society is possible due to consensus among people. There is so much inequality and diversity between the tribes and that there is no way that system could drive society to meaningful progress and growth.

**Question 6**

Do you think the way people behave in social interactions is more like the behavior of animals or more like actors playing a role in a theatrical production? Why?

No human being can live all alone in this world we must relate to people every day of our lives, be it our family members, our neighbors, friends, or our colleagues. By doing so we are interacting with them and socialization is achieved. *John Donne said, “No man is an island entire of itself*. Social interaction is the fundamental feature of social life and is what keeps any society moving. In other words, effective social interaction is necessary in any society to function properly. We learn how to interact from our socialization, for example, we learn how to behave when talking to our elders, how to talk when we are in classroom even in our homes and we also learn our societies roles. Our societal role is the behaviors expected of people in a certain status.

Nevertheless, if we are in a certain place, we are expected to behave in way that suits the place we are and the societal roles makes our interaction with other people possible. Social interaction based on roles is usually very automatic and we often perform our roles without thinking about them and that is why social interaction is possible. If we always had to think about our roles before we act them, social interaction would be reduced, dull, and it would be full of error. For instance, if actors in a play always had to read the script before performing their lines, as they understudy sometimes do, the play would be slow and hard.

## Furthermore, since social interaction is what keeps society moving, I think that the way people behave in social interactions is more like actors playing a role in a theatrical production. From a sociological point view, much of our social interaction can be understood by likening it to a performance in a play. Shakespeare said it best when he wrote,

“All the world’s a stage,   
And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and their entrances,   
And one man in his time plays many parts.” (As You Like It, Act II, Scene 7).

Each society is unique with its culture. Each individual has many parts or roles to play, and many of these roles states how we should interact in any place we found ourselves. The culture of society similar to the script of a play. Just as actors in a play learn what lines to say, where to stand on the stage, how to position their bodies, and so many other things, so do we learn as members of society the roles that specify how we should interact. This can relate to Erving Goffman (1959) theory of dramaturgical approach. Goffman believed that we can understand social interaction as if it were a theatrical performance. People who interact are actors on a stage, the things they say and do are similar to the parts actors play, and any people who observe their interaction are equivalent to the audience at a play. Jonathan et al sum it up by stating that “Individuals are, in essence, dramatic actors on a stage playing parts dictated by culture, and like all theater, they are given some dramatic license in how they play roles, as long as they do not deviate too far from the emotional script provided by culture” (Book, 2022).

Goffman further emphasized that, the presentation of self-guides social interaction just as it guides behavior in a play. In other words, whenever we interact with people, we tend to behave in a specific manner depending on the particular person and the place the interaction is going on. In a theater performance, actors act according to what was written in the script and also tried their possible means to convey the impression of their characters according to what the play writer had in mind when writing the play and according to what the director had in mind when the play is presented. Erving, calls it impression management. Therefore, social interaction involves impression management.

In addition, impression management also guides our social interaction in everyday life. When people interact, they attempts to send a positive impression of themselves the people they are interacting with. We normally try our best consciously or unconsciously, to manage the impressions we send to others thereby highlighting positive aspects of our lives and hiding the negative aspects. Let us take students behavior in a classroom as an example, how a student behaves when he or she is with her teacher is different from how he or she behaves when they are at home or when he is with his friends, also our behavior in a job interview is dramatically different from our behavior at church. How we dress is also a form of impression management, we are the same person regardless of what clothes you wear. Using our earlier example of our behavior in a job interview and church, the way we dress while going for an interview is different from the way we dress while going to church. If you dress for a job interview as you would dress for a church, the person interviewing you would get an impression you did not intend to send and it will not be funny, because you might end up not getting the job just because of the way you dressed.

**Question 7**

How do you think taking a sociology course might affect your social interactions?

Since Sociology is the study of society, social relations, culture, and how human behavior is influenced by their society. Studying sociology is beneficial to me and it will affect my social interaction and also interaction of other people for the following reasons:

First, studying sociology helps us to understand ourselves and each other, some courses in sociology examine how the social world influences our behavior, the way we think, feel and act. Since there are different kinds of people in the world with different kinds of behavior and people do not necessary think and behave the same way as others do. Studying sociology teaches people to think and ask reasonable questions about people’s behavior. This increases their willingness and capacity to not see people’s behavior from their own perspective rather from people’s perspectives thereby prepare them to interact and even live and work in various part of the world. Let us take an online program as an example, Instead of students from different parts of world meeting up on campus for their studies, they study online, write their assignments and examinations online and also make use of library from the comfort of their homes. Therefore, sociology aids people from different parts of the world to connect and interact socially.

Secondly, it improves people’s lives and prepares them for careers in different parts of the word. People with sociological training are equipped with informed decisions about social issues and effective steps to deal with those issues.

Thirdly, studying sociology helps us to understand ourselves better since our society influences our behavior, it enables us to know how our societies work and how we play our daily part in that**. Having knowledge of sociology also enhances our ability to be an active and informed citizen, and be able to influence societal choices and policies** in apositive way. For instance, if a person that has knowledge of sociology is a member policy making body that will affect the educational system, he or she will contribute efficient and effective way of designing a curriculum that would be beneficial to all stages of education such as early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and tertiary education.

