SO101—Introduction to Sociology I

Study Guide - Week 4

Hi there!

Every week, you will find a study guide like this one that should help to make your life a little easier as you progress through this course. Contained within the study guides are tips on completing the discussions and written assignments, links to helpful websites relevant to that week's material, and notes from the readings. We hope that you find these study guides worthwhile and helpful!

Week 4 Objectives:

During Week Four, you will learn about social groups, including the various types of these groups. You will also explore the specifics of a social network as well as study the five core societal institutions: family, religion, education, politics, and economics.

Upon successful completion of this Lesson, the student will be able to:

•**Identify principles at work in social interaction, groups, bureaucracy, and social structure.**

Please be sure to utilize the "My Notes" section to organize your thoughts with regard to what is the most important information within the lecture that is being imparted. Focus on factual information relevant to each discussion topic.

Reading Assignment and Lecture Key Points:

For a more complete review of the reading/lecture this week, please go under "Lessons," go to Week Four, and click on the reading/lecture links for the week.

A **social group** consists of two or more people who interact with one another and who share a common identity, a sense of belonging or "we-ness." Friends, families, work groups, religious congregations, clubs, athletic teams, and organizations are all examples of social groups. Each of us is a member of many groups simultaneously.

Now we need to discuss the **different types of groups**.

- A **primary group** is a relatively small group of people who engage in intimate face-to-face interaction over an extended period of time.

- A **secondary group** is usually a large, formal, impersonal, and temporary collection of people that pursues a specific goal or activity. Unlike primary groups, secondary groups are usually highly structured with rules and regulations. Primary groups meet our expressive (emotional) needs while secondary groups focus on instrumental (task-oriented) needs.
- **In-groups** and **out-groups** determine who to relate to in groups.
  - Members of an in-group share a sense of identity and "we-ness" that typically excludes and devalues outsiders.
  - Out-groups are people who are viewed and treated negatively because they are seen as having values, beliefs, and other characteristics different from one's own.
    - For example an out-group might be obese and overweight people. They often have negative self-concepts due to others thinking they are lazy. In-groups cohesion can create positive outcomes for an individual. However in-group/out-group hostilities can also fuel conflict such as the Palestinian-Israeli battles over the occupation of the West Bank, the eviction of white farmers in South Africa, and ongoing civil wars in some African nations.

A **social network** is a web of social ties that links an individual to others. A social network may contain a group as small as three people to millions. Groups exist within the context of larger social units, such as social networks.

An **institution** is defined as all the norms, statuses, and roles that meet one or more of a society's basic needs.

The five core institutions include the family, economy, political, religions, and education. Institutions contain systems of beliefs, values, and norms that govern individuals, groups, and organizations that ensure a society's survival. Institutions are linked to one another.

1. The family replaces people in a society through procreation, socializes its members, raises children, and legitimizes sexual activity between adults.
2. The economy organizes a society's development, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
3. The political institution maintains law and order, passes legislation, and forms military groups for internal and external defense.
4. Education socializes people, transmits knowledge, and provides information and training for jobs and other work-related activities.
5. Religion encompasses beliefs and practices that provide a sense of meaning and purpose related to the afterlife.

W4 Discussion "Milgram Study"

Chapter 6 began with information about groups' different social groups. In this discussion forum please address the following questions:

- Describe how Milgram's study illustrates social groups.
- How do you think this type of study has impacted how social scientists research this type of human behavior?
- Do you think this type of research should be done?
- Why or why not?

Consider the following:

For this discussion question, you are being asked to examine Stanley Milgram's study closely in relation to social groups and to apply his research to various concepts in sociology, including its impact on how social scientists conduct research on human behavior and the ethics involved in the experiment. See the information earlier in this study guide for a review of social groups.

To be able to answer this discussion question, it is important to familiarize yourself more fully with Milgram's study. The excerpt below comes from **Chapter Six** in your textbook:

Milgram's Research

In a well-known laboratory experiment on obedience, psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1965) asked 40 volunteers to administer electric shocks to other study participants. In each experimental trial, one participant was a "teacher" and the other a "learner," one of Milgram's accomplices. The teachers were businessmen, professionals, and blue-collar workers.

