Session 7 – The family

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53882 (Monday, 3.30 – 5.30 p.m.)
53883 (Monday, 5.40 – 7.40 p.m.)
21/01/2023 – 24/04/2023

Overview of the session

1) Presentation of a classical excerpt in sociology (20 min)

2) Discussion by the designated discussants (10-15 min)

3) Opening of the discussion to the whole class (15 min)

4) Short break (10 min)

4) Overview of the second mandatory excerpt (30min)

5) Revision and training for the midterm, and short activity (20 min)

Don't forget the midterm on March 18th!

Allocation of presentations and discussions

Date	Session	Text excerpt
24/01	Sociological approaches	
31/01	The individual in social context	Douglas (Mary). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. 2003.
07/02	Norms and deviance	Becker (Howard). Outsiders. 1963.
14/02	Stratification and inequality	Marx (Karl) and Engels (Friedrich). The Communist Manifesto. 1848.
21/02	Identity and identification	Brubaker (Rogers). Trans. Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities. 2016.
07/03	Urban sociology	Venkatesh (Sudhir) and Levitt (Steven). History and disjuncture in the urban American street gang. 2000.

Allocation of presentations and discussions

Date	Session	Text excerpt
14/03	The family	Edin (Kathryn) and Kefalas (Maria). Promises I Can Keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage. 2005.
21/03	Religion	Snow (David) and Machalek (Richard). "The convert as a social type". 1976.
28/03	Education	Khan (Shamus). Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St Paul's School. 2001.
04/04	Economic sociology	Esping-Andersen (Gøsta). 'Hybrid or Unique?: The Japanese welfare state between Europe and America'. 1997
11/04	Society and the state	Dubois (Vincent). The bureaucrat and the poor. Encounters in French Welfare Offices. 1999.
18/04	Movements and revolutions	McAdam (Douglas). The Biographical Consequences of Activism. 1989.

Presentation of a classical excerpt in sociology

Today's presentation is on:

Edin, K. & Kefalas, M. 2005. Promises I Can Keep, Introduction, and Ch. 1. Berkeley, CA: UC Press

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Overview of biographical elements.

Born in 1908 in Brussels, Belgium.

Lévi-Strauss began his first ethnographic missions in 1935. After taking refuge in New-York in 1941 amid the Second World War, he came back to France in 1949 and was named to the chair of social anthropology at the *Collège de France* in 1959.

He is mostly known for his ethnographic studies and his works on culture and on the family, parenthood and kinship.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Overview of biographical elements.

Lévi-Strauss' work as an anthropologist and ethnologist was key in the development of the theories of structuralism (the French school of anthropology) and in particular structural anthropology.

Lévi-Strauss was initially a philosophy graduate. He first obtained a position at the University of São Paulo in Brazil. While living there, he discovered the school of cultural anthropology in Brazil, and made several trips to study the Amazon river.

On his return to France from New-York, he submitted a doctoral thesis on the anthropology of kinship: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1955).

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Race and history. 1952.

Lévi-Strauss is also known for his analysis of racism, notably the one he makes in a booklet, *Race and history* (1952), written for the UNESCO.

In this booklet, Lévi-Strauss shows an inherent tendency of social life: any group tends to see the world through a dichotomy between 'them' and 'us', which consists of valuing one's group and devaluing the other.

For Lévi-Strauss, it is this natural tendency that can give rise to racist prejudice.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Race and history. 1952.

On the opposite, in *Race and history* (1952), Lévi-Strauss affirms the equal dignity of all cultures. More specifically, he asserts that one culture should not be destroyed for the benefit of another that thinks itself superior.

In the midst of the colonial period, his writings were controversial. For Lévi-Strauss, a people always has the right to defend its culture against cultural and mental colonisation. This became UNESCO's mantra to this day.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

Lévi-Strauss was a proponent of the structuralist approach to sociology. He believed that there are inherent tendencies in social life. This approach became dominant from the 1950s to the 1970s in Western Europe.

Behind this approach lies the desire to create a synthesis between the works of Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx. It takes a holistic view on society and its development is in great part due to contributions in structural linguistics. In short, structural linguistics aim at showing the existence of unconscious latent structures common to several text excerpts from various authors.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

This structural linguistics approach comes, originally, from anthropology, more specifically from the study of myths.

Structural anthropology is *opposed* to functionalist anthropology. In short, structures denote the organisation of the different elements of society, as opposed to their function. Structuralism rebukes functionalism for having sought to compare only functions, whereas structures as well need be compared.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

In this line, Lévi-Strauss looked for structural invariants in societies.

Finding a structural invariant consists in comparing different cultures in order to identify features common to all humanity.

Hence, in short, Lévi-Strauss believed that anthropology, through the study of structures, can identify a universal grammar of the human mind, in other words universal categories of thought that are found in all societies and that are linked to the necessity of life in society.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

He discovers one such category in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*: the prohibition of incest.

Incest is forbidden throughout humanity, and Lévi-Strauss shows that this prohibition is not only linked to biological determinism (i.e., recessive genetic diseases).

