

## UNIT ONE

### THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Sociologists define the concept, "**society**" as individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same spatial or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Society is a group of interacting individuals who share the same territory and participate in a common culture. As we have already seen, "**interaction**" is a process by which communicating individuals influence each other's thoughts and activities. All of this interaction must be ordered or organized some way; according to some framework— We refer to this frame work as **social structure**.

Social structure is the organization of social positions and the distribution of people in them. Our text defines social structure as "the way in which a society is organized into predictable relationships". It's important to realize that we are not concerned with personalities but **positions**; e.g., faculty member; short stop; half-back; President of the U.S., etc. (This is not as easy as it seems— Think of the President. What thoughts fill your mind? Now think of the president who served before Clinton. What kinds of thoughts enter your mind? It is difficult to separate the man from the position). \*

**Social structure** refers to the pattern of social relationships in a society. Such structure regulates the interactions among members of the society, providing guidelines within the cultural norms for achieving the goals defined by cultural values. Generally, social structure maintains societal stability. However, when the social structure and the societal values become incompatible, the structure must embrace social change to allow the society to survive and continue healthy development. While a variety of sociological approaches have sought to describe the development and maintenance of social structure, understanding the

relationship between structure and change is necessary for the development of a peaceful world society

**Social structure** is the distinctive, stable system of social relations that exists in any human society. It is not concerned with people as individuals, in groups, or in the organizations forming the society, nor the ultimate goal of their relationships. Rather, social structure deals with the organization of their relationships: how they are arranged into patterns. Thus, the concept of social structure assumes that human social relationships are not arbitrary or coincidental, but rather they follow certain patterns that can be identified.

### **Development of Social Structure**

There is no agreement on how different types of social structure develop. Generally, social structures form hierarchies or networks. The differences between these types of social structure are related to the notion of "social stratification," i.e. whether society is separated into different strata or levels, according to social distinctions such as race, class, and gender. The social treatment of persons within the social structure is then related to their placement within the various social strata.

In the hierarchical structures, stratification is vertical, with higher levels valued more than lower ones. There are those (mostly American) who claim that hierarchical social structures develop naturally. They suggest that such structures may be caused by larger system needs, such as the need for labor, management, professional, and military classes, or by conflicts among groups, such as competition among political parties or among different social classes. Others, (mainly in Europe ) hold that this structuring is not the result of natural processes, but that it is socially constructed. It may have been created by those in power seeking to retain their power, or by economic systems that place emphasis upon monopoly and competition or cooperation and sharing.

The second type of structure is that of a network: people are connected, but not in pyramids. There is no "alpha male" at the top of the heap; there is not even any

concept of higher and lower. In contrast to the "mechanical" solidarity of hierarchical social structure, noted for generally repressive and punitive legal systems, Emile Durkheim introduced the term "organic" solidarity to describe societies based on the network model, where law is generally restitute. This type of structure is likened to the anatomy of a living body, where all social institutions are interdependent and these connections are what naturally impose constraints and goals on each other.

In understanding social structures and social changes, there appeared several schools of thought, two main examples being **Structuralism**, and **Functionalism**. **Structuralism** was introduced into sociology by Claude Levi-Strauss originally from the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure. This view favors deterministic structural forms (that define forces) over the ability of individual people to act. Just as languages are structured by rules governing their elements that native speakers follow almost unconsciously, so societies are seen as being structured according to underlying rules. Thus, it might be argued that the structural view comes close to "mathematization" of a given object.

Each given culture forms the world according to different structures of meaning. Structures studied by Strauss and others include patterns of kinship, myths, religion, and various cultural customs related to everyday life. Just as linguistic structuralism claimed that "deep structures" exist in the grammars of all languages, Strauss claimed that social structures originate from the deep structures of the human mind and thus reflect universals in human thinking.

