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THE SOCIAL FACT

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Sivarajavel IAS Academy 's

THE SOCIAL FACT

is a monthly bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such away that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOGICAL BULLETIN

Connecting the dots :

Sociology is a process in making. Everyday newspapers and weekly have many important news, which have sociological angle in subtle form. This chapter helps you to connect those dots and give a clear picture of the reality.

Sociology Explained :

World is one for sociology. Many authors explain social problems and social changes in length and breadth through their research. This chapter collects and compiles those articles which are related to our syllabus.

Perspectives :

Beauty of Sociology, as a social science, is its capacity to offer different perspectives of a same topic. This chapter analyses a current topic with a unique social perspective.



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CONNECTING THE DOTS

- Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) announced that the party would contest the 2024 Lok Sabha election from Andhra Pradesh, and organize a large public rally for that. VCK is a dalit party originally from the state of Tamil Nadu : **On a functional side, Dalit consciousness is developing beyond language barrier and on the dysfunctional side, political parties are using one identity (caste) over other (Language) for the vote banks.**
- A research report on contents which are posted online, found that a “well-crafted lie” will get more engagements than typical, truthful content and that some features of social media sites and their algorithms contribute to the spread of misinformation : Post Modernists **believes social media is the tool for the modernity and deep inside it is also acting as a challenge for social transformation**
- Demonstrators took to streets across Iran again on Saturday over Mahsa Amini despite Internet cuts, as the protest movement sparked by outrage over her death in custody enters a fifth week. Amini’s death on September 16 has fuelled the biggest wave of street and social protest, violence seen in the country for years : **Hashtags(#) are becoming new leaders for leaderless movements. The new social movement is taking shape where protesters are using both physical and digital presence for their cause.**
- Two environmental protesters appeared in a U.K. court after throwing tomato soup over one of Vincent van Gogh’s “Sunflowers” paintings at London’s National Gallery. Following the latest “direct-action” stunt targeting works of art, the duo pleaded not guilty to criminal damage : **‘Direct action was coined by US anarcho-feminist V. de Cleyre. Radical climate activism seeks to draw media and public attention to the issue. These tactics are designed to disrupt the status quo. Eco terrorism, Gandian Crusaders are other climate change movements.**

- A research found out that Certain emojis take certain meanings based on the audience of the platform. For example, to use the skull as 'death by laughing' can be interpreted correctly on TikTok but maybe misinterpreted on Twitter/ Facebook : **Symbolic interactionism considers society is functioning based on the significant symbols. The meaning of any symbols is based on the common stock of knowledge shared by the group of individuals and it takes different forms and meetings over the period. Emojis are new significant symbols.**
- Many human rights activists criticized FIFA (The World governing body for Football) for taking the double standards and imposing its own biased ideology over the sport. They questioned the way Russia is banned from the World cup (WC) by citing the human rights violation but allowing Iran to participate in WC and conducting it in Qatar, which is infamous for human rights violations. : **Ohmae describes how globalization enabled transnational organizations to gain power and influence the society with their own values and ideology.**
- From far-right demonstrators in the US, attacks on synagogues in Sweden, arson attacks on kosher restaurants in France and an increase in crimes against Jews in the UK, globally, anti-Semitism is exploding once again. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents in the US showed a 34 per cent increase from 2020 to 2021 : **Robert E Park cites ethnic violence based on race is still present because of the lack of social interaction and presence of racial consciousness. "We vs they" concept is the root cause for new judeophobia.**
- German sportswear brand Adidas announced that it would sever its nearly decade-long partnership with US musician and fashion designer, Kanye West. Adidas, which has had a strained relationship with Kanye West, made the decision after the musician's recent controversial statements elicited widespread condemnation by a number of Jewish rights groups. : **Influence of pressure groups is not only confined to the state-nation politics but also to the capitalist economy and its institutions.**

- A new trend known as 'quiet quitting' has dominated social media platforms like Twitter and TikTok. The phrase doesn't refer to employees actually leaving their jobs, but instead, doing the bare minimum required of them. Employers consider it to be lazy, disloyal and potentially indicative of an overall downward spiral : **Neo Marxist says Capitalism will find new ways and jargon to make the work efficient through exploitation and in turn it will lead to alienation. The need to strike a healthy work-life balance through quiet quitting is seen as rebellion by exploitative capitalism.**
- Nearly 50 years after Native American activist and actor Sacheen Littlefeather was booed off stage at the Oscars for protesting against the misrepresentation of Native American tribes in the entertainment industry, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has apologized to her for the abuse she had to endure : **The change of value system is the marker of modernisation and the society embraces the new pattern variable over other. As it comes from inside the society, it is called orthogenetic change.**
- Thirty-three years after Khomeini declared Rushdie's book blasphemous and put a bounty on his head in 1989, the author was stabbed repeatedly at a public appearance in New York State. This has haunted many liberal novelists and thinkers whose writings were also seen as insulting to Islam and the Prophet Mohammad : **Among many reasons for the rise of fundamentalism in the religion, Asish Nandi considered over emphasis of the modernity and liberal ideas without accepting the diversity is resulting in the fundamentalist activities.**
- Twitter has fired thousands of contract workers as Elon Musk continues to implement aggressive measures to bring the social media giant back on its feet. Staff were not given any heads up before being laid off. The terminated staff only discovered they had been let go after losing access to work systems : **Karl Marx predicted that when workers lost their say over the product they produced, they would be removed from the market without their consent and the presence of a vast reserve army of labor increased this plight.**

