

Objectivity and Subjectivity

SOCIOLOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Questions

(1) Is sex outside of marriage right or wrong?

(2) Is polygamy [e.g. a man having more than one wife] right or wrong?

(3) If two adults consent to have sex for money, should they be allowed to do so?

(4) If an adult wishes to purchase pornography from a seller running a legitimate business, should he or she be allowed to do so?

(5) Should gay marriage be allowed or should it be illegal?

Basic Sociological Point

“As much as we might like it otherwise, *sex is never only a personal matter.* All societies control or channel human sexual behavior.

A major way that human groups channel sexual behavior is through the social institution of marriage and family, which shape people’s ideas of right and wrong.”

~Henslin, p. 50

Objectivity and Subjectivity

All social problems consist of:

(1) Objective conditions

(2) Subjective concerns

What Sociology Cannot Offer

Most people are probably more familiar with subjective concerns. We generally know how we feel about particular issues.

Sociology CANNOT provide “correct” answers to subjective debates, that is, whether sex outside marriage, polygamy or prostitution are right or wrong, or whether gay marriage should be legal or illegal.

What Sociology Can Offer

What sociology CAN do is:

- (1) Document objective conditions**
- (2) Analyze subjective concerns expressed by different groups**
- (3) Contextualize subjective concerns within objective conditions – i.e. exercise the sociological imagination**