## **Functionalism**

**Functionalism** is based on Emile Durkheim's work, and holds that every social and cultural phenomenon fulfills a certain function. This approach was developed in relation to social structure by Radcliffe-Brown and Talcott Parsons. Radcliffe-Brown regarded the system of human interactions as central in a functionalist approach to society. Society is seen as a system of organized parts or components of the whole, each dependent on the others and integrated into the

whole. These parts are individual persons who participate in social life, occupying a certain status within the system. The individual is in turn controlled by norms or patterns. In some primitive societies it is the function of folklore to maintain these norms and patterns; in others, education, religious rituals, or other traditional customs fulfill this role. Since he explained cultural phenomena through the functioning of social structure, Radcliffe-Brown's mode of thought became known as "structural-functionalism."

Talcott Parsons developed a structural functionalism theory in which he claimed that humans were "acting" in a non-voluntary way. According to his view, **society** molds people, causing them think that there are certain acceptable ways to behave and live. Shared values and norms, the institution of the family, and the generally agreed upon means for accomplishing ends were all viewed by Parsons as patterns of social interaction that contribute to the relatively smooth functioning of society. Such patterns allow the operation of society as a system of interrelated parts where a change in any one part affects all the others. Talcott Parsons' main goal was to convincingly describe logical types of social relations that included **all** groups of society, not just the rich or the poor. Thus, his theory includes a **cross-section** of society in all its aspects.

### **Other approaches**

Karl Marx developed a view of social structure that underlay his materialistic view of history, namely that European society had progressed through a series of stages or modes of production from a primitive communal society, to slave society, to feudalism, to capitalism, which he predicted would then move on to socialism. Each mode of production had its own economic system which gave rise to a system of class stratification based around ownership of the means of production. According to Marx, society moves to the next stage when the dominant social class is displaced by a new emerging class, resulting in a new social structure. Marx's approach includes several core assumptions that are not specific to **any** period of history:

- Human beings are social creatures who live in complex societies.



- Human society consists of human beings collectively working to achieve the necessities of life.
- Human society develops a complex division of labor.
- Over time, unlike ants or bees, human beings develop better methods of harnessing nature through the development of science and technology.
- Human beings have the ability to reflect on their society and interaction with nature, but their thinking and organization are always dependent on the state of development of their society and of the power structures in their society.

The clearest formulation of Marx's "Materialist Conception of History" was in the 1859 Preface to his book *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

While Marx's view was met with significant criticism, his distinction between the material structure of society, namely relationships among people in their activities in relation to the physical world, and the non-material "superstructure," consisting of norms, knowledge, and meaning of human life, has remained influential. Although the relationship between them, namely whether superstructure derives from material structure, as Marx claimed, or whether the non-material aspects of human life are causal and material structures are resultant, has been debated.

A number of anthropologists, such as Max Gluckman and Victor Turner, argued that society should not be conceived of as rigid structures, or static functions, but rather as a pattern of social processes. In this processual view, human society is

seen as organized around sets of rituals or symbolic activities that carry the meaning (usually religious and values of the society, and which guide the behavior of its members particularly through transitions in their lives). Building on Arnold van Gennep's model of rites of passage, Turner (1975) elaborated on the concept of "liminality," the state of being between phases, in the process of entering a new stage (on the threshold). Applying this concept not just to the individuals within the society but to societies as a whole results in a view of social structure as providing guidelines on how social change should be effected in the society as well as the interactions among its members.

Finally, the "transactional" view, developed from the idea that interdependence among people forms the basis of society (Keohane & Nye 2000), allows a different approach, particularly to the analysis of micro-structures in society. From this viewpoint, each social institution develops its structure through the complex interactions among those involved, as they work towards a common goal. No individual behaves in isolation, nor is any relationship between individuals seen in isolation; all are part of one interconnecting system that exists inseparably from the activities of the members. Thus, social structure is not separable from the behavior and relationships of the members of the society.