- *The Tamil Nadu State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes stated that excluding beef from the proposed Ambur biryani festival would be tantamount to “discrimination,” and that such restrictions should be avoided in state-sponsored events. The Commission rejected the reason of District Magistrate that organizers were avoiding beef and pork to respect the sentiments of the people, as many Hindus reside in the town : **Bureaucracy is known for its iron cage of rationality but in reality rationality is overshadowed by the dominant group politics and acting as an arm for ideological state apparatus.***
- *The age-old custom of isolating menstruating women from their families and home is still alive and kicking at a village in Veppanthattai. Around 250 families hailing from the Dalit community, which resides in the slum area of the village, follow the practice of forcing a menstruating woman to stay in a concrete hut called muttukkadu outside the village. The community follows this practice fearing the wrath of the village deity if the norm is broken : **Karen Armstrong argues that none of the religion has particularly good for women. Although women may have made significant advances in other field, the gains in most religion is very limited.***
- *We live in a society governed by rule of law. Rule of law, if understood and implemented properly, is a defense against oppressive structures such as patriarchy, casteism, and ableism. It is an aspirational goal, which is beyond you and me as individuals, but towards which all of us have our parts to play,” Justice Chandrachud, who has been nominated as the next Chief Justice of India. : **This speech of CJI is an attempt to change the value system of the people as André Beteille says India is governed by customs more than law. Only when law and customs are in the same page, there will be a consensus in mass mobilisation agaিসnt social evils.***

A PICTURE TO PONDER



“The rich will do anything for the poor but get off their backs”

-- Karl Marx

SOCIOLOGY EXPLAINED

WOMEN AND RELIGION

Paper 1: Stratification - Gender

Paper 2: Patriarchy and sexual division of labour

Women and religion, women's religious commitments, ideals, and involvement are increasingly of interest to sociologists within both the sociology of religion and other fields. While early research on religion focused on the origins, functions, meaning, and measurement of religion, the past few decades have witnessed a burgeoning interest in women's spirituality, the involvement of women within religious institutions, and religiously based women's social movements. Part of this shift is the result of the growth of gender studies within sociology, as well as increased religious pluralism and expression across the religious landscape.

Women's involvement in religion varies depending on whether we are considering personal beliefs and practices or institutional affiliation and leadership. Some scholars have been critical of women's marginalization within religious institutions. Some critics, such as theologian Mary Daly, argue that women's historic exclusion from positions of leadership and authority within western religious traditions is evidence that the Judeo Christian tradition itself is inherently patriarchal and oppressive and should be abandoned in favor of non-patriarchal feminist spiritualities. The recent growth of neo-pagan, goddess-worship, and other forms of feminist spirituality suggest that some women are moving away from traditional western religious institutions.

The reason being that they do not adequately meet their needs or provide the kind of overarching moral narrative that gives meaning to women's lives. Others, however, argue that religion itself (especially western Christianity) is not inherently oppressive to women, but that the gender egalitarian teachings of these traditions and the historical involvement of women as leaders, teachers, and writers have been minimized for political and economic reasons. Thus, within both the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestantism, for example, feminist organizations have emerged in an effort to restore more gender equitable practices and beliefs. Christians for Biblical Equality, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus, and the Women's Ordination Conference are examples of organizations that seek to advance feminist goals within conservative Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Countering these are a number of conservative organizations and institutions that promote "traditional gender roles" in which women's nurturing is seen as a natural complement to men's responsibilities as leaders, protectors, and providers within both family and the church (Concerned Women for America and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood are two such examples).

Although less and less willing to describe these relationships as one of women's submission and men's leadership, the model these groups promote is nevertheless one in which men have final decision making authority and spiritual responsibility for family life. The abuses of this power have led to an increase of scholarship on links between religious teaching on women's submission and domestic abuse (Kroeger & Nason Clark 2001). Sociology of religion has also explored the dimensions of women's leadership as clergy and lay leaders within the church. Adair Lummis, Nancy Ammerman, and Paula Nesbitt are examples of scholars who have written on the struggles of women in positions of leadership within conservative denominations and traditions and the organizational barriers women face as effective clergy. What the above research highlights is how women's connections to religious institutions vary based on underlying ideas about the nature of masculinity and femininity themselves.