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

One classical example is the family configurations of some Amerindian peoples.

In these peoples, the children of two brothers are considered as siblings, in the sense that the same word is used to designate brothers and cousins from brothers. The union is forbidden between cousins from two brothers. Conversely, the children of two sisters or of a brother and a sister are considered as distant cousins, and hence the union is encouraged by society.

In both cases, there is the same biological proximity, but not the same social proximity. Hence, here social proximity determines the incest taboo, not biological proximity.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). Structuralism.

Likewise, in French canon law, it is forbidden for a man to marry his father's ex-wife, even when it is not his mother, except with a special exemption from the French President. Similarly, a woman is not allowed to marry her mother's ex-husband, even when this ex-husband is not the woman's father.

Here, the incest taboo is based on the relationship with regards to French law and not necessarily on biological proximity.

For Lévi-Strauss, it is therefore the existence of social rules that regulate human reproduction that are universal.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). The family. 1971.

Lévi-Strauss asks the question as to why the family model is pre-eminent in many peoples, regardless of their status with regards to "*development*"?

"The general trend, however, except for the so-called Vienna school, has been that more and more anthropologists have become convinced that familial life is present practically everywhere in human societies, even in those with sexual and educational customs very remote from our own."

"*These extreme positions, however, suffer equally from over-simplification. It is well known that, in very rare cases, family bonds cannot be claimed to exist.*"

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). The family. 1971.

Although family structures exist in the vast majority of peoples studied by anthropologists, some examples contradict the idea that they are universal and are the centre of much discussions among anthropologists.

Some example of these peoples' include the Nayar, from whom "*marriage [is] a purely symbolical ceremony which did not result in a permanent*"; the Masai, who "*[do not] recognize the family as a social unit.*"; or the Boróro.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). The family. 1971.

Lévi-Strauss criticizes anthropological approaches which either tend to be too relativistic and which fail to see large-scale tendencies in human societies or question the relation of structures different to ours with the concept of family, as well as approaches which tend to re-interpret every structure model observed as a family.

For him, building on past observations, "*the only thing which can be said is as follows: monogamic, conjugal family is fairly frequent*".

Moreover, Lévi-Strauss insists on the fact that the monogamic conjugal family model is not necessarily more frequent as the societies becomes more "*developed*".

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). The family. 1971.

Building on this, Lévi-Strauss asks that "*if there is no natural law making the family universal, how can we explain why it is found practically everywhere?*".

To answer this, Lévi-Strauss proposes a definition of the family.

Lévi-Strauss (Claude). The family. 1971.

For Lévi-Strauss the family can be defined by:

- A social group which finds its origin in marriage
- Which consists in husband(s), wife(s), and children
- Where the family members are united by:
  - Legal bonds
  - Economic, religious and other kinds of rights and obligations
  - A precise network of sexual rights and prohibitions and a varying and diversified amount of psychological feelings (love, affection, respect, etc.)

A social group which finds its origin in marriage.

Lévi-Strauss notes that "*every society has some way to operate a distinction between free unions and legitimate ones*", often at several levels.

He observes that, from many works in anthropology on all continents, bachelorhood is often a barrier to reaching the full status within a group, as does the condition of being in a union without children, or in an unofficial union.

This distinction between individuals is furthermore age-dependent, where bachelorhood for younger individuals is not as excluding as it is for older individuals.

Which consists in husband(s), wife(s), and children.

Lévi-Strauss notes also that while polygamous or polyandrous societies are commonly observed, the vast majority of unions in peoples are actually monogamous.

Furthermore, among polygamous or polyandrous families, it is frequent that a strong distinction is being made between the first, legitimate partner, and the others.

"*That monogamy is not inscribed in the nature of man is sufficiently evidenced by the fact that polygamy exists in widely different forms and in many types of societies; on the other hand, the prevalence of monogamy results from the fact that, […] there is normally, about just one woman available for each man.*"

Which consists in husband(s), wife(s), and children.

This definition does not contradict the fact that there is a great diversity of functional values associated with the conjugal family.

The model of conjugal family can reinforce the solidity of the marriage by the parental care of one spouse over the other (Chukchee of Siberia, Mohave, New Guinea), there is or isn't the transmission of name, rank and property; there is or isn't begetting of children and "fostering" (Polynesia, European feudal society, northwestern side of America), etc.

Where the family members are united by various bonds.

Bonds among family members are specific and depend on the position of individuals within the family but also on their relationships to other members of the family.

"*Many societies are interested in clearly establishing the relations of the offspring with the father's group on the one hand, and with the mother's group on the other, but they do it by differentiating strongly the two kinds of relationships. Territorial rights may be inherited through one line, and religious privileges and obligations through the other.*"

Where the family members are united by various bonds.

For Lévi-Strauss, economic necessities are essential in explaining the prevalence of the family structure but should not be interpreted as resulting from natural causes.

"*If sexual considerations are not paramount for marriage purposes, economic necessities are found everywhere in the first place. […] what makes marriage a fundamental need in tribal societies is the division of labor between the sexes.*"

"*Like the form of the family, the division of labor stems more from social and cultural considerations than from natural ones.*"

Where the family members are united by various bonds.