### **Elements of Social Structure**

In order to discuss the basic division and types of social structures, the "unit" of social structure should be established first. Murdoch (Goldsmith 1978) has shown that the family is universal among stable societies and thus should be regarded as the "unit" of social structure. Culture, as the product of the interactions in society, both material (between people and physical objects) and non-material (in relation to meanings, beliefs, language, values, ideas, expectations, etc.) is shared, learned, and intergenerational. It also forms the foundation of social structure.

Society is grouped into structures with different functions, meanings, or purposes. In a broader sense is the "social system," which can be viewed as a social structure composed of the economic system, legal system, political system, and

cultural system (some sort of shared reality: language, norms, values, etc.). Social structure, however, is much more than that. It also includes education, family, religion, and social services such as health care. Language is the basic channel for communicating information and instruction in a society. There are cultural norms affecting marriage, child bearing, and child rearing. Political systems affect not only the individual political environment but also certain legal systems, regulation of violence (by a police force), property laws, trade rules, health care, and so forth. Societies also generally develop an agreed upon division of labor. These different elements are interrelated, as can be seen from the following example: economic factors have been responsible for shifts in popular behavior, some of them cutting across class lines. As a result of increasing production, prosperity increased, and the general trend in the standard of living for most groups was upward, allowing ordinary people to improve their diet, housing, and increase leisure time. Workers pressed for a workday of 12 hours, then ten, and, in the early twentieth century, a few groups began to demand an even shorter period. Scattered vacation days were also introduced, and the "English weekend," which allowed time off on Saturday afternoons as well as Sundays, spread widely. Social structure is the institutional framework that makes for order in repetitive, rhythmic (whether daily, weekly, or yearly) interactions among people. The key to the social structure of a society lies in understanding its social institutions and their intertwining combinations. Social institutions provide the order necessary to make social structure possible.

## **Elements of Social Structure**

**1. Statuses:** In simple language, we use the term "status" to mean prestige. However, status may be said to mean any position in the social structure either high or low that determines where a person fits into the society and how he/she is expected to relate to other people. For example, we can talk about statuses of mother, president, pastor, male etc. We believe you can add more examples. statuses. These are the achieved status and the ascribed. Ascribed and achieved. An ascribed status is one that is assigned to a person at birth or at a different stage in the life cycle. For example, being born into a royal

family, being a male or female. An achieved status is a position a person attains largely through personal effort. For instance, teacher, doctor, lawyer, politician etc. We can as well talk about master status. A master status is a key or core status that carries primary weight in a person's interactions and relationships with other. In other words, this occurs when a person's statuses largely determine his or her social identity. This may be the occupation that takes up most of the person's time and uses up most of his or her energy. For adult, occupation is usually the most significant master status. For children, age and sex are master statuses. It must be noted, however, that a master status may also be an ascribed status such as ugly or beautiful.

2. Values: At the top level of the structure are the societal values. These are the most general or abstract, normative conceptions of what the ideal society itself would be like. Individuals or groups are found to be emotionally committed to values. These values help to integrate personality or a system of interaction. Values are things we cherish so much in society. In other words, they are the things we hold in high esteem. Examples of values include honesty, transparency, accountability, patience, truthfulness, hard work, respect for others, punctuality and loyalty. It is important to note that values are context specific and cultural – bound. This means that values differ from one society to the other and what could be described as a value in one context could be distained in a different context. For instance, same sex marriage is highly esteemed. In America but frowned upon in Ghana. In addition, a taxi driver made a hot chase of some suspected armed robbers, knocked them down and broke the legs of the suspected armed robbers. As a result of this act, he was promised a house by the resident of Ghana and a new car by the company where the victim of the robbery works. This act in this context was seen as a value. However, there are other people who have accidentally hit people on the road with their cars and have been arrested and prosecuted.

