

## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Express the relationship between one's beliefs and one's group memberships.
  - 2.1 Explain functionalist, conflict, and interactionist views on various social structures.

Course/Unit Learning Outcomes	Learning Activity
2.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 7 Chapter 8 Chapter 14, pp. 353-367 Unit VII Assignment

## Reading Assignment

**Chapter 7:** Families

**Chapter 8:** Education and Religion

**Chapter 14:** Population, Health, and Environment, pp. 353-367

## Unit Lesson

In Units V and VI, we have looked at the inequality that occurs in society. Part of our lessons and discussions in the past have also focused on how social structures influence a person's opportunity, and how social structures and socialization shape beliefs. In this unit, we are going to look at specific social institutions in society. Social institutions are at the core of how we view society and interact in society.

What is a social institution? A *social institution* is a group or structure that society uses as an organized entity to meet basic needs. The creation and maintenance of social structures occur in every society because without them there would be chaos and a breakdown in society. Some of the major institutions in society include family, education, economy, media, medicine (health care), politics, military, law, and science. Our readings for this unit cover family, religion, education, and health care. We are going to specifically focus on the social institutions of family, religion, and health care in this lesson.

### Family

One of the most important social institutions is family. Family can be defined various ways in society. The concept of family is socially constructed. You can create family through blood relations, friends, marriage, adoption, etc. Family as a social institution addresses basic needs such as socialization, youth protection, companionship, care for older family members, and regulation of population in a society. When looking at the structure of the family, we look at kinship patterns, types of families, and types of marriages. Kinship groups are simply groups of people that are related. This would include aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. You do not have to be blood related to be part of a kinship group. You can be adopted or related through marriage. Two types of families are the extended family and the nuclear family. The extended family contains members of the kinship group. The nuclear family is often defined as a married couple and their children. However, the definition of nuclear family can also be expanded. A nuclear family could contain a cohabitating couple and youth, a couple without children, or maybe grandparents raising a grandchild in

their home. The nuclear family is simply a group of people living under one roof working as a unit to meet those basic needs described earlier.

When discussing family, the topic of marriage is very central. Marriage plays an important part in the creation and maintenance of family. There have been shifting views of family and marriage over time. In addition, the views and traditions regarding marriage and family vary from culture to culture. Our textbook discusses some current trends in marriage in the United States. One very interesting point is that even though the United States has a high rate of divorce, marriage is still highly sought after by many Americans. Marriage can be viewed as a status symbol. It can also be viewed as an important part of religious faith or cultural values. Chapter 7 provided statistics on divorce in the United States. Witt (2018) discusses how first marriages that end typically lasted about eight years. Of course, there are many marriages that last a lot longer than eight years. The divorce statistics are affected by divorces occurring after second or third marriages. Witt (2018) noted that roughly 20 percent of adults have been divorced.

## Religion

Religion is an important social institution in society because it is weaved so heavily into the cultural values and norms in a society. Religion as a social institution offers people a place to share with others a belief system that addresses the afterlife and provides values to create a foundation for life on earth. Sociologists look at the function religion plays in society and the components that make up the social institution of religion. In the Chapter 8 reading, Witt (2018) lists the components of religion as beliefs, rituals, experience, and community. So regardless of the type of religion, the members are following a belief system, engaging in rituals to honor that faith, actively seeking experiences to deepen their connection to that faith, and seeking community with others to share the faith.

## Health Care

Health care is an important social issue in all societies. Health care can be viewed as a social institution falling under the larger social institution of government. It is a humanitarian issue and greatly affects the productivity and quality of life for people. Health care is a hot topic in the United States right now. There is a debate over how big of a role the U.S. government should play in health care and a debate about exactly what role the government should play in health care. Other debates surrounding the U.S. medical care system is the lack of competition, unwillingness for providers to cover certain procedures and conditions, and skyrocketing prescription drug prices. It is a good idea for us all to become as educated as possible on the topic of health care and review the different sides because it is such a complex issue. The CSU Online Library has a great research database called *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. It is recommended to visit this database and search the topic of health care. You will be able to find articles, audio recordings, and videos with different viewpoints on the subject of health care in the United States and around the world. What is your view on our healthcare system in the United States today?

At the end of Chapter 14 in the textbook on page 375, the sociological perspectives on health are provided in the diagram called *SocViews on Population, Health, and Environment*. The diagram discusses how the views by functionalist, the interactionist, and the conflict can be applied to health care. The functionalist view describes health care as a social institution that helps create order and stability in society. The functionalist view sees the healthcare system as a working part of the bigger system (society). It keeps the society healthy that is important for not only creating social order, but also for creating a productive society.

The interactionist view takes a more micro approach. It also takes a much more personal approach. In the interactionist view, the interaction between individuals and groups has an important impact on the type of system and how well it functions. It is about personal relationships. For example, one very important relationship would be the doctor-patient relationship. Another important factor in discussing the interactionist view is the understanding that the individual has an active role in their own medical care and health choices. The conflict view focuses on the inequality that can occur in health care. The conflict view argues that an inequality in power and resources lead to unequal access to quality and affordable health care. For example, a company can choose whether or not to offer employees health care in certain cases. A company can pick the particular healthcare provider and restrict it, and the worker has no say in the matter. Companies with excellent healthcare benefits can use it as a powerful tool to attract employees. The hospitals, practitioners, and insurance companies also can use their power and status in determining what type of health care an individual receives. To summarize, the conflict view is all about the healthcare system being controlled by those with power, status, and money while those with less power and status

receive no health care, less health care, or lower quality health care (Witt, 2018). What sociological perspective do you think best explains our healthcare system?

We learn that our access to health care is influenced by where we live, our beliefs, group membership, and our statuses (e.g., gender, race, job, age). For example, you may be part of a faith that does not believe in abortion or certain types of contraception and therefore oppose it being paid for by government money. You may have the exact opposite belief and see the need for these types of services. Your faith or personal values has an impact on what role you think the government should play in health care.

#### Reference

Witt, J. (2018). *SOC 2018* (5th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.

### Learning Activities (Nongraded)

Nongraded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.

#### 1. SocThink

Your textbook provides several opportunities for you to explore relevant topics, from personal self-exploration to challenging questions concerning topics being studied in this unit. Taking the time to read and respond to these opportunities will help you learn and apply the information being studied. These opportunities can be found on the following pages:

- Chapter 7:
  - p. 154
  - p. 155
  - p. 160
  - p. 163
  - p. 166
  
- Chapter 8:
  - p. 179
  - p. 183
  - p. 186
  - p. 190
  - p. 192
  - p. 202
  
- Chapter 14:
  - p. 355

#### 2. Check Your Learning

Quizzes are a way to self-test and see if you understand what you are studying. The textbook provides a brief Pop Quiz for each chapter. Take advantage of this learning tool to enrich your learning experience! The answers are provided, so you can check and see how well you did. For this unit, the quizzes are available on the following pages:

- Chapter 7: Pop Quiz, p. 175
- Chapter 8: Pop Quiz, p. 206