The teachings of some religious institutions and traditions are that women and men are essentially different, and because of those differences should be differently involved in religious worship, teaching, and leadership. Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, and many conservative Protestant denominations are examples of religious traditions in which specific leadership positions and responsibilities are reserved for men. Within some of these traditions, religious ritual and family responsibilities are also gendered – with women and men being seen as having separate practices and obligations inside and outside the household.

Not all theologically conservative religions, however, are necessarily or uniformly conservative when it comes to the place of women in religious life. The past decade has seen a movement away from debates over androgyny and hierarchy toward a growing emphasis on complementarity and ideological egalitarianism. Both those who argue that there are essential gender differences and those who argue for gender equality have moved toward a pragmatically egalitarian approach in which symbolic offices and authority may remain limited to women, but women's increasing opportunities to teach, lead, and participate in institutional religious life are paralleled by greater emphasis on men's responsibility to become more involved in everyday family life as husbands and fathers.

In terms of personal religious life, sociologists of religion have been particularly interested in the appeal of conservative religious traditions to women and the articulation of religion and family life. Rather than focusing on women's institutional involvement, this body of research explores the personal benefits women find in religious observance. Recent studies of conservative Protestants have all made the case that women find personal satisfaction, growth, community, and family support through religious life. Small group participation, prayer services, and family rituals are particularly important in creating a sense of community and care for women within these traditions.

SOCIOLOGY OF ANTI SEMITISM

Paper 1: Paper 1 : Stratification - Race and Ethnicity

Paper 2 : Nation, democracy (Politics and Society)

Anti-Semitism consists of hostility or hatred directed at Jews. Anti-Semitism may be manifested as prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory actions toward Jews because of their racial, ethnic, and/or religious heritage, as well as perceptions about their economic standing or political power. History records many incidences of anti-Semitism, culminating in the attempted genocide perpetrated against Jews during the Holocaust prior to and throughout World War II.

From a sociological perspective, anti-Semitism is not reducible to individual prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory acts against a Jewish person. Although anti-Semitism may be perpetrated by a particular individual or may target a specific victim, the question of interest to sociologists is how anti-Semitic attitudes and actions are collectively facilitated, culturally supported, and institutionally legitimated. Thus, even if a particular person or small group of “extremists” within a society exhibits anti-Semitic beliefs or behaviors, a sociological approach to this phenomenon seeks to account for the broader group influences (e.g., definitions of race, norms of authoritarianism, sources of religious conflict) that legitimate such ideas and actions.

The Holocaust is the most horrific outgrowth of anti-Semitism, given the aim of its architects to commit “judeocide” (that is, the genocide of all Jewish people living in Europe). However, the precise role and scope of anti-Semitism in the Holocaust has provoked a debate of sorts among historians and social scientists. One theory, dubbed “intentionalism,” attributes the Holocaust to a clique of mad extremists not representative of German culture or society. Another theory, more functionalist in nature, traces the Holocaust and the rise of Nazi fascism after World War I to obstacles that inhibited Germany’s modernization and undermined the nation’s economic development.

A third perspective charges that “eliminationist anti-Semitism,” a virulent hatred of Jews that aimed to achieve nothing short of genocide, was widespread among the German population. According to this perspective, then, only Germany and its unique political culture could have spawned the Holocaust. There is some evidence to support each of these theories. William Brustein’s (2003) work on anti-Semitism, particularly as it relates to the Holocaust, is especially instructive. Brustein suggests that there are four different forms (or sources) of anti-Semitism: religious, racial, economic, and political anti-Semitism. Religious anti-Semitism is rooted in the unique elements of Judaism (the Jewish faith), while racial anti-Semitism is linked to socially defined perceptions about Jews’ distinctive physical appearance. Economic anti-Semitism is most common in moments of economic crisis and during periods when Jewish commerce was perceived to threaten the welfare of other groups.

Finally, political anti-Semitism often results from perceptions about Jewish influence on or threats toward the realms of governance and law (e.g., charges of Jewish involvement in the Communist Party during the twentieth century). Each form of anti-Semitism has been manifested in Europe at periods prior to the Holocaust, though it is the combination of these four types of anti-Semitism – such as that in pre Holocaust Germany – that provokes the most virulent hatred of Jews. Thus, current cross national studies of anti-Semitism suggest that it is important to identify the type of anti-Semitism found in particular locales, and the precise determinants that foster anti-Jewish sentiments and practices in specific contexts (Brustein & King 2004). Research demonstrates that anti-Semitism also has a long history in the United States, although support for the tenets of this ideology has declined markedly during the past several decades (Dinnerstein 1994, 2004; Blakeslee 2000; Weiner & King 2005). For example, in 1964, 48 percent of Americans believed that Jews have irritating faults and are more willing than others to engage in “shady” practices, while only about half this number support such views in the contemporary United States (Smith 1993).