3. Another important element in a social structure worthy of note is role. Role, in sociology, are behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a given social position or status. A role is a comprehensive pattern of behaviors that is socially recognized, providing a means of identifying and placing an individual in a society. It also serves as a strategy for coping with recurrent situations and dealing with the roles of others (e.g., parent–child roles). Every status carries with it a set of culturally defined rights and duties, this is what is termed a role. These expectations define the behavior people view as appropriate and inappropriate for the occupant of a status (Zanden, 1990). Role are the



behavior patterns, personality traits, obligations and privileges expected of an occupant of a status. In other words, a role may be viewed as any relatively standardized social position, involving specific rights and obligations which an individual is expected or encouraged to perform, example, parental role. Quite simply, the difference between a status and a role is that we occupy a status and play a role. Sociologists have identified different types of roles. Some of them have been explained below. Role performance is the actual behavior of the person who occupies a status. It is observed that in real life situation a gap often exists between what people should do and what they actually do. Status occupants also vary in how they perform their roles. Role set. Role set describes a situation in which a single status encompasses multiple roles attached to it. For example, the status of a pastor makes him a teacher, a preacher, a counselor, an administrator etc. Give some other examples. We can have Role conflict. Role conflict occurs in a situation in which the fulfilment of one role automatically results in the violation of another. In other words, when individuals are confronted with expectations stemming from their simultaneous occupancy of two or more statuses. For example, a situation in which a policeman has to investigate a crime case involving his guilty father-in-law. Should he investigate the case on merit and help the prosecution to jail the in-law and incur the displeasure of his wife or should he overlook the substance and negative consequences of his in-law's predicaments? Concretely, these are the relevant performances of their individual occupants. Functionally, they are contributions to collective goal attainment. Role occupants are expected to fulfill their obligations to other people (who are also role occupants). For example, in a family, the husband has obligations towards his wife. In fact, the elements of social structure are roles. Also, we have role distance. By role distance we mean the subjective detachment displayed by a social actor while playing a role. For example, a company's cleaner who indicates to a visitor that he/she is not only a cleaner but does something else of a higher social status. Role strain also occurs when individuals find the expectations of a single role incompatible, so that they have difficulty performing the role (Zanden, 1990). It can be said also that role strain occurs when people cannot meet the demands of their roles. In other words, there are people who occupy certain statuses but fail to satisfy the demands in terms of the role they should perform.

4. Groups constitute a vital component of social structure. "No man is an island unto himself" and "Man is a gregarious animal" are two intellectually distinct sayings that sum up the significance of groups and group formations in a discussion of the social structure



of Ghana. This is particularly so viewed against the fact that the Ghanaian society itself is an envelope of smaller groups. A group may be said to mean two or more people who share a feeling of unity and who are bound together in relatively stable patterns of social interaction. A group can also be explained as any number of people with similar norms, values and expectations who regularly and consciously interact. It is important to note certain facts from the definition of group. These characteristics are that in a group people share a sense of belonging, there is a distinct pattern of social interaction which is relatively stable, there are leaders and followers in a group based on statuses and roles played by individuals and lastly, the behavior of members in a group is guided by set norms and values. Sociologists have identified two types of groups namely; primary and secondary groups. Charles Horton Cooley (1902) coined the term primary group to refer to a small group characterized by intimate, face-to-face association and co-operation. e.g., Family.

- i. Primary groups play a pivotal role both in the socialization process and in the development of roles and statuses (Schaefer and Lamm, 1995). Primary groups are generally characterized by small in size, intimate, face-to-face association, relatively long period of interaction, some emotional depth in relationship, thrives on co-operation and friendship.
- ii. Secondary group on the other hand refers to a type of group where there is little social intimacy or mutual understanding. For example, Ghana National Supporters Union which roots for the national soccer team, The Black stars. It is characterized by large size, short duration and temporary, little social intimacy or mutual understanding and relationships are generally superficial. Hello learner, it is important to note that the distinct between primary group and secondary group is not always clear-cut because primary groups or fraternities become so large and impersonal that they no longer function as primary groups. E.g., The family may become so large that they no longer function as primary group. In-group and out-group concepts cannot be left untouched. An in-group can be viewed as any group to which people feel they belong. It comprises everyone who is regarded as "we" or "us". E.g. Family. At the international level, Ghana can be seen as an in-group. An out-group on the other hand is a group to which people feel they do not belong. The claims of Christians and Muslims epitomize the in-group and out-group concepts.

