

# INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

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# Introduction to sociology

- Goals
- Logistics
- Introduction to the introduction : what is sociology?
  - From « what » to « how »
  - Sociology as science
  - European founding fathers... and founding questions
  - A diverse discipline

# Introduction to sociology: goals of the course

## What?

- Understanding sociological practice and methods : what sociology is about
  - Not a matter of content but a way of thinking : seeing the world with a “sociological eye” (Hughes, 1971)
- Knowledge of key sociological topics, concepts, methods, authors and theories

# Introduction to sociology: goals of the course

## What for?

- Tools to reflect on the contemporary world and its transformations
- Tools to better understand one's position in society, the motives of one's actions : seeing yourself and others with a sociological eye
- Learning to question the given (what seems natural, obvious...) : improving your critical thinking
  - The sociological perspective “makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives” (P.Berger, *Invitation to sociology*, 1963, p.21)
- Methodological and theoretical skills which can be applied to a variety of professional domains (research, consulting, training, public management, education, social work...)

# Introduction to sociology

- Weekly lecture : Anne Revillard
- Discussion sessions : Sebastian Billows, Marianne Blanchard and Thomas Dollé
- Read, read, read
  - Assigned texts for the discussion sessions
  - The classics
  - Online resources for current sociological research : Jstor, CAIRN...
- Grading policy
  - Discussion sessions (including mid-term exam): 64%
  - Final exam : 36% (analysis of documents + short essay)

# Introduction to sociology: course outline

1. What is sociology?
2. Social norms (1): norms and deviance
3. Social norms (2) : norms, culture and socialization
4. The family
5. Religion
6. Capitalism and economic sociology
7. The state
8. Social movements
9. Social inequality (1): stratification and social class
10. Social inequality (2): Gender, race and intersectionality
11. Urban sociology
12. Education

# What is sociology?

**What** do sociologists study?

“institutions”, “social facts”(Durkheim)

“social action” (Weber)

“Social relations, institutions and societies” (Smelser)...

# What is sociology?

## What do sociologists study?...

Ex. 2011 English supplement of the *Revue française de sociologie*

Sex and Emotion-Based Relations as a  
Resource in Migration :  
Northern Chinese Women in Paris

[Abstract](#)

Florence LÉVY  
Marylène LIEBER

Has Ethno-Racial Segregation Increased in the  
Greater Paris Metropolitan Area ?

[Abstract](#)

Edmond PRÉTECEILLE

Social Class and Criminal Achievement

[Abstract](#)

Mathieu CHAREST  
Pierre TREMBLAY

Joining the Literary Pantheon :  
How Contemporary French Poets Attain Renown

[Abstract](#)

Sébastien DUBOIS

The Genesis of the Medical Field : France,  
1795-1870

[Abstract](#)

Patrice PINELL

The Professional Ethos of Mathematicians

[Abstract](#)

Bernard ZARCA



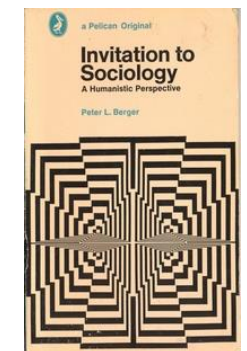
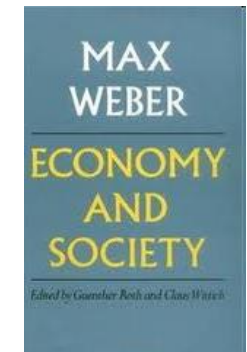
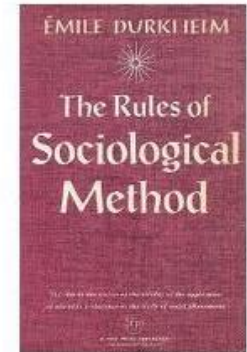
# What is sociology?

What do sociologists study?...