Moreover, whereas 29 percent of Americans were regarded as “hardcore anti Semites” by the Anti Defamation League in 1964, only 17 percent were considered to fit this profile in 2002, which is a slight increase from the low of 12 percent in 1998. Thus, while anti-Semitism is at historically low levels, some observers argue that survey evidence suggesting that nearly 20 percent of the American population is anti-Semitic points to alarmingly high levels of anti-Jewish sentiment (Simon 2003). It is worth noting that the Anti Defamation League’s operationalization of an anti-Semite is based on an 11-point scale measuring agreement with various stereotypes of Jews (e.g., Jews “always like to be at the head of things,” “are more loyal to Israel than America,” “have too much power in the business world,” “don’t care what happens to anyone but [their] own kind,” “are just [not] as honest as other business people”). Based on the Anti Defamation League definition, hardcore anti-Semites are those who answer in the affirmative to six or more of the items on this 11-point scale. Other scales of anti-Semitism commonly include a selection of these items.

Despite the decline in Americans’ hostility toward Jews during the past several decades, some groups within the United States are still more inclined to hold anti-Semitic views than others. Gender differences in anti-Semitism have been observed, such that men exhibit more hostility toward Jews than do women. Americans who are older, rural dwellers, and Southerners are generally more anti-Semitic than those who are young, urbanites, and those residing outside the South. Blue collar workers are more inclined toward anti-Semitism than are white collar professionals. Education is widely viewed as the key to diminished anti-Semitism among those in the professional class, because higher levels of education tend to erode support for anti-Semitism while bolstering a commitment to liberal viewpoints and tolerance for others. Anti-Semitic views generally increase in locales with a higher proportion of Jews and declining economic conditions, a pattern that is commonly observed for other minority groups as well. As minority groups grow in number, concerns typically increase about the “threats” they may pose to local politics, economic opportunities, and social life in general. There are also racial and religious variations in anti-Semitic attitudes. Research reveals greater support for anti-Semitic views among black Americans than among their white counterparts.

Sociologists generally interpret blacks' stronger negative attitudes toward Jews as a function of African Americans' blocked opportunities in American society, which contrast markedly with the high economic status that Jews in the US tend to enjoy. Where religion is concerned, some research traces American anti-Semitism to the pervasiveness of Christianity in the US, particularly the conservative (fundamentalist) brand of Protestantism that is so prominent in the South. Interestingly, conservative Christians, who are generally distinguished by their view of the Bible as the inerrant word of God, seem to be of two minds concerning Jews (Smith 1999). While conservative Christians tend to embrace the biblical depiction of Jews as a "chosen people" and strongly support the existence of a Jewish state, they also believe that Jews should be converted to Christianity and tend to believe that Jews are overly focused on monetary gain.

Within the United States, efforts to promote Holocaust education to reduce anti-Semitism seem to have met with mixed success (Simon 2003). Between 80 and 90 percent of Americans believe that valuable lessons can be learned by studying the Nazis' efforts to eradicate the Jewish population in Europe during the Holocaust. However, these courses may be of limited value in reducing anti-Semitism because students who take such courses enter them already having low levels of anti-Semitism and high levels of political tolerance. Thus, while such courses can provide beneficial knowledge about the Holocaust, students who take them are not very anti-Semitic in the first place. Those who could most benefit from such courses are likely to avoid enrolling in them because of their prejudice against Jews.

Finally, given the heterogeneity of cultural practices and viewpoints among different types of Jews (Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Reform, and secular), it is worth noting that religious variations have been observed in perceptions of and reactions to anti-Semitism among American Jews. In one study of Jewish rabbis, Orthodox rabbis and those linked to Jewish advocacy organizations perceived anti-Semitism to be a greater problem and more frequently express concerns about this problem in public speech than those affiliated with other branches of Judaism.

COMMODITIES, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE ECONOMY OF IMPRISONMENT

Paper 1 : Works and economic life

Paper 2 : Karl Marx - Modes of production

Under capitalism, we are surrounded by products that promise to improve or fulfill our lives in some way. Whether it's beauty products, nutritional supplements, clothing, or even technology, the advertisements we are exposed to tell us that we need to keep consuming products in order to be the best versions of ourselves. Consumerism, or society's incessant preoccupation with purchasing consumer goods, has seeped into just about every corner of our lives. Even holidays – our cultural traditions that are about celebration and togetherness – have become multi-billion-dollar industries, with consumption (like buying gifts or decorations) now being a condition for participation. After all, it is impossible to celebrate Halloween without at least buying a pumpkin! In this sense, we can see how holidays like Halloween have become commodified, or turned into objects of consumption.