iii. Another equally important type of group is the reference group. This refers to any group that individuals use to as standard for evaluating themselves and their behavior. Reference groups have two basic purposes. They serve as a normative function by setting and enforcing standards of conduct and belief. Comparison function by serving as a standard against which people can measure themselves and others. For example. Lawyers call themselves "learned friends".

5. Another element in social structure to be discussed is **social networks**. Social networks consist of people linked by various social ties. Clusters, or factions that form within large groups, are called cliques. Cliques, family, friends and acquaintances can all be bases for social networks. Interaction takes place within social networks that connect people to the larger society. A study was conducted by Stanley Milgram to show how small our social world really is; his study led to the phrase "six degrees of separation", meaning that on the average, everyone in the United States is separated by just six individuals. One important reason is that it so difficult to overcome social inequality is because our social networks.

6. **Groups and Institution:** Social structure can be viewed in terms of inter relationship of the component parts. Social structure includes social groups and institution. These are called the major groups and institutions. Four of these the family, economic institution, political institutions and religious institution Centre upon getting food and other items or wealth, procreation, worship and ruling. The community, the total organized life of a locality, is the most inclusive spontaneous groups in the social structure. There are also the enduring phenomena of social classes, the ethnic or racial in group and the temporary grouping of crowd. These are more or less spontaneous configurations responsive to various interests that develop within the community.

7. **Organization:** In the larger societies of modern time, human beings deliberately establish certain organizations for the pursuit of their specific ends or purposes. These organizations, very often called associations, are group manifestations of life and common interests. The associations constitute the most conspicuous part of the social structure and they gain in coherence,

definite number and efficacy as the conditions of the society group more complex.

8. **Norms:** Sub-groups and roles and governed by social norms. Social norms are of two types: (i) obligatory or relational and (ii) permissive or regulative. Some norms specify positive obligations. But they are not commonly applied to all the roles and sub-groups. For example, the positive obligations of a family are not the same as those of business firm. Some other norms specify the limit of permissible action. A role occupant of a sub-group in this case 'must' do certain things, 'may' do certain things and others. They are called regulative norms. They do not differentiate between roles and subgroups. For example, in our society, regardless of one's role, one must not seek to influence others by threat of violence or by violence itself. The components of social structure are human beings, the structure being an arrangement of persons. In relationship institutionally defined are regulated.

The **basic components** of social structure are: Statuses; Roles; Groups; and Institutions, Norms, Networking. The six basic social institutions are:

1. **FAMILY**— caring for the young (extensive discussion is on it in unit 2)
2. **EDUCATION**— transmitting cultural knowledge from one generation to the next
3. **RELIGION**— reaffirming the values that bind people together
4. **POLITICS**— governing people, maintaining order
5. **ECONOMY**— providing food, shelter, and necessary services
6. **RECREATION**—entertainment/ recreation/ relaxation

### **The Components of Social Structure— Some Terms:**

age, sex, race, occupation, nationality, son, daughter, mother, father, etc.

**master status**: This is the basic one in giving you a sense of who you are. Think of the question, "Who and what are you, what do you do?" (Usually its a job).

**ascribed status**: This one has been assigned or given to us and we can't change it easily— race, sex, age, etc.

**achieved status**: It is earned by us; Doctor, Lawyer, college graduate, etc.).

**social class**: Roughly a social class consists of people who occupy the same status in society. (Marx – depends on relationship to the means of production (job); Weber– status group, people who share similar interests, attitudes, likes, and dislikes). (College professors can have different life-styles; one goes to bars and basket ball games while the other goes to fancy restaurants and classical music concerts). According to Weber garbage collector and factory owner can both belong to the same status group if they both like Mozart and have similar likes and dislikes.