→ “Society” is everywhere

→ From “what” to “**how**” : a **scientific perspective** on society

- E.Durkheim (1895): sociology = “the **science** of institutions, their genesis and their functioning”
- M.Weber (1922): sociology = “a **science** concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences”
- P.Berger (1963): “The sociologist [...] is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is **scientific**”



# Sociology as science

- Axiological neutrality
- Methodology
- Theory-building

# Sociology as science

- **Axiological neutrality**

- A term coined by M.Weber
  - Sociology as a « **value-free** » endeavor
  - **Sociology is not about *judging* society or saying how it *should be*, it is about describing, analyzing and explaining how society *is*.**
- What it means:
  - Sociologists should do their best to set aside their personal values when analyzing society
  - « setting values aside » does not mean forgetting about them, but constantly analyzing how they may interfere with the production of knowledge and analysis, in order to « unbiased » the latter.
- What it does not mean:
  - « one cannot have beliefs and do proper social science »
  - « a sociologist should only work on subjects they have no interest in/beliefs about »
  - « sociology is useless to society »

# Sociology as science

- Axiological neutrality

”The sociologist will normally have many values as a citizen, a private person, a member of a religious group or as an adherent of some other association of people. But within the limits of his activities as a sociologist there is one fundamental value only – that of scientific integrity. Even there, of course, the sociologist, being human, will have to reckon with his convictions, emotions and prejudices. But it is part of his intellectual training that he tries to understand and control these as bias that ought to be eliminated, as far as possible, from his work. It goes without saying that this is not always easy to do, but it is not impossible. The sociologist tries to see what is there. He may have hopes or fears concerning what he may find. But he will try to see regardless of his hopes or fears. It is thus an act of pure perception, as pure as humanly limited means allow, toward which sociology strives”.

(P.Berger, *Invitation to sociology*, 1963, p.5)

# Sociology as science

- **Methodology**
- « rules of evidence » (P.Berger); sociology as *empirical* investigation
- Using *systematic* methods to produce and analyze data
  - A diversity of methods
  - Criteria of systematicity are specific to each method : sample representativeness in quantitative methods, reaching theoretical saturation in qualitative analysis...
- Making these methods public : methodological accountability

# Sociology as science

- **Theory-building**
- Beyond description:
  - Analysis, explanation, interpretation
  - Concepts, theories, ideal-types
  - Two fundamental theory-building tools : history and comparison
- Examples of sociological questions:
  - How does society hold itself together?
  - How are social norms transmitted and incorporated by individuals?
  - What are the forms and consequences of social inequalities?
  - How do behaviors, values, representations, vary according to one's position in society?
  - How does social change occur?
  - Beyond formal hierarchies, who actually holds power in a given organization/community and why?
  - Beyond what is formally assigned or defined, what is the content of one's work? How are different roles actually assigned to people in a given situation?
  - ...

# Sociology as science

- **Empirical investigation and theory-building**
- Interactions between theory-building and methodology : the choice of methods depends on the theoretical question one asks
- No matter how beautiful the theory, empirical relevance is a theory's judge in the last resort → sociology as evidence-based science

# How did society become a matter of scientific investigation in the XIXth century?

- The Enlightenment, the rise of scientific thinking and questioning of religious authority
  - Ex. A. Comte and positivism
- Democratization, political instability and questions regarding the social order
  - Ex. Tocqueville
- An intellectual elite concerned with social problems : the birth of social inquiry
  - Ex Le Play



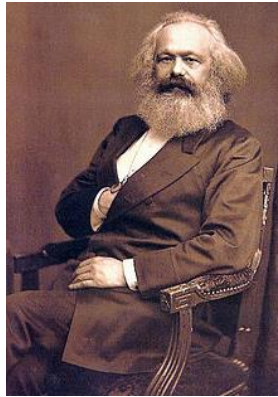
# European founding fathers...



**Alexis de  
Tocqueville**  
(1805-1859)

1835-1840 *De la  
démocratie en  
Amérique*

1856 *The old regime and  
the Revolution*



**Karl Marx**  
(1818-1883)

1844 *On the Jewish  
question*

1848 *The Communist  
Manifesto*

1859 *A contribution to  
the critique of political  
economy*

1867-1894 *Capital*



**Emile Durkheim**  
(1858-1917)

1893 *The division of labor in  
society*

1895 *The rules of sociological  
method*

1897 *On Suicide*

1912 *The elementary forms of  
religious life*



**Max Weber**  
(1864-1920)

1904-1905 *The protestant ethic  
and the spirit of capitalism*

1918 *Politics as a vocation and  
Science as a vocation*

1922 *Economy and society*

# ...and founding questions

- What science do sociologists have in mind?
    - Sociology as « social physics » (A.Comte) or hermeneutics
    - Should we make sociology in spite of human subjectivity or thanks to it?
  - How does one get a hold of society?
    - What should be used as a starting point? Society as a whole/social structures, or individual action?
- “**Social facts**” (Durkheim) vs “**social action**” (Weber)

