1.4C: Applied and Clinical Sociology

Applied or clinical sociology uses sociological insights or methods to guide practice, research, or social reform.

Learning Objectives

• Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world

Key Points

• Sociological research can be divided into pure research and applied research. Pure research has no motive other than to further sociological knowledge, while applied research has a direct practical end.

• Applied research may be put into the service of the corporate world, governmental and international agencies, NGOs, or clinical work. In all these instances, they apply sociological theories and methods to further the goals of the organization they are working under.

• One budding area in modern retail firms is site selection, or the determination of the best locations for new stores. Site selection requires understanding human ecology and consumer spending patterns, both of which are addressed using the sociological imagination.

• Clinical sociology involves the study of groups of people using learned information in case and care management towards holistic life enrichment or improvement of social and life conditions. Clinical sociologists usually focus on vulnerable population groups, such as children, youths or elderly.

Key Terms

• **clinical sociology**: Clinical sociology courses give students the skills to be able to work effectively with clients, teach basic counseling skills, give knowledge that is useful for careers, such as victims assisting and drug
rehabilitation, and teach the student how to integrate sociological knowledge with other fields. They may go into such areas as marriage and family therapy, and clinical social work.

- **Sociotherapist**: A sociotherapist practices sociotherapy, which is a social science and form of social work and sociology that involves the study of groups of people, its constituent individuals and their behavior, using learned information in case and care management towards holistic life enrichment or improvement of social and life conditions.

- **Site Selection**: Site selection indicates the practice of new facility location, both for business and government. Site selection involves measuring the needs of a new project against the merits of potential locations.

Researchers often differentiate between “pure” and “applied” research. Presumably, pure research has no direct ends than adding to the knowledge pool, whereas applied research is put toward some practical end, such as working for a marketing firm to understand the relationship between race and consumption patterns or working for a government agency to study the reasons why poverty continues to exist. Of course, the line between pure and applied research is often blurred. For example, “pure” researchers in a university might get government funding to do their research projects, which somewhat complicates their commitment to do pure research. Outside the academic world, sociologists apply their skills in a variety of settings. Here, we will discuss the possibilities of applied sociology and one subfield, clinical sociology.

Sociologists can be found working in a wide range of fields, including organizational planning, development, and training; human resource management; industrial relations; marketing; public relations; organizational research; and international business. In all these instances, they apply sociological theories and methods toward understanding social relations and human behavior to further the goals of the organization they are working under, whether this is a business, a governmental agency, or a non-profit organization.

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**The Corporate World**

Some sociologists find that adapting their sociological training and insights to the business world is relatively easy. Corporations want and need to understand their customers’ habits and preferences in order to anticipate changes in their markets. This drive to understand consumers is called consumer research and is a growing interest of corporations. Sociologists are particularly well suited to apply their quantitative and qualitative understanding of human behavior to this field.

Another budding area in modern retail firms is site selection, or the determination of the best locations for new stores. Site selection requires understanding human ecology and consumer spending patterns, both of which are addressed using the sociological imagination. Some additional direct applications of sociology include concept and product testing (which will put to good use training in research methods), the evaluating of global market opportunities (which will draw upon understandings of various cultures), long-range planning and forecasting (which draws on both statistics and futurist perspectives), marketing and advertising (which applies consumer studies directly), and human resource management (which relies on studies of organizational behavior).

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**Governmental and International Agencies**

Outside of the corporate world, sociology is often applied in governmental and international agencies such as the World Bank or United Nations. For example, a sociologist might work compiling and analyzing quantitative demographic data
from the U.S. Census Bureau to understand patterns of population change. Or a sociologist might work for the United Nations to research global health trends and the efficacy of current public health initiatives.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Jane Addams, Applied Sociologist: Jane Addams is considered by many to be one of the earliest sociologists, though her contributions were mostly to the application of sociology to social work.

Non-Governmental Organizations (or NGOs) are legally constituted organizations created by private persons or organizations with no participation or representation of any government. Examples of NGOs include Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services, CARE International, and Lutheran World Relief. Many NGOs are concerned with the very social problems and social issues that sociologists study, from poverty to gender stratification to world population growth. Sociologists play important roles in the work of NGO’s from community organizing to direct relief to lobbying, as they are able to apply sociological approaches (for example, the conflict approach) to understand structural patterns that have led to current social problems.

Clinical Sociology

Clinical sociology involves the study of groups of people using learned information in case and care management towards holistic life enrichment or improvement of social and life conditions. A clinical sociologist, who might also be
called a sociotherapist or life enrichment therapist, is usually concurrently a member of another relevant profession: medical doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, social worker, criminologist, or activity and recreational professionals, among others. Clinical sociologists usually focus on vulnerable population groups, such as children, youths or elderly, and are employed in various settings such as treatment facilities or life care communities like nursing homes. They are directly involved in case management and care planning.