Karl Marx, who is often referred to as a “founder” of sociology and who wrote extensively about capitalism, argued that commodification is part of the core “logic” of capitalism. Under this capitalist logic, or way of understanding the world, we come to see things like friendship, holidays, and love as objects available for purchase – in the form of a friendship bracelet, a Christmas gift, or an engagement ring. For example, rather than love simply being valued in and of itself, society and advertisements tell us that love is something you must express by buying something nice for your partner. Sociologists and other scholars have examined this trend of commodification through various parts of society; including government and the policies are enacted by legislators. Starting in the 1970s, many governments across the world decided to privatize formerly government-run services (e.g. health care, public housing, or assisted living for the elderly), effectively turning those services into objects of consumption rather than services that all citizens are entitled to.

The idea behind these changes was that private companies and unrestricted markets are best suited to provide social welfare, and that it would generate economic growth to turn those necessary services into something available for purchase. Scholars have defined this free market-based approach to government as “neoliberalism,” and its impacts are seen on both international, national, and local levels. In the U.S., the criminal justice system has been the target of several neoliberal policies. As the prison population began to dramatically increase in the 1980s (with the mass incarceration resulting from the “War on Drugs” and general “law and order” politics), states and the federal government had to deal with the increased cost associated with booming incarceration. To address the issue of increased public spending on incarceration, the prison system was transformed to allow private companies to build and manage prisons for profit.

More recently, there has also been an increase in the number of privatized immigration detention centers, where undocumented immigrants are held while they await being processed through the immigration system. Given that the private companies who build and maintain prisons or detention centers rely on their profitability, these companies’ cost-savings have been related to a number of safety and quality concerns inside of their facilities. In addition, they are often allowed to operate with little government oversight or regulation. To further decrease public spending on prisons, many states decided to entirely shift the financial burden of paying for imprisonment from taxpayer funds and onto the incarcerated individuals themselves. These states enacted so-called “pay-to-stay” policies, whereby prisoners are charged for room, board, medical attention, and other service-specific fees for the entire or partial duration of their imprisonment.

As opposed to fines or restitution, which are intended to punish criminals or to compensate victims of a crime, the purpose of these “user fees” is to increase revenue from the prison system. These costs can range anywhere from a \$12 fee to be booked into county jail, to being court-ordered to reimburse the state for the full per-capita cost of transportation, room and board, clothing, security, medical expenses, and even the educational programs available inside of the prison.

In a recently published article in *Sociological Forum*, authors Brittany Friedman, April D. Fernandes, and Gabriela Kirk examine more closely how these pay-to-stay policies relate to the overall neoliberal turn of the criminal justice system. Using data from a wide collection of legal documents from the state of Illinois, they explore how pay-to-stay policies are justified and framed by lawmakers. They show that pay-to-stay policies demonstrate a neoliberal adaptation of consumerism, turning incarceration into a commodity that the consumer (i.e. the incarcerated) must pay for.

They write that this “consumer logic is thought to eliminate the free rider problem because it prescribes that incarcerated people must pay back the state for having to incapacitate them in the first place” (752), as lawmakers have framed it as unfair that taxpayers must bear the cost of incarceration. As such, “paying for a crime” is not just metaphorical, in terms of the time someone has to serve in prison and the relinquishment of rights that comes with that. More literally, prisoners also have to pay for their crime. Much like beauty products and Halloween pumpkins, then, imprisonment in our neoliberal capitalist society has become a commodity – an object to be purchased. The difference is that the latter is driven not by free will, but by force.

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PERSPECTIVES

PANDEMIC BABY BOOMS

Paper 1: Sociological theories of social change.

Paper 2: Population size, growth, composition and distribution.

There was speculation as to whether the coronavirus would lead to a baby boom, the premise being that people are home more than usual because of the pandemic, which could lead to an increase in baby-making activity. It was also thought that regular access to contraception might be interrupted. However, at the time, sociologist Philip Cohen predicted a baby boom was highly unlikely, offering this explanation: “So even if a few people accidentally or on purpose decide to have a baby now, they will probably be outnumbered by the lost births from people meeting less, having sex with non-residential partners less and deciding now is not a good time.”

In the same article, historian Stephanie Coontz agreed a baby boom was unlikely, noting that people tend to postpone having children when they are insecure about the future. Coontz stated: “Birth rates generally fall during recessions and depression, and since this pandemic is causing serious and likely long-lasting economic hardship, I don’t expect many people to try for a child.” Economists Melissa Kearney and Phillip Levine confidently predicted a baby boom was unlikely to occur.

For a comparison, they pointed to the Great Recession, which led to a significant decline in birth rates. There were higher declines of birth rates in states where the recession was more severe. For another comparison, they mention the 1918 Spanish Flu, during which there was a significant decline in births. “Each spike in the Spanish Flu epidemic led the birth rate to fall roughly 21 births per 1,000 population,” they wrote. In forecasting the possible impact of COVID on fertility, their analysis suggests a decline in births in the range of 300,000 to 500,000 in 2021. This takes into account not only economic hardships endured during the pandemic, but also social distancing norms, and anxiety about an uncertain future. Their conclusion: “There will be a COVID-19 baby bust.”