E. Durkheim : *social facts* as “manners of acting, thinking, and feeling **external to the individual**, which are invested with a **coercive power** by virtue of which they exercise control over him” [*The rules of sociological method*]

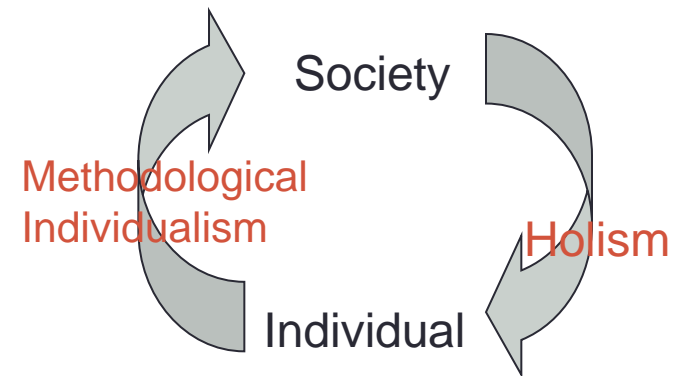
M. Weber : the “interpretive understanding of *social action*” at the heart of sociology. Social action = an **individual action** whose **subjective meaning** takes into account the behavior of others. [*Economy and society*]

# ...and founding questions

- Is individual action “free” or socially determined?

## Agency vs Structure

- Should one see society as determining individual behavior or as the result of the accumulation of individual actions?



- Do ideas or material interests rule the world?



# A diverse discipline

A diversity of ...

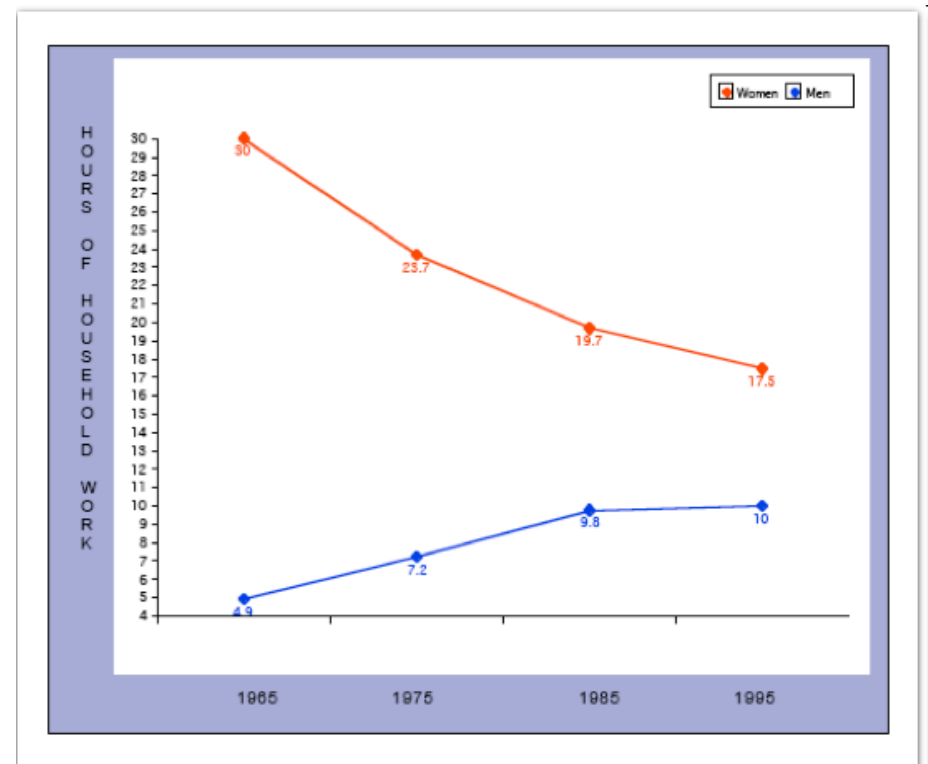
- ...types of empirical materials and methods
- ... epistemologies/theory-building methods
- ... scales of analysis
- ... theoretical perspectives
- ... topics

# A diversity of types of empirical materials and methods

- Quantitative vs qualitative methods
- An illustration of the diversity of empirical material : quantitative and qualitative data on the gendered division of housework

