Social Structure and Society
Social Structure and Status

The underlying pattern of social relationships in a group is called **social structure**.

- Status is one very important element of social structure. **Status** is a position a person occupies within a social structure.

- Status helps us define who and what we are in relation to others within the same social structure.

- Sociologists are interested in the relationships among social statuses.
Everyone Has Status

- Social statuses do not exist in isolation.
- All statuses are interrelated with other statuses.
What is an ascribed status?

- **Ascribed status** is neither earned nor chosen; it is assigned to us.

- At birth, an infant is either male or female. We do not choose our gender.

- Age is another example of an ascribed social status.

- In some societies, religion and social class are ascribed by the family of birth. If you were born into a lower-class home in India, for example, you would not be permitted to rise to a higher social class.
How is status achieved?

- **Achieved status** is possible where people have some degree of control and choice.

- In most modern societies, an individual can decide to become a spouse or a parent.

- Occupations are also achieved statuses in modern societies where people have freedom to choose their work.
What is a status set?

A **status set** is all of the statuses that a person occupies at any particular time.
Are all of a person’s statuses equal?

- **Master statuses** are important because they influence most other aspects of the person’s life.

- In industrial societies, occupations—achieved, for the most part—are master statuses because your occupation strongly influences such matters as where you live, how well you live, and how long you live.

- Age, gender, race, and ethnicity are examples of ascribed master statuses because they significantly affect the likelihood of achieving other social statuses.
Match the definition with the type of status (a-d) it best describes.

1. wife, mother, author, church choir director  
   - d ascribed status

2. electrician, spouse  
   - b achieved status

3. the presidency of the United States, professional athlete  
   - c master status

4. sex, gender, race  
   - a ascribed status

5. daughter, son  
   - a ascribed status

6. quarterback, coach, fan, trainer  
   - d status set
Social Structure and Roles

- People interact according to prescribed roles, which carry certain rights and obligations.

- Sometimes conflict or strain occurs when an individual has too many roles to play.

- **Rights** are behaviors that individuals expect from others. **Obligations** are behaviors that individuals are expected to perform toward others.
Role performance is the actual conduct, or behavior, involved in carrying out (or performing) a role.

Role performance can occur without an audience (as when a student studies alone for a test).

Most role performance involves social interaction.

Social interaction is the process of influencing each other as people relate.

If statuses are like the parts in a play and roles are like the script, then social interaction represents the way actors respond to cues given by other actors.

Role performance is the performance itself.
How does play-acting differ from social interaction?

- The process of choosing the role and then acting it out occurs in nearly all instances of social interaction.

- Unlike stage performances, most real-life role performance occurs without planning.

- On the stage, there is a programmed and predictable relationship between cues and responses. In life, we can choose our own cues and responses.

- The range of responses is not limitless—only certain responses are culturally acceptable.
Links between Culture and Social Structure

Sociologists concentrate on the study of social structure.
Role Conflict and Role Strain

- **Role conflict** exists when the performance of a role in one status clashes with the performance of a role in another.

- **Role strain** occurs when a person has trouble meeting the many roles connected with a single status.
Match each situation below with the key term (a-e) it illustrates.

1. A husband and wife discuss the disciplining of one of their children.
2. A mother is expected to take care of her children.
3. A businessman has no time for his children.
4. A school principal hands out diplomas at a graduation ceremony.
5. A corporate chief executive officer is economically forced to terminate employees who are his friends.

-  1. A husband and wife discuss the disciplining of one of their children.  
   e. role

-  2. A mother is expected to take care of her children.  
   a. role

-  3. A businessman has no time for his children.  
   d. role strain

-  4. A school principal hands out diplomas at a graduation ceremony.  
   c. role performance

-  5. A corporate chief executive officer is economically forced to terminate employees who are his friends.  
   b. role conflict
   e. social interaction
Preindustrial Societies

Societies are classified as preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial.
Hunting and Gathering

- These societies survive by hunting animals and gathering edible foods.
- These societies are usually nomadic, and tend to be very small.
- The family is the only institution.
Horticultural Societies

- This type of society came into being when people learned they could grow and harvest certain plants instead of simply gathering them.
- The shift from hunting and gathering to horticulture, or gardening, led to more permanent settlements.
- Relative stability permitted the growth of multicommunity societies averaging one to two thousand people each.
- The family is very basic to social life.
Pastoral Societies

- Food is obtained primarily by raising and taking care of animals.
- There is more migration than in those based more fully on cultivation of land.
- These societies are male dominated.
- With a surplus of food supply, some members of the community are free to create a more complex division of labor.
- Because nonedible goods are produced, an incentive to trade with other peoples emerges.
Agricultural Societies

- **Agricultural societies** subsist by growing food, using plows and animals.
- Increased productivity allows people to engage in noneconomic activities.
- Cities can be built and occupations appear that are not directly tied to farming.
- Government replaces the family group as the guiding force.
Types of Societies

- **Preindustrial (continued)**
  - Agricultural farming
    - 6,000 years ago

- **Industrial**
  - Industrial England
    - 280 years ago

- **Postindustrial**
  - Mid-1950s to present
    - More than half of employed are in the service sector
Industrial and Postindustrial

- The Industrial Revolution created a new type of society called industrial society.

- An **industrial society** is one that depends on science and technology to produce its basic goods and services.

- Intensive animal and human labor is replaced by power-driven machines, a process known as **mechanization**.

- **Urbanization** is a basic feature of industrial societies.
What are Durkheim’s views?

- In societies in which the division of labor is simple, **mechanical solidarity** is the foundation for social unity.

- A society based on mechanical solidarity achieves social unity through a consensus of beliefs, values, and norms; strong social pressures for conformity; and dependence on tradition and family.
What are Durkheim’s views?

- Modern industrial society is based on **organic solidarity**.
- Members depend on a variety of people to meet their needs.
- If a biological organism composed of highly specialized parts is to survive, its parts must work together.
- Similarly, the parts of a society based on organic solidarity must cooperate if the society is to survive.
Some societies such as the United States have passed beyond industrial society into postindustrial society.

The economic emphasis is on providing services and information rather than on producing goods through basic manufacturing.
Five Features of a Postindustrial Society

1. The majority of the labor force are employed in services rather than in agriculture or manufacturing.

2. White-collar employment replaces much blue-collar work.

3. Technical knowledge is the key organizing feature.

4. Technological change is planned and assessed.

5. Reliance is on computer modeling in all areas.
Indicate whether each of the following is or is not a major feature of a postindustrial society.

_____ a. emphasis on technical knowledge
_____ b. employment of the majority of the labor force in service industries
_____ c. reliance on advanced technology
**is not** d. increased dependence on skilled blue-collar workers
_____ e. shift toward the employment of white-collar workers
Chapter Summary

- The underlying pattern of social relationships in a group is called social structure.
- Status is one very important element of social structure.
- People interact according to prescribed roles that carry certain rights and obligations.
- Preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial societies meet basic needs in different ways, greatly affecting culture and social structure.
- Transition from an industrial society to a postindustrial society has been linked to social instability.