In July, the question of baby boom or baby bust was addressed in *Psychology Today*. Excellent points were made about concerns regarding medical care, as well as fears about hospital environments during a pandemic. Understandably, people might wait to have children until a time when prenatal care is safer and when there would be less worry about a shortage of medical professionals and medical supply. In the conclusion to this article, it was predicted that a baby boom is highly unlikely, but that we needed to take into consideration several factors, including how long the pandemic would last, how serious the economic problems would be, and if supply chains for contraception would be impacted.

By October, all indications were that a baby boom wasn't happening. Forbes pointed out that fertility in the United States is in decline, recently being at its lowest rate in 35 years. A sociological explanation in this article is that women are more burdened than usual in the pandemic with childcare and household labor.

With many schools turning to remote education, women have taken on much of the extra work of helping their children with schoolwork and caring for them at home, all while trying to stay in the paid workforce. In an article that explores the enormous burden that women experience, sociologist Jessica Calarco explains that women build and maintain safety nets in the absence of help from state and federal policymakers. She writes: “When women do the work of the welfare state, it comes with a cost for women’s well-being, women’s relationships, and women’s careers.”

Given the economic uncertainty presented by the pandemic, the general challenges faced by families and the disproportionate stress on women, it makes sense a baby boom wouldn’t happen during the COVID pandemic. An article in Time features a graphic with an all caps BABY BUST showing that if one wants to see a baby boom, we have to look back to when the baby boom occurred—1946 to 1964. There hasn’t been a baby boom since.

Keep in mind the birth control pill wasn’t approved by the FDA for contraceptive use until 1960. Since then, increased access to various forms of effective contraception has been a factor in declining birth rates. We can also consider the Millennial generation who currently is in the main age range for having children (ages 24-39). Major life events for Millennials have been delayed by the Great Recession. One of those milestones is having children. As of 2018, according to Pew Research Center, approximately 19 million Millennial women had given birth: “This amounts to more than half (55%) of all Millennial women, smaller than the shares of previous generations of women who had given birth at a comparable age.” It’s noted that many women become first-time mothers in their 40s.

Depending on the choices that Millennials make about having children, “we’re looking at a fundamental and unprecedented change to our population,” says demographer Dowell Myers in the aforementioned Time article. It was tempting to think there might be a pandemic baby boom. But the reality is that it’s not going to happen in the United States. Demographer Alison Gemmill addresses the subject this way: “People like this idea that people are stuck inside, they’re not going to have much to do. But people will use methods to prevent pregnancy. People that do want kids, I think they’re going to postpone.” Nearly a year into the pandemic, companies recognize the baby bust means there will be less demand for baby formula and diapers.

As for the contraception supply chain, it has been disrupted, as reported by Anna Louie Sussman, and is impacting access in lower-income countries. For example, there was a container with 50,000 IUDs being shipped to Iran that was held in a Dubai port for nearly three months. Constraints on access to contraception, and restrictions to health services, is especially a concern in poorer countries. As the pandemic continues into 2021, it’s possible that unintended pregnancies will increase in poorer countries, something that’s not expected to occur in wealthier countries such as the United States.

POWER OF RELIGION

Paper 1: Emile Durkheim

Paper 1: Religion and Society

Religion has always captivated sociologists. Émile Durkheim, who is often credited with being one of the “founders” of sociology, wrote extensively about religion in his 1912 book *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in which he aimed to explain the role of religion in society. Writing from a functionalist perspective, Durkheim posited that religion served an important function. Religion, he argued, serves the purpose of producing societal cohesion and expressing our “collective consciousness,” or our shared beliefs and ideas as a group. As such, societal participation in religion can have significant impacts on both social and individual life outcomes.

For example, in Durkheim’s famous study of suicide, he concluded that religions that place heightened importance on the collective produce higher social integration – and lower rates of suicide – among their members. On the other hand, religions that allow for more individual freedom and are less reliant on collective practices produce lower levels of social integration, leading to higher risk of suicide among those members. Along these same lines, more recent research has found that church attendance is associated with various positive outcomes, such as reduced risk of depression and overall physical well-being. Much like Durkheim, a study conducted by Rita Law and David Sbarra (2009: 817) concludes that “going to church on a regular basis is a type of shared spiritual activity, which has the potential of communicating a shared meaning system and promoting a sense of purpose in life.”

This idea that religion produces social cohesion and integration in society can seem a far cry from what is taking place in U.S. society today, where societal divides are flourishing – not least because of religious differences. While religion and religious activity may create strong cohesion within smaller, religious circles, the societal-level gap in religiosity is only widening; a phenomenon referred to by researchers as “religious polarization.” Trends show that religiosity is declining in the U.S. overall, with factions previously identifying as moderately religious instead becoming increasingly secular. At the same time, religiosity remains strong among groups that are highly committed, resulting in two separate poles of religious commitment (one with lack of commitment, and one with high commitment) with little room for moderate religious commitment in between.