Gendered division of housework –  
quantitative data : Chart on the evolution  
of the weekly average number of hours of  
household work performed by men and  
women from 1965 to 1995

Source : Lisa Wade, « Of housework and  
husbands », 2009, Sociological images,  
<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2009/07/11/of-housework-and-husbands/>



# A diversity of types of empirical materials and methods

Gendered division of housework – qualitative data : excerpt of a report from **direct observation**

Source : A.Hochschild, *The second shift*, New York, Penguin, 1989, p.149-150

**A**t 7:45 one Sunday morning I slowly drive my car up a newly paved street lined with young trees and clusters of two-story homes that form a curving line up a hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay. It has the feel of a new housing development; along each street the shrubs are sculpted with the same taste. Streets have names like Starview, Overlook, Bayside, and though the traffic goes back and forth only within the development, there are ten-mile-an-hour signs every half block, as if an informal understanding could not be trusted. Between groups of every six houses, ivy lawns sprawl into large communal spaces, and their mailboxes are clustered under a small, communal mailbox roof. It was a developer's attempt at community.

At this hour the sidewalks, strewn with Sunday newspapers, are empty. Other times of day I see only employees—a Chinese gardener trimming, a Chicano handyman fixing floodlights, two white workmen carrying rolls of carpeting from their truck to a home. Half the units are filled with retired couples, Carol Alston tells me later, and the other half with two-income families. “The elderly don't talk much to the young, and the working couples are too busy to be neighborly: it's the kind of place that could be neighborly, but isn't.”

Greg Alston answers the door. At thirty-seven, Greg is a boyish, sandy-haired man with gold-rimmed glasses, dressed in well-worn jeans and a T-shirt. Also at the door is Daryl, three, with a

dimple-checked grin. He has bare feet, and shoes in hand. “Carol's still asleep,” Greg tells me, “and Beverly [their three-month-old baby] is about to wake up.” I settle in the living room, again the “family dog,” and listen as the household wakes up. At 7:15 Greg has risen, at 7:30 Daryl, and now, at 8:00, Beverly is up. For a while, only Greg and Daryl were downstairs. Greg was talking to Daryl about tying shoes, Daryl was discussing the finer distinctions between Batdog, Spiderbat, Aquaman, and Aquababy. Soon, Carol has dressed and calls out to me; I help her make the bed. She breastfeeds Beverly and puts her in a swing which is hung near the dining-room table between two sets of poles; the swing is kept in motion by a mechanical bear, whose weight, as it gradually slides down one of the poles, drives the mechanism that moves the swing. As Carol cleans off the dining-room table and does the dishes, she tells me about a wild two-year-old child of friends whom they had taken to Marine World Saturday, and who had thrown a metal car at the baby. She begins making pecan and apple pancakes for breakfast. Greg is repairing a torn water bed downstairs. Each parent has one child.

# A diversity of types of empirical materials and methods

Gendered division of housework – qualitative data : excerpt of the transcript of **semi-structured interviews**

Source : A.Hochschild, *The second shift*, New York, Penguin, 1989, p.149-150

**Carol :**

I don't know whether I'm rationalizing in order to feel good about myself while I'm not working, or whether I'm on to the innermost truth. But I've changed my perspective. I've missed the sexy part of business, going out to lunch and talking about big deals, talking about things that "really mattered." I lived like that for years. Only over the past few years have I realized how superficial that life really is. In the long run, what's important is Daryl, Beverly, Greg, and my friends—some of those friends are work friends. These are who I will carry in my heart to the grave.

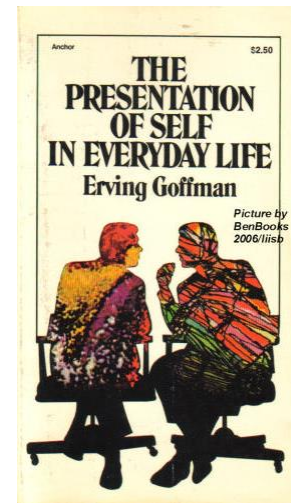
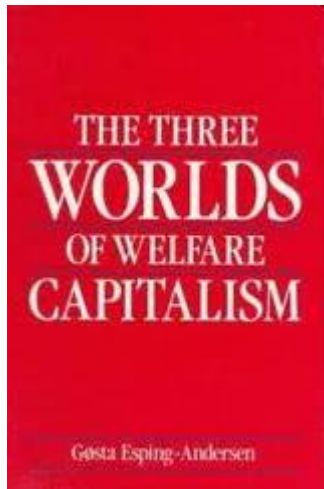
I have a different identity now. I don't feel like I *have* to have a job. Greg shouldn't *have* to either.