**roles**: Roles are socially prescribed ways of acting in a particular status. They involve certain behavior patterns, obligations and privileges. We play a different role for each of the different statuses we occupy. Usually one status (say President of the U.S.) has many different roles assigned to it. (Run country, veto bills, State of the Union Address, commander of armed forces, submit budget to Congress, greet foreign dignitaries, etc). We call this a **role set**.

**role set**: Each status usually has several roles attached to it– Doctor as medical professional; Doctor as nurse supervisor; Doctor as instructor to other Doctors; Doctor as medical researcher; Doctor as hospital administrator; Doctor as surgeon.

**role model**: A person who occupies a status and plays the roles associated with that status in the way that we would like to play them. (Sort of an ideal). Be able to hit the ball like Ted Williams or Mickey Mantle.

**role expectations**: social norms that define how a role should be played. (What is an English Professor supposed to teach? How are children expected to behave in front of company?)

**role performance**: actual role behavior— how well we actually play the roles we have.

**role strain**: difficulties that result from the differing demands and expectations associated with the same social position (status). The Captain

of a Navy ship has many roles. One of them is to maintain high morale among the officers and crew. Another is to accomplish the assigned mission or task. Often these two are incompatible, and it's hard to meet role expectations.

**role conflict**: Difficulties that occur when incompatible expectations arise from two or more social positions (statuses) held by the same individual. For example; a priest hearing confession— a man comes in and confesses to killing the President of the U.S. Here, two different roles, associated with two different statuses— (priest's confidentiality vs his role as a responsible citizen to report a crime to the police) have two roles which are in conflict. How many people have seen the movie Sergeant York? Gary Cooper has serious doubts about joining the Army. In fact, he won't do it until those doubts are settled. (Man of God vs. soldier expected to kill). He will not assume that second status (soldier) until he resolves the dilemma. He was trying to avoid role conflict by not assuming the position (status) of soldier. How does he resolve this problem? He decides that a man of God can, and must, under certain circumstances, kill. In other words the roles do not necessarily conflict. Once he resolves this dilemma he readily accepts the second status which is that of soldier.

**groups**: A group is a number of people (three or more) who interact together in an orderly way on the basis of shared expectations about each other's behavior. Note the distinction between group and category. The latter are people who share the same characteristic— red hair, for example. Note that a group is more than a simple aggregate— people who happen to be at the same place at the same time.

**primary group**: relatively small number of people who interact over a relatively long period of time on an intimate, face-to-face basis. These groups are the building blocks of social structure families, roommates, husband and wife, peer group, small town, or neighborhood.



**secondary group**: relatively large number of people who interact on a temporary, anonymous, and impersonal basis. Formal organizations like Ford Motor Company, IBM, DuPont; they exist to serve a purpose.

**Associations and Institutions**: What's the difference between the terms "association" and "institution?" An institution is a stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, roles, and groups that develops around a basic social need. Simply stated--an organized procedure--an established way of pursuing some basic social need. On the other hand an association is any organized group, large or small that; has structure; has continuity; continues beyond the individuals that start it; has an identity (name)

**Institution:**

education

family

religion

government

**Association:**

VCU

Kennedy

Greek Orthodox Church

Richmond City Council

**What are some of the characteristics of institutions?** They are inherently conservative. We say that patterns of behavior become institutionalized. By this we mean that they become fixed, rigid, and traditional. It's difficult to change and innovate. Education; stop the experimenting--- get back to the basics. Religion; bring prayer back into the schools. Recreation; until recently, refusing to change the criteria for amateur status in the Olympics, (Why not let the pro's participate? What took them so long to allow women to run the marathon?) Economy; In the U.S. we're afraid of socialized medicine when it would provide better care for the poor. Government; campaigning takes more and more time from the presidency, yet people resist implementing 1 six-year term. Institutions are closely linked within the social structure. Religion, politics, recreation, economy, family, education all are compatible and interrelated within a given society. If not, the society would disintegrate. (Witness the tremendous strain Catholicism places upon the government in communist

Poland. Because institutions are linked together when one changes, the others tend to experience "adjusting changes."