According to a Pew Research Center report from 2019, these trends are particularly true for Christianity, which has seen an overall 12 percentage point decline in affiliation over the past decade. Culturally, this polarization has severe consequences. Since religiosity is strongly correlated with views on various cultural issues (such as abortion and same-sex marriage), this religious divide in turn produces a hotbed of cultural divides. Nothing has put these cultural divides on display as starkly as Donald Trump’s candidacy for President in 2020 and the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th. While one can undoubtedly find Trump supporters among all demographic groups in the U.S., one demographic in particular has become an increasingly significant stronghold for Trump support: white evangelicals. Within white evangelical circles, high levels of religious commitment and extreme support for Donald Trump have become fused into one, creating a “potent mix of grievance and religious fervor.” Scholars have named this fusing of religious ideology with support for Donald Trump’s far-right politics “Christian nationalism,” a set of beliefs based in the “Old Testament” that emphasize the apocalypse and the need to maintain cultural and racial/ethnic purity through war.

Demonstrating this connection, Trump's candidacy relied heavily on notions of the U.S. losing its Christian heritage and his campaign sought to restore the U.S. as a Christian nation. Moreover, Christian nationalism has been linked to racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, anti-Muslim sentiment, and attitudes opposing gender equality, gay rights, and welfare spending; all issues that the Trump campaign leaned into. As Durkheim described more than a century ago, this growing societal divide in the U.S. has proven religion to be a powerful force in society. While Durkheim emphasized the communal nature of religion and research has studied the effects of religious attendance, many adherents of Christian nationalism are actually unconnected to churches or religious groups, instead practicing independently on their own.

In a recently published article in *Sociological Forum*, authors Samuel Stroope, Paul Froese, Heather M. Rackin, and Jack Delehanty investigate this exact question. Examining data from the election in 2016, they find that Christian nationalism is significantly associated with Trump support among only non-churchgoing voters. Surprisingly, this shows that the political power in Christian nationalist ideology is actually strongest when its adherents are detached from traditional religious institutions. As such, the authors argue that the appeal of Christian nationalism is not necessarily based in religious practice and scriptural knowledge, but rather as a form of cultural identity and worldview that individuals use to navigate their daily lives.

In many ways, these findings about Christian nationalism speak to Durkheim's contention that religion serves an important role in society by providing individuals with a sense of collective belonging. As churchgoing continues to decline, religiously infused cultural ideologies (such as Christian nationalism) that allow for people to envision a "shared cultural identity" seem to be replacing more traditional forms of religion. And, to be sure, this trend will keep impacting U.S. politics in significant ways.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

Paper 1: Max Weber - Verstehen

Paper 1: Stratification

It is very easy to fear what we don't understand, and it is also easy to fear people who seem to be different from us. Our language enables this: the previous sentence contains the words “we” and “us,” suggesting that “they” and “them” are another group. As Peter Kaufman wrote two years ago, there is a danger in “othering” people that can mask our similarities. People who identify as transgender get placed into the “other” category often, largely because many people don't understand what it means to identify as any gender other than the one assigned at birth. When I came of age in the late twentieth century, I knew of no one who openly expressed gender identity issues—of course, that doesn't mean no one I knew had these issues, just that they were hidden.

The concept of identifying as transgender was new to me, just as it was for many people. As sociologists, we strive to better understand people from their perspective. Sociologist Max Weber's concept *verstehen* calls upon us to use research for the purpose of understanding people we study. This has led me to begin to read the growing body of sociological research on how people who identify as transgender come to this realization. Sociologist Arlene Stein interviewed FTM (female to male) patients who were undergoing “top surgery” for her book *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity*. We learn about the young adults she met arrived at the decision to have surgery, as well as their journeys with gender identity during their lives.

Most do not fit the narrative of feeling trapped in the wrong body their whole lives, but instead arrive upon their transgender identity gradually, sometimes after years of trying to figure out where they fit on the gender and sexuality spectrum. She also interviews family and friends for many of her main informants; the journey is theirs as well, as parents and partners come to terms with the identity shift of a loved one. Ben, one of Stein's central interviewees, had the support of his parents during the top surgery, and they traveled from Maine to Florida and helped care for him in recovery. Both of Ben's parents spoke to Stein, and detailed the struggle they each went through to accept Ben's decision to transition from female to male, his father coming along more slowly than his mother at first.

