Tools for Analysis: Sociological Reasoning

C&E SOC. 140: Introduction to Community & Environmental Sociology

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This summer I had the pleasure of taking Introduction to Community and Environmental Sociology, as a reentry, nontraditional student in a virtual setting. The goal in taking this course was to prepare me for "Public Health in Rural & Urban Communities," as part of an individual major I have proposed. This summer experience has initiated me into an interdisciplinary approach as a social scientist. I have always struggled to find a way to combine different approaches in my career pursuit of solving complex matters in the health industry. Sociology is a discipline in which one can investigate social patterns and behaviors and then assemble a logical presentation using various analytical tools. Furthermore, this field of study allows for both subjectivity and objectivity, thus it is acceptable to openly support findings with a passionate response. For me, this style was a challenge, since I had become accustomed to a dispassionate writing technique in prior English courses, learning about argumentation, research, and rhetoric.

In this course, I was fascinated by concepts like the sociological imagination, and community. I also have the desire to learn about health systems. Many sociological matters are interrelated to health. In one class discussion, for example, we viewed a PBS documentary called "Unnatural Causes," and learned from neuroscientist Brian McEwen about the human body's natural response to stressful situations (PBS, 2009). The determinants of health explains how those reactions may be understood in terms of an individual's race or sex. The idea of health determinants is just one of the many social patterns to explore.

The sociological imagination, aided by the focus on community formations, offers sociologists the tools needed to evaluate sociological matters, and report on their findings. Sociological imagination is the interplay of society with the abstraction of individual troubles (Mills, 1959, pp. 4). Community as a concept, creates a multilayered framework for which differing environments can be compared. From a small community, for instance a nuclear family unit, to a larger community, (a municipality, union state, or nation) a community is a formation of members and its guidance. A community is connected through one or more of the following: family bloodlines, values, or by location. Lastly, a community represents a group with long-standing traditions connected with society by its authorities, evolving on a continuous basis (Tönnies, 2001, pp. 77).

I spent this summer amongst my immediate family, together we form a small community. Between my eldest sister, her two high-schoolers, one middle-schooler, my older brother, his wife, toddler, and infant sons, my second older sister my mother and myself, I saw firsthand what decision making looks like when the needs of multiple people are considered. I was cognizant of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the implications of traveling and togetherness for our small community. I was hyperaware and thankful that my sister-in-law, who happens to be a doctor, was marginally safe during the pre-vaccine phase of the pandemic, in contrast to the many women clinicians worldwide who endured grueling medical workhours, understaffed, and under resourced in terms of personal protective equipment, according to an interview of Eve "V" Ensler we studied this semester (Democracy Now!, 2021). "V" also gave a report to *The Guardian* about the COVID-19 pandemic, more broadly the "disaster patriarchy," and how it affected women in other communities around the world, from domestic abuse to unfair work

conditions, thankful that none of the women in my life had such painful experiences (Ensler,

2021). I recognize the greater society outside of community.

Our current western society is somewhere between a neoliberal paradigm and a quasi-

globalist culture. The best way to oppose bad-faith corporate capitalists, is to boycott their brand,

and yet as a society, individuals capitulate with morally objectional consumer habits. Because of

the Internet, we are more capable than ever to change society on an international scale, still it is

easy to be influenced or distracted by the same technology. Elite knowledge is tantamount to

power in the battle for social equity between class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, and

religion (Hill Collins, 2010, pp. 9). The fundamental analytical tools discovered in this sociology

course, encourages me to be informed and share information with the intent to inspire change.

The catch is that some simply have become closed off to opposing views.

The gated community closes itself to anything that threatens the status quo, creating

roadblocks for even the most cogent policy initiatives. For instance, the climate change deniers

that were borne out of the donations of wealthy interests, dismiss scientific reasoning for the sake

of political gamesmanship, ultimately help maintain the composition of the richest class (Klein,

2015, pp. 32-63). This community, one may argue is stalling a global society from working

toward creating long term environmental resolutions. Food systems is another challenging

sociological matter as food security is necessary for all human survival and also has its relation

to other sociological matters such as climate change, land use, and labor laws.

We learned from the documentary "Food Chains," a similar 'metaphysical' gatekeeping

by the food supplier Publix, accused of running a monopsony, and how the corporate capitalist

structure can overwhelm a community's efforts toward equity (Screen Media Ventures, 2011). In

this example, the reporting on the contribution to the United States food supply industry by migrant farmers is being suppressed by corporations who benefit from said laborers working for what is described as slave labor wages, in increasingly unsafe conditions due to climate change also evidencing racism as a lived, embodied experience (Dillion & Sze, 2016, pp. 15). Through the documentary "This Changes Everything," we learned of yet another gatekeeping situation. This time, about indigenous groups seeking environmental justice as they were blocked by an oil drilling company from accessing their ancestral inherited land (Barnes, Hossain, & Klein, 2015). Since environmental justice is composed in four parts, distributive justice, procedural justice, corrective justice and social justice, the harmful effects to the victimized community are immeasurable (Mohai, 2018, pp. 22).

I learned from these studies how to focus a broad premise with both an empathic lens and interdisciplinary approach. Deploying a sociological imagination is difficult. Recently, I have dared my friends to imagine our modern society from the perspective of someone from a completely different background. Doing this exercise, myself, will benefit me as I continue to learn about healthcare systems in different communities. It is critical for sociologists to perform the difficult task of exercising their sociological imagination and provide context to precedence to shift the interest away from a select few to the collective many. Because, with enough concerted effort, entire communities will evolve; meaning, societies will advance.

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