The learner was strapped into a realistic-looking chair that supposedly regulated electric currents. The learner was not actually receiving a shock but was told to fake pain and fear. The teacher read aloud pairs of words that the learner had to memorize. Whenever the learner gave a wrong answer, the teacher was told to apply an electric shock from a low of 15 volts to a high of 450 volts. When the learners shrieked in pain, the majority of the teachers, although distressed, obeyed the study supervisor and administered the shocks when told to do so.

Milgram's study was controversial. Ordering electric shocks raised numerous ethical questions about the participants' suffering extreme emotional stress. However, the results showed that an astonishingly large proportion of the participants obeyed an authority figure's instructions to inflict pain on others.

It is important to note here that although **no electric shocks were given** in reality, the participants deemed the "teachers" thought that, indeed, their "students" were receiving a shock that they (the "teachers") administered. The point was to see just how far a person would go in their **obedience** to someone in power, namely the person in charge of the experiment, who directed the "teachers" to administer the shocks. Therefore, the

ethical issue is not that physical pain was endured but that **emotional distress may have occurred on the parts of the "teachers" who thought that they were hurting their "students."**

For a more in-depth review of this study, please click on the links below:

http://www.stanleymilgram.com/milgram.php

http://www.muskingum.edu/~psych/psycweb/history/milgram.htm

W4 Assignment "Ideal Bureaucracies"

The textbook describes Weber's ideal characteristics of bureaucracy. There are also eight shortcomings listed in the textbook.

Consider the bureaucracies that you come in contact with (college, work, IRS, medical offices, or the Post Office).

Pick **one** bureaucracy and create a 1000 word, APA style paper. In your paper describe the following:

- How did you come in contact with the bureaucracy?
- What shortcomings do you see in the bureaucracy? (Select and provide evidence of at least two shortcomings)
- How would you resolve the shortcomings mentioned?
- Do social group memberships give some individuals an advantage when navigating this bureaucracy?

Please attempt to cite your sources using APA formatting.

Consider the following:

The information below comes from **Chapter Six** in your textbook and is what you should be referring to while writing your paper. Remember that you will need to come up with **two separate shortcomings** (from the eight listed below) that apply to the bureaucracy that you have chosen as well as ideas as to **how to resolve these shortcomings**. If you need to re-familiarize yourself with the various types of social groups (see the last listed requirement for the paper), then scroll up within this study guide to review the social group information.

A **bureaucracy** is a formal organization that is designed to accomplish goals and tasks by large numbers of people in the most efficient and rational way possible.

Ideal Characteristics of Bureaucracies

Max Weber (1925/1947) identified six key characteristics of the ideal type of bureaucracy. Remember that ideal types describe abstract traits rather than those that fit any specific organization. In Weber's model, the following characteristics describe what an efficient and productive bureaucracy *should* be like:

- ***High degree of division of labor and specialization***. Individuals who work in the bureaucracy perform very specific tasks.
- ***Hierarchy of authority.*** Workers are arranged in a hierarchy in which each person is supervised by someone in a higher position. The resulting pyramids—often presented in organizational charts—show who has authority over whom and who is responsible to whom. Thus, there is a chain of command, stretching from top to bottom, that coordinates decision making.
- ***Explicit written rules and regulations.*** Detailed written rules and regulations cover almost every possible kind of situation and problem that might arise. They address a variety of issues, including hiring, firing, salary scales, rules for sick pay and absences, and everyday operations. If a person has a question, usually all she or he has to do is look up the answer.
- ***Impersonality.*** There is no place in a bureaucracy for personal likes or dislikes or tantrums. Instead, employees are expected to follow the rules, to get the work done, and to behave professionally. An impersonal workplace in which all employees are treated equally minimizes conflict and favoritism and increases efficiency.
- ***Qualifications-based employment***. People are hired based on objective criteria such as skills, education, experience, and scores on standardized tests. If workers perform well and have the necessary credentials and technical competence, they'll move up the career ladder.
- ***Separation of work and ownership***. Neither managers nor employees own the offices they work in, the desks they sit at, the technology they use, or the products that they assemble, invent, or design.

For Weber, all of these characteristics produce an efficient and rational bureaucracy. A "rational matter-of-factness," he maintained, made bureaucracies more productive by "eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements" (Weber 1946: 216). Weber viewed bureaucracies as superior to other forms of organization because they're more efficient and predictable. He worried, however, that bureaucracies could become "iron cages" because people become trapped in them, "their basic humanity denied."