**Functions of institutions:** There are two kinds (from Robert Merton): manifest and latent. Manifest functions are those that are intended. Latent functions are hidden and unintended. What is the manifest function of education, for example? – Education is intended to provide training which enables individuals to function in society. –It is intended to teach the youth. What is a latent function of education? It gets the kids out of the home and frees up mothers from babysitting so they can get into the labor force.

Among the several elements of social and cultural structures, two are of great importance:

- The first consists of culturally defined goals, purposes, and interests, held out as legitimate objectives for all members of the society. They are simply the things "worth striving for." Although some of these cultural goals may be directly related to human biological needs, they are not necessarily determined by them.
- The second element of the cultural structure defines, regulates, and controls the acceptable ways of reaching these goals. Every social group invariably matches its cultural objectives with regulations, rooted in the norms and values, regarding allowable procedures for moving toward these objectives.

Generally, no society lacks norms governing conduct. However, societies do differ in the degree to which acceptable behavior, social mores, and institutional controls are effectively integrated with the goals in the hierarchy of cultural values. The social structure remains intact as long as members of the society are able to achieve their goals within the framework of acceptable ways of reaching them. When cultural values and social structure become incompatible, changes in the social structure become inevitable.

## **Social Structure and Social Change**

Problems arise when the regulatory norms of the society come into conflict with procedures which, from the standpoint of individuals in the society, would be most efficient in securing the desired values. The exercise of force, fraud, or power may be ruled out of the institutional area of permitted conduct yet would appear to be efficient methods of obtaining wealth, often a symbol of success. Thus, the culture and the social structure may operate at cross-purposes.

Under stable conditions, societal regulations and goals are balanced in such a way that individuals are able to find socially acceptable methods of realizing social value. Thus, within a competitive society, as long as the sentiments supporting this competitive system are distributed throughout the entire range of activities and are not confined to the final result of success, the choice of means will remain largely within the realm of social control. When, however, the cultural emphasis shifts from the satisfaction deriving from competition itself to almost exclusive concern with the outcome, the resultant stress makes for the breakdown of the regulatory structure, the society becomes unstable and what Emile Durkheim called "anomie" (or normlessness) develops.

In the view of structural functionalists: "without the normative regulation of means, society would be afflicted by chaos, anomie, and apathy ... social disorder" (Merton 1957). There is another way to deal with the danger of social disorders, however: structural change. For the survival of any society, social structural changes are crucial in preventing protracted conflict.

John Burton (1996) wrote of conflict "prevention" by removing its underlying causes and creating conditions under which it need not occur. However, addressing injustice before it provokes conflict often requires far-reaching changes in the existing structures and institutions of society. For example, if it were discovered that a major societal problem, such as drug abuse or teenage pregnancy, could be prevented by the redistribution of resources and the provision of more rewarding jobs, social changes could be effected which would ultimately lead to more stable social structure. If such social structural changes were made,

this might ensure that all members of society had sufficient opportunities for individual development and social bonding, and thus alleviate the structural conditions that contribute to these social problems. Reform of government institutions also has potential to stabilize social structure through societal change. Societies strive to develop a "workable political system in which the multiple social groups can participate to their satisfaction" (Maiese 2000). This sort of state reform has the potential to mitigate and heal the effects of violent intrastate conflict, as well as prevent future conflict.

History provides many examples of political and social movements that aimed to radically change existing political and socioeconomic structures. The American New Deal, for example, used nonviolent methods to alter the balance of economic power between dominant and subordinate classes. The New Deal's labor legislation compelled large interstate corporations to recognize and bargain with labor unions, and also banned unfair labor practices. In this way, significant changes were effected without involving a breakdown of the existing social structure.

