

SOC 347

CHAPTER 8

**Does the Individual Really Make a  
Difference?**

# Learning Objectives

- Social change
- The individual versus society
- Social influence
- Social power
- Social conflict
- Social trends
- Rationalization of life

# Questions

Why do couples marry?

What evidence can you find that society guides the feeling we call “love”?

# Sociology

- focus on power of society
- social forces
- social patterns

# INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE

- individual does have some control
- ability to think and act

## Limitations

- social context
- social roles
- class, race
- culture

# IMPACT ON OTHERS

## 1. Difficulty on measuring influence

- teachers' influence exaggerated
- people forget what's been taught
- simultaneous influences from family, friends, media
- potential for harm (unintentionally)
- unintentional influence
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# IMPACT ON OTHERS

## 2. Larger social context

- social context determines influence
- influence has to be cultural specific or appropriate
- influence greater when others are ready and interested

# INDIVIDUAL VERSUS LARGER SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

## 1. Rigid social patterns

- “organized” way of doing things
- ranked positions
- culturally produced shared beliefs
- long established procedures (e.g. marriage)
- attempts to change dominant social patterns resisted

## 2. “Powerful” individual can impact social patterns

- change can occur within the bounds of social patterns (Civil Rights)
- minor changes within existing patterns
- Presidents, Actors, Religious leaders
- Revolutionary heroes with large numbers
- Revolutionaries who overthrow the system quickly re-create the same social patterns

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL POWER

- Ideas can be challenged with power
- those with high positions
- those attractive, charismatic, wealthy, intelligent can initiate changes
- those able to mobilize the masses (quite effective)
- parents have great power over children\*\* (most effective influence)

# Problem

- those with most power do not want to change the system
- those defending social patterns have greater power

# SOCIAL CHANGE PRINCIPLES

## 1. Change is inherent in all social organizations

- size, age, environment, urbanization affect change
- technology (computers, communication) accelerate change

# **SOCIAL CHANGE PRINCIPLES**

## **2. Change from social conflict**

- change occurs when others are willing to fight
- civil rights movement, labor unions, anti-war groups, feminists, animal rights, environmentalists
- But others also fight to keep the established order

# **SOCIAL CHANGE PRINCIPLES**

## **3. Change occurs when the social context favors it**

- society is ready for change
- new ideas build on old
- ideas depend on willing adherents
- charismatic (sales men and women) arise when the old is not functioning well

# **SOCIAL CHANGE PRINCIPLES**

## **4. Most lasting change result from Social Trends**

- change arising from actions of many individuals
- acting in similar ways produce a cumulative effect
- trends have inertia—take on a life of their own

# **SOCIAL CHANGE PRINCIPLES**

## **5. Social Patterns persist**

- strong tendency for social patterns to hold
- social patterns create social inequality
- powerful and privileged fight to keep the system
- new members are socialized into patterns
- the past acts as a force for right

# IMPLICATIONS

- search for truth rather than tradition and ignorance
- careful about “truths” taught through culture
- individuals have little influence when there is a power base and the social context is favorable

# Implications

- Social conflict and social trends are more powerful in influencing society
- Individuals have most power to influence within their relationships (parents over children)

# Implications

- need to balance anger over injustice with realistic expectations
- to be a change catalyst—you must be willing to fight those who benefit from existing social patterns