

SOC 1430 SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE UNITED STATES

1-12-05 NOTES recorded by Matthew Smith with some additions by Dr. Brush

Ways life is different for us then it was for our grandparents:

1. Female police officers
2. Access to educational resources
3. Internet communication
4. Entertainment/TV
5. Travel: Has become easier and more frequent, we have more options
6. Racism: The forms of it has changed, now hidden instead of open
7. Less threat of World War
8. Increased amount of women in the work force and less at home
9. Methods of distribution and consumption of food have changed (more variety in food available)
10. Ease of finding/holding a job (depression)
11. Clothing

With this comes the important question, what era are we describing? What points are we comparing?

Now=2006 (and most of us are between 18 and 25).

Then: There is going to be some variation depending on individual circumstances. Probably in the 1930's and 1940's for most of us (that is when our grandparents were our age.)

Part of what gets tricky when talking about social change is specifying the range. We don't want to compare apples and oranges.

Sociologists often use *zeitgeist*="spirit of the day."

We try to define the *zeitgeist* for a cohort (a group that has something in common, the most common of which is a birth cohort where everyone in the group was born between year X and Y.)

What useful qualities can we use in defining cohorts for social cohorts?

- Here one has to be careful because if we get too detailed, analyzing the cohort becomes very difficult.

Cohorts are useful because those people went through similar events at the same time, for example they all graduated high school around the same time.

There are multiple kinds of change that we can analyze.

- Changes in life course
- Historical time

We are more interested in the latter, not the former, when we specify life events as the basis for cohort formation. But in a class on social change, we may want to focus on change in historical time – which we definitely do not want to confuse with change in the life course.

Defining events of our generation:

9-11: What is the age group that is defined by this? Those who were in high school?

- Other plausible alternatives:
 - Princess Diana's death: so much media attention
 - OJ Simpson trial: Also lots of media attention, related to race relations, and how the law worked
 - Oklahoma City Bombing: Also during mid 90's

Back to how things have changed...

12. More integration of cultural diversity
13. Cold War Experience
14. An increased lax in decorum
15. Sites for sexual experimentation (now we have the automobile)
16. Divisions between rich and poor have increased, an increased amount of inequality
17. Technological change has become much more rapid
18. Family size, number of children has decreased. Household and fertility has changed.

We have to realize that we are making generalizations, for example about family size, when people start having children, etc.

Perceptions of sex are complicated; we certainly could argue that people have become much more open to talking about sex. It has become publicly accepted and displayed.

19. Taboo's, especially in reference to sex
20. What is considered politically correct
21. An increased amount of medicalization
22. An increased openness in sexuality (has become more acceptable to be homosexual, bisexual, etc.)
23. Possibilities for peace and transnational co-operation have increased
24. Family roles have changed, a decrease in the standard male-breadwinner role
25. Distrust of government has increased
26. Cost of living has increased
27. Language/slang-has become more informal
28. Optimism/pessimism, cynicism, has changed, but different opinions as to what direction
 - a. It is difficult to talk about opinions because during both times there will be distributions of opinions. In our grandparents day there were both very optimistic and pessimistic people as there our today. There may be

- differences in the distributions, however, and we have to come up with a way to capture these differences. This is different from point estimates.
29. Politics: mainstream has gone farther right, but acceptance of leftist policies has increased.
 30. Educational opportunities (especially in reference to the female gender having more access to education)
 31. What is culturally acceptable parenting policies
 32. Discipline in schools
 33. More family change: Divorce, cohabitation, etc.
 34. Secularization of public and political life vs. previous religious domination of those spheres
 35. Advances in medicine and disease (we have cures now to some things they had then, but we also have diseases now they'd never heard of)
 36. Issues about gender
 37. Weight, eating disorders
 - a. We have to learn to distinguish between an underlying change in phenomenon and a change in the perception of the phenomenon. Both are interesting, but they are not synonymous.
 38. Change in retirement age, life cycle
 39. Abortion and freedom of choice

Next, we got into our groups and worked on a system of classifications. Each group came up with basic categories of social change. In this, one has to consider how general or how specific these categories should be. After working in groups, we reported our categories to the class.

CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

1. Family
2. Technology
3. Geography (distribution of population)
4. Policies and law
5. Economics
6. Pop culture/social norms
7. Life Cycle (age of marriage, how long we work, how often we change jobs, age at retirement, etc.)
8. Gender
9. Education
10. Sexuality
11. Relationships
12. Medicine/health
13. Attitudes and beliefs
14. Communication
15. Race relations
16. Institutions

HOMEWORK: Read first chapter in McCall and think about the question: How can we characterize “What is” so we can look at how it has changed?

Additional questions to address while reading this very complex, technical book (we will work on answering these in the same groups we formed before):

1. What are McCall’s research questions?
2. What theories inform her analysis?
3. What is her basic unit of analysis and why?
4. What are some of the key concepts she invokes?
5. What is her basic method? What does she claim is innovative about it?
6. What is she seeking to describe and explain?
7. What is the “old” inequality? What is the “new” inequality? What does the distinction suggest about social change in the U.S.?
8. What does McCall mean by “structural change”?