## LEVELS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Sociologists study different levels of society: the macro level, the meso level, and the micro level.

Sociologists define three major levels of society. They use data to understand types of behavior that occur at the different levels and the interconnections of these levels. **Micro-level analysis**, detailed examination of one-to-one interactions between individuals, includes studying people's behavior during negotiations, confrontations, and everyday conversations. Micro-level analysis allows for nuanced analysis of particular dynamics of social phenomena but may fail to consider broader social forces that impact such processes. **Meso-level analysis**, detailed examination of a specific group, community, or organization, studies certain parts of a society. Also referred to as network analysis, this approach examines the patterns of social ties among people in a

group and how those patterns affect the overall group. **Macro-level analysis**, examination of society as a whole, looks at the broad systems, institutions, hierarchies, and patterns that shape a society. Macro-level analysis takes into account the social, political, economic, and other forces that impact societies and individuals but might not capture important facets of social interactions that occur on the micro level.

Macro-level analysis is used to look at societies at large. Meso-level analysis involves the study of groups, communities, and institutions. Micro-level analysis focuses on the social interactions of individuals or very small groups.

### **Example: The Prison**

**Micro level:** Look at a prison. We see that it's comprised of administrators, guards, and prisoners. There's also an elaborate set of rules governing the relationships between the three. But when we look deeper we find more. There's an informal network among the prisoners and they divide themselves into many different categories and these categories describe what they do in the prison. Here are some of the positions in prison argot: (Sykes and Messinger)

**Toughs:** those who quarrel easily and fight without cause

**Gorilla:** those who use violence to obtain their goals

**Merchant or peddler:** buys and sells goods; exploits fellow prisoners by manipulation, not force

**Wolf or fag:** prisoners who enter into homosexual relationships (label applies to the role they take)

**Square John:** they conform to the values of the greater society (in effect, support prison officials)

**Rat or squealer:** informers

**Real man or right guy:** quiet; doesn't talk; doesn't push people around, but can handle the toughs and the gorillas; doesn't let other prisoners down.



The importance of this is that some prisoners assume much admired roles— the real men; while others are considered scum— the rats. The problem for prison administrators is to maintain order and control when they are in the minority— more prisoners than guards. Prisoners certainly don't obey from love or respect. They are at the legal limits of coercion. How do they do this, then? They allow the breaking of trivial rules in exchange for cooperation. They allow an "informal social structure" to develop where prison leaders (prisoners, themselves) have a say in what goes on. In May, 1980 very violent riots took place in the New Mexico State Pen. Why? The informal structure was disrupted. Cries of political corruption booted out leaders to other prisons and left the prisoners without leaders. As a result, the toughs and gorillas took over— macho contests. A riot ensued: When the authorities tried to negotiate, they found that they had to deal with several different groups of prisoners.

**The Macro Level:** Here we wouldn't focus on the internal workings of a particular prison, but rather how prisons fit into the larger society.

- ☐ What is the purpose of prisons (containment and isolation; punishment; retribution; rehabilitation)?
- ☐ What percent of the U.S. population is in prison? (over 1,000,000 in prison on any given day in U.S.— a % greater than most countries; well over 1 million on probation/parole).
- ☐ What types of prisons are there?
- ☐ What are the characteristics of prisoners— age, sex, religion, race?
- ☐ Are prisons overcrowded? (From 1993 World Almanac: It is estimated that state prisons were 16 to 31 percent above their capacities in 1990.

Both "micro-structure" and "macro-structure" can be found within social structure. **Micro-structure** is the pattern of relations among the basic elements of social life that cannot be further divided and have no social structure of their own (i.e. pattern of relations between individuals in a group composed of individuals, where individuals have no social structure). **Macro-structure** is thus a kind of "second

level" structure, a pattern of relations among objects that have their own structure (e.g. the relationship among political parties, as political parties have their own social structure).