"*[It is] wrong to try to explain the family on the purely natural grounds of procreation, motherly instinct, and psychological feelings between man and woman and between father and children.*"

"*To put it in other words: what makes man really different from the animals that, in mankind, a family could not exist if there were no society.*"

Lévi-Strauss emphasises that these bonds are deeply rooted in, and interdependent to the way society recognizes these bonds.

Where the family members are united by various bonds.

Hence Lévi-Strauss states that a family can only exist so long as a plurality of other families are ready to acknowledge that there are other links than consanguineous ones, and that the natural process of filiation can only be carried on through the social process of affinity.

The prohibition of incest.

It is here that Lévi-Strauss makes the famous argument on the importance of incest prohibition as a cultural invariant in the constitution of societies and the appearance of families (and family as a concept) in societies.

While family takes many forms and seems not to adhere to a single, generic definition, one can well identify the prerequisites and practical rules which define its conditions of perpetuation.

The prohibition of incest.

"*As Tylor has shown almost a century ago, the ultimate explanation is probably that mankind has understood very early that, in order to free itself from a wild struggle for existence, it was confronted with the very simple choice of 'either marrying-out or being killed-out.'*

The alternative was between biological families living in juxtaposition and endeavoring to remain closed, self-perpetuating units, over-ridden by their fears, hatreds, and ignorance, and the systematic establishment, through the incest prohibition, of links of intermarriage between them, thus succeeding to build, out of the artificial bonds of affinity, a true human society."

Revision and training for the midterm

The midterm will take place on Saturday, March 18th.

It consists in a three hours exam with two questions:
- An *open-ended* question to which you should answer, preferably by writing in dissertation style, leveraging references from the course.
- A question related to an article (*e.g.*, from the press, or from an academic journal) on which you are asked to write a commentary, preferably also using links to material seen during the course or seminar sessions.

Revision and training for the midterm

Some important points to think of when writing the exam are:

- Write your answers in a clear and precise style.

- Draw upon relevant concepts and theories covered in the course (i.e. in lectures, seminars, readings etc.) giving correct definitions where appropriate.

- Ensure that each answer has a clear structure and it that it reflects a reasonable balance among its different elements (e.g., definitions, argument, and conclusion).

- If you summarize someone else's ideas, you should indicate the original author of those ideas in the text. In this vein, do familiarize yourself with Sciences Po's regulations on plagiarism.

Short activity – Homogamy in France

We will look at a table showing the distribution of men in couples according to their social group / education level and that of their spouse.

We consider couples where one spouse is a men and where at least one of the two spouses is between 30 and 59 years old.

The tables measure, for each social category / education level, the distribution of men according to their wife's social background / education.

Short activity – Homogamy in France

		Spouse					
		Farmer	Self-employed	Executive	Intermediate profession	Employee	Factory worker	Total
Men	Farmer	33,1	1,1	5,3	16,7	30,7	13,1	100
	Self-employed	0,5	17,9	11,9	21,6	43,1	5,0	100
	Executive	0,2	2,9	38,5	34,5	22,0	1,9	100
	Intermediate profession	0,2	2,8	12,4	35,8	42,4	6,4	100
	Employee	0,5	1,9	8,3	24,5	57,2	7,6	100
	Factory worker	0,2	2,2	2,8	16,6	59,4	18,8	100
	Total	1,2	4,1	14,9	26,8	43,9	9,1	100

INSEE (Enquête Emploi – 2011)

Short activity – Homogamy in France

		Spouse					
		No diploma	CAP/BEP	BAC	BAC +2/+4	BAC +5	Total
Men	No diploma	41	26	16	15	2	100
	CAP/BEP	26	37	18	17	1	100
	BAC	16	19	28	33	4	100
	BAC +2/+4	8	11	18	53	10	100
	BAC +5	4	4	10	47	35	100
	Total	41	26	16	15	2	100

INSEE (Enquête Emploi – 2011)

What do you think are the most common meeting places for partners?

Is homogamy explained by meeting during studies (or at work)?

Can you think of social facts which favour homogamy?

What role do you think the Internet plays on homogamy?

Short activity – Homogamy in France

Some references to explore these questions further…

Bozon (Michel) and Héran (François). *La formation du couple*. In Repères. 2006. [FR]

Bourdieu (Pierre), Nice (Richard) and Wacquant (Loïc). *The peasant and his body*. In Ethnography. Volume 5, Issue 4. 2004.

Bergström (Marie). *Online correspondence: homogamous matching on online dating sites*. In Sociétés contemporaines. Volume 104, Issue 4. 2016.

For next time…

- Read Weber, M. 2013. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Routledge.

- Read Snow, D., & Machalek, R. 1976. "The convert as a social type", Sociological theory, 1, p.259-289.

- When reading, remember to note the important elements of the text: question asked by the author(s), (hypo)theses of the author(s), methods used, references, writing style, argumentative construction, etc.

- Prepare the presentation and discussion (if concerned)