Fourthly, studying sociology helps in decision-making. Since sociologists uses scientific method of research to gather information, interpret and analyzing the data collected, they can gather systematic information about an important social issues such as inequality in the society, and provide information about what is going on and why is happening, they go ahead to present alternatives solutions for social policies and social services for the betterment of everybody in the society.

Fifthly, Studying sociology also helps us to understand that at times personal issues can also become public issues in the sense that some of the problems people face are often rooted in the structure of the society. The truth is that, individual in the society and the society itself are inseparable. Let us take unemployment as an example, when an individual is unemployed, some people might starts blaming the person. Some will go as far as saying that the person is lazy, they lacked good work habit or that he or she has not search enough to get a job. But honestly, society that does not consider the wellbeing of their people cannot function well and any society that does not also have job creation polices or does not support small business will always have unemployment issues. For example, in Nigeria, there is inequality because the natural resources that are meant to serve the whole society is in the hands of the people in power and unemployment is the order of the day. If only a few people were unemployed, their unemployment could be that they were lazy or lack good work habit but the reverse is the case. According to a report by a credit rating agency, Agusto &co, in a country of 200 million people, “35 percent of the population is unemployed and increased to 40 percent during COVID-19 pandemic”. (Endurance, 2022). In such society there must be chaos, anarchy and doom. Thus problem of one person in a society can also become public issues and this can lead to a powerful positive social change when they bind together to challenge the problem.

Finally, studying Sociology also teach people ways to acknowledge how they fits into the world and how others perceive them. This will aid them to look at themselves and society from a sociological perspective thereby enabling them to see how to connect to different groups of people based on the ways they classify themselves and how the society classify them. However, every society has a social ladder on which individuals fits in according to their socio-economic positions. Some people belongs to upper class or middle class while some belongs to lower class. In some societies, there is social mobility for all. In other words, people can move from one social stratification to another while in some societies, people cannot. For instance, some children whose parents are wealthy do not go to the same school with the children whose parents are poor.

## **Question 8**

## What sort of career are you interested in? How could studying sociology help you in this career?

As a teacher, studying sociology is very essential for me since sociology studies society, social relations, culture, and how human behavior is influenced by the society.

However, having knowledge of sociology contributes to the knowledge and understanding of differences in human interaction which could be used in decision making. In other words, it will enable me to understand that my pupils or students have individual differences and it will also help me to know how to fellow up each and every one of them. For instance, in a class of 20 pupils, some of them may be brighter than others. Those ones that are not bright might be because they are not attentive in the class or that they have one problem or the other. In this case because I have knowledge of sociology, I could try to find out the reason the child is under performing and once the problem is discovered, I will create a strategy to solve his or her problem. Using socio-metric technique to study the individual differences and social relationships among pupils will go a long way.

Furthermore, it will help to know how to interact with the pupils for effective communication and feedback from them. In other words, since I deal a lot with children, knowledge of sociology will help to construct my lesson plan and select which method of teaching to use for effective understanding of the learning content.

In addition, it provides the broad knowledge of the society and also helps to strengthen the relationship between school and society as a whole. This means that having known how a particular society operates, it will aid me to cope with any society I find myself and also enables me to know how best to relate to the pupils, school authorities and other teachers as well.

Knowledge of sociology helps to promotes objectivity. As we already know, sociology adopts scientific method of investigation and it is positive and objective. Going by this, it will help me as a teacher to be objective in issues relating to the students particularly their data or result. The data should be heterogeneity. In other words data or their result should be presented as they are and not as they ought to be. For example, giving them assignment on composition about their town, it is supposed to show some differences based on their ethnics group or tribes.

Knowledge of Sociology also aid in formulation of educational polices. As a teacher I can be a member of task force who formulates educational polices in Nigerian senate thereby contributing immensely to the designing of curriculum and provide positive polices that will help in the improvement of classroom management.

**Conclusion.**

Since sociology is concerned with the study of human social behavior and the influence of society upon this behavior, having the knowledge of sociology is crucial for all, especially for sociology majors and anybody that wants to understand how the society and the environment influences the way people act and behave. Sociology helps us to understand the way we interact with one another no matter where we are. Personal problems will be public problems, if the society ignores the problems or afflictions of individuals in the society. In conflict situation, it helps when people come together and fight for their rights. Knowledge of sociology and its influence in us helps us to appreciate other people in terms of their culture, backgrounds and values. It helps us to value other cultures and respect other cultures. Its theories help in gathering data systematically, since sociologists use such data to study and understand the biological and social needs of individuals that make up societies.

That social conflict leads to change in the society is still one of the major theories used in understanding the modern society as the modern society continues to grow and change in various ways, with many factors both internal and external contributing to these changes. These factors may include new ways of life as introduced from other parts of the world and from other societies, cultures and regions, new ideas and so on. Social conflicts that lead to changes are not necessarily through arms conflicts but mostly engagement through discussions and sharing of thoughts, to effect and bring about the desired changes and improvement in the society, in order to solve both individual problems and societal problems.

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