**Greg :**

My dad never touched me much. He was probably afraid. Plus, my dad is quiet, like I am. He doesn't express himself. I have reflected upon the fact that I don't embrace my dad. About six months ago, when he was here, I accidentally embraced him. I'm glad I did. He commented on it. He said that I hadn't hugged him for years. He used to wrestle with me a lot but that stopped after I started to beat him at fourteen. After that we didn't really touch. I don't know whether it was him or me, but it stopped.

# A diversity of scales of analysis : from macro- to microsociology

From the comparative analysis of welfare states...



...to the sociology of face-to-face interactions



## A diversity of scales of analysis : from scale to theory

« The fundamental division [from a theoretical point of view] is between macroscopic perspectives that focus on organizations, institutions, societies, and culture and microscopic perspectives that focus on individuals' social psychology and interactive processes among them ».

(Smelser, 1994, p.25)

Beyond the micro-/macro- divide : « sociological theories of the middle range » (Merton, 1949) and the « meso-level realm of social reality » (Turner, 2012)

- Ex. Elias's concept of figuration (1970)
- Ex. Giddens's theory of structuration
- Ex. Bourdieu's concept of habitus...

# A diversity of theoretical perspectives



A word cloud of theoretical perspectives in sociology and anthropology. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'Holism' at the top and 'Rational Choice' at the bottom. The words are in various shades of brown and black, with varying font sizes and orientations. The words included are: Holism, Marxism, Structuralism, Culturalism, Genetic Structuralism, Pragmatism, Individualism, Symbolic Interactionism, Ethnomethodology, Functionalism, Feminist Theory, and Rational Choice.

Holism  
Marxism  
Structuralism Culturalism  
Genetic Structuralism Pragmatism  
Individualism Symbolic Interactionism  
Ethnomethodology Functionalism  
Feminist Theory  
Rational Choice

# A diversity of theoretical perspectives

- 3 important parameters
  - Micro/meso/macro
  - Conflict/integration
  - Agency/structure

# A diversity of topics and subfields: current sections of the American Sociological Association (Jan. 2013)

Aging and the Life Course  
Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco  
Altruism, Morality and Social Solidarity  
Animals and Society  
Asia and Asian America  
Body and Embodiment  
Children and Youth  
Collective Behavior & Social Movements  
Communication and Information Technologies  
Community and Urban Sociology  
Comparative and Historical Sociology  
Consumers and Consumption  
Crime, Law, and Deviance  
Culture  
Development  
Disability and Society  
Economic Sociology  
Education  
Emotions  
Environment and Technology  
Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis  
Evolution, Biology and Society  
Family  
Global and Transnational Sociology  
History of Sociology  
Human Rights  
International Migration  
Inequality, Poverty and Mobility  
Labor and Labor Movements  
Latino/a Sociology  
Law  
Marxist Sociology  
Mathematical Sociology  
Medical Sociology  
Mental Health  
Methodology  
Organizations, Occupations, and Work  
Peace, War, and Social Conflict  
Political Economy of the World-System  
Political Sociology  
Population  
Race, Gender, and Class  
Racial and Ethnic Minorities  
Rationality and Society  
Religion  
Science, Knowledge, and Technology  
Sex and Gender  
Sexualities  
Social Psychology  
Sociological Practice and Public Sociology  
Teaching and Learning  
Theory

# Introduction to sociology: course outline

1. What is sociology?
2. Social norms (1): norms and deviance
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6. Capitalism and economic sociology
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# To sum up...

- Goal of the course = understanding a perspective (the « sociological eye »), beyond a body of knowledge
- Sociology as science
  - Sociology is not about judging society or saying how it should be, it is about describing, analyzing and explaining how society is
  - Methodology matters
  - Sociology is about empirical investigation AND theory-building
- « Social facts » and « social action »
  - E. Durkheim : social facts as “manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” [The rules of sociological method]
  - M. Weber : the “interpretive understanding of social action” at the heart of sociology. Social action = an individual action whose subjective meaning takes into account the behavior of others. [Economy and society]
- A diverse discipline

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