Shortcomings of Bureaucracies

Weber described the ideal characteristics of a productive and efficient bureaucracy, but what's the reality? As you read through the following list of problems, think about the ones you've experienced while working in a bureaucracy or dealing with one.

- *Weak reward systems* reduce the motivation to do a good job and are thus a major source of inefficiency and lack of innovation (Barton 1980). Besides low wages or salaries, weak reward systems include few or no health benefits, little recognition, unsafe equipment and work environments, and few incentives to be creative.
- *Rigid rules* discourage creativity and can result in **goal displacement**, a preoccupation with rules and regulations rather than achieving the organization's objectives (Merton 1968). Instead of questioning whether all the red tape is really necessary, bureaucrats are usually more concerned that people follow established procedures because "we've always done it this way."

- ***Rigid rules and goal displacement often lead to* alienation,** a feeling of isolation, meaninglessness, and powerlessness. When people are reduced to a "small cog," they feel dehumanized. Alienation—at all levels—may result in high turnover, tardiness, absenteeism, stealing, sabotage, stress, health problems, and in some cases, whistle-blowing (reporting organizational misconduct to legal authorities).

- *Communication problems* are common in bureaucracies. Because communication typically flows down rather than up the hierarchy, employees (and many managers below the highest echelons) rarely know what's going on. Supervisors and their subordinates may be reluctant to discuss problems or offer suggestions for fear of being criticized, demoted, or fired. Those at the top often make ill-informed decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information, as illustrated by group-think (Blau and Meyer 1987; Fletcher and Tap-lin 2002).
- *Parkinson's Law* is the idea that work expands to fill the time available for its completion (Parkinson 1962). This means that even if employees finish an assigned task before the deadline, they'll look busy and act as though they're still working on the task to safeguard their jobs or avoid getting another assignment. Parkinson's Law also explains a bureaucracy's tendency to keep getting larger. Managers, wanting to appear busy, increase their workload by creating rules and forms. They then hire assistants, who in turn require more supervision and paper work. There is also an incentive to spend (even waste) as much money as possible to guarantee an ever-increasing budget and hiring even more people.
- A related idea, the *Peter Principle*, proposes that workers are promoted until they reach their level of incompetence (Peter and Hull 1969). In many bureaucracies, employees who perform well are promoted to the next level, usually to administrative positions. Thus, project directors become managers, teachers become principals, and nurses become hospital administrators. Sooner or later, those promoted find themselves in positions for which they lack sufficient knowledge, training, competence, or experience.

- The *iron law of oligarchy* is the tendency of a bureaucracy to become increasingly dominated by a small group of people (Michels 1911/1949). A handful of people can control and rule a bureaucracy because the top officials and leaders monopolize information and resources. As a result, those at the top maintain their power and privilege.
- The cumulative effect of these and other bureaucratic dysfunctions can result in *dehumanization* because weak reward systems, rigid rules, and other shortcomings limit organizational creativity and freedom. As a result, work becomes more automated and impersonal.

Your teacher also asked that you try to do **APA formatting** for your paper. For APA formatting, you will need a title page, a reference page (you should at least have your textbook listed as a source), a 12-point Times New Roman font, double spacing, in-text citations, a running head, numbered pages, etc. Grantham has great information on APA formatting. To find it, click on your "Courses" button, click on the Writing Center, and then scroll down on that first page until you see "GU APA Guide" and "GU APA Template." Click on those links to find the information on APA formatting and to see what your paper should look like.

Please don't forget that **only the body of the essay counts towards the 1000-word count** requirement. This means that neither the title page nor the reference page should be included in your word count.

W4 Midterm

The midterm for this class consists of **twenty multiple-choice questions** that cover the information in **Chapters 1 through 6**. You **may use your textbook** while taking this exam, so please be sure to have it handy!

APA Formatting:

https://content.grantham.edu/at/SALC/APA_Guide_with_glossary_(Grantham_University_2012).pdf

Sites that cover information on social groups:

http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Groups.php

http://www.tomcravens.com/groups.html

http://www.wiziq.com/tutorial/140329-Types-of-Social-Group

Sites that cover information on social networks:

http://www.wiziq.com/tutorial/140329-Types-of-Social-Group

http://socialnetworking.lovetoknow.com/What_Types_of_Social_Networks_Exist

Sites that cover information on societal institutions:

http://www.thesocialleader.com/2009/12/7-major-societal-institutions-roles/

http://sparkcharts.sparknotes.com/gensci/sociology/section9.php