Stein's book teaches us that the transition is not just physical but social, and that the people in the trans person's life also go through a transition, often dealing with a sense of loss and confusion. Ben's younger brother, Chris, had a hard time grappling with the identity shift. He told Stein he felt the loss of a sister he felt close to and wondered if he really knew her at all if she wasn't who he thought she was. We learn from follow-up interviews after the top surgery that for some of the respondents, their notions of gender remain fluid afterwards, and in some cases they don't feel entirely male or female. These experiences teach us about the fluidity of meanings of gender that cannot be resolved by one's outward appearance alone.

Transgender men can also be useful informants about gender and work. One of Stein's informants, Parker, talks about how one male co-worker seemed to become especially competitive with him after his transition. Sociologist Kristin Schilt studied gender inequality on the job, interviewing trans gender men for her book *Just One of the Guys? Transgender Men and the Persistence of Inequality*.

Whether to be out as transgender or “stealth”—not revealing one’s transgender status—is an issue transgender people face in a number of social settings. While in some workplace settings being out is widely accepted; Stein’s interviewee Ben worked as an activist for LGBT issues and was in a safe space to reveal such information. Other situations might not be as amenable for self-disclosure. Although transgender issues occasionally make the news, they are often presented through the lens of fear rather than understanding. This is especially the case with concerns about public restrooms. We learn from Stein’s interviewees that bathrooms are an especially scary place for them, and they fear victimization in the men’s room or dirty looks in the women’s bathroom. As the cliché goes, “they” are more afraid of “us” than “we” are of “them.”

Perhaps as more people meet someone who is out as transgender, the “othering” will subside, as it has in many contexts for people who are lesbian or gay. Perhaps parents of a transgender child will have a roadmap for guiding their kids through the process, as someone I know is grappling with now with her teenage child. In the meantime, we can apply Weber’s concept of *verstehen* to better understand those among us. Here are a couple of many videos to begin the process

FOOTBALL FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS.

Paper 1: Scope of sociology

Paper 2: Politics and Society

FIFA World Cup 2022 is around the corner. Sociology is intertwined with the life of the people, so does football. In this column, we bring Andrew Guest's article on "Watching the World cup through sociological lenses. The 2010 World Cup in South Africa, as the first World Cup hosted in sub-Saharan Africa, became a forum for discussions about development and division—soccer's global governing body FIFA trademarked the phrase "Celebrate Africa's Humanity" as if there was something singular and unified about the humanity of that diverse continent. The 2014 World Cup in Brazil, particularly after massive 2013 street protests surrounding the Confederations Cup warm-up tournament, became about corruption and inequality. There are still regular news briefs about "white elephant" sporting facilities from both Brazil's World Cup and the 2016 Rio Olympics—emblems of bread, circus, and massive profits for well-positioned elites. The 2018 World Cup cultivated narratives about hooliganism and racism that pervade an unfortunate proportion of the soccer landscape in Russia, while the 2022 World Cup in Qatar is already rife with attention to worker's rights and religious tolerance.

During the month-long tournament itself, attention often shifts to narratives about the nations and identities represented through competition. As the British cultural historian Eric Hobsbawn famously (among soccer scholars) noted, "the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people." The start of a World Cup match, with eleven men from each side donning national colors and saluting their flag, is a powerful visual image of nationhood. But, like many such visual representations of identity, it is also often inaccurate.

For one, the simple fact that the players who get the most global attention are men, despite the athletic accomplishments on display in the women's World Cup, only starts to hint at the many questions about gender, masculinity, and sexuality embedded in global soccer. In addition, World Cup teams often visually present complex stories about race, class, and ethnicity—stories that vary by nation from the relative homogeneity of the Russian national team to the sometimes surprising diversity of teams such as Belgium. The complexity of these narratives and the emotional nationalism of the World Cup is reflected in a final addendum to the Šimunić story. Since his banishment from the 2014 World Cup, and in a quest for exoneration, Šimunić collaborated on a documentary film titled *Moja Vlojena Hrvatska—My Beloved Croatia*—that argues his moment of nationalist fervor was an embodiment of noble pride rather than a hateful screed.

The English language trailer for the film begins with the claim “Soccer, to Croats, is much more than just a game” and segues into interviews with Croatian World Cup players talking wistfully about the patriotic feelings of playing for their national team. Even Šimunić's father, the Australian emigree, makes a tearful appearance describing his pride at seeing Josip in the distinctive red checked uniform of the Croatian national team. It is, ultimately, an emotional jumble of personal concerns and public issues of the type that sociologists love to dissect and the World Cup seems ever-primed to provide. To really watch the World Cup, a more humble Šimunić might say, “some people have to learn some sociology.

ANN OAKLEY



- Ann Rosamund Oakley (born 17 January 1944) is a British sociologist, feminist, and writer. She is professor and founder-director of the Social Science Research.
- Ann Oakley's research was conducted at a time when sexism was not a widely recognised concept. Oakley, a feminist, desired for changes to be brought about regarding women's position.
- She is best known for her work on sex and gender, housework, childbirth and social science.
- Notable Works : The Men's Room (Adapted for BBC television)



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