Chapter 5

Social Structure and Interaction
Sociologists spend a lot of time researching how our society is structured. **Social structure** is the way in which a society is organized into stable and predictable patterns of social interaction that are composed of the various positions people occupy. The government and our educational system are just two of many ways that social order is created, transmitted, maintained and enforced. However, the structuring of civilization does not require actual structures, but the structuring of how we interact with each other.

**Status and Roles**

One of the manners that our interactions are structured is through our **status**, which refers to any of the full range of socially defined positions within a group or wider society. Statuses that many people have is that of sister/brother, student, employee, manager and mother/father. In other words, if your position has a name/title and it puts you in a socially lower or higher place relative to another person then it is most likely a status. Most people have a **status set**, which is all of the statuses that a given person occupies, and can be a wife, mother, daughter, sister, employee, team mom and Girl Scout leader all at the same time.

There are different types of statuses that can have varying levels of importance in society and your life as a whole. **Ascribed status** is a social
position that is usually assigned at birth with little to no regard to a person’s unique talents or characteristics. Examples of this type of status would be if you were born into a royal family. You being the next queen or king of a nation has little to do with your actual abilities and mostly pertains to where you are at in the birth order. Two ascribed statuses that we pay particular attention to are our sex and our race. In our society men are in a relatively higher status than women, and that white people have a comparatively higher status than people of color. (View Movie 1.1)

A social position that is largely within our power to change is an achieved status. These positions typically revolve around becoming something. Examples of this would be becoming a doctor, lawyer, professor, and engineer, but it would also include you becoming a fast food cook, a custodian, and a security officer. However, there is often a social position that a given person occupies that dominates other statuses and usually determines a person’s general position within society, which is called a master status. On a large scale, the President of the United States would be a prime example of this type of position. The President is a high profile position that everyone acknowledges, and the person with this title will be recognized by the vast majority of people in our society and across the world. They would always be referred to as the President and will always be treated with some deference even when they do not hold that political office anymore. On a smaller scale, your parents will ALWAYS treat you as their child no matter how old you are. That does not mean that they will not treat you like an adult, but you will always be their child and will continue to receive love, protection, emotional support and financial assistance. (View Movie 1.2)

**1) https://youtu.be/SfSvmv4MjQ0 - Video**

**2) What is the author’s main point?**

**3) How does his master status affect his life?**

**4) Do you have a master status? Explain.**
assigned to it. In other words, you know that a position is socially defined because it comes with a certain set of expectations. Examples of social roles assigned to the status of parents are that they are supposed to feed, clothe, provide shelter, protect and socialize their children to live in our society. A police officer is expected to protect and serve the people, paramedics respond to medical emergencies, and teachers facilitate the learning process.

**Role Strain versus Role Conflict**

Just because you are assigned a role that does not mean that these are easy to perform. **Role strain** is when the demands of one status become burdensome and hard to manage. Students during finals week is an excellent example of this concept because having multiple exams in the same week can drive students to the extremes of their ability to retain knowledge. Being a manager of a fast food restaurant can be a serious challenge when a worker calls in sick the same weekend that the local military base gets paid. Or being a brother/sister can be a strain when your two younger siblings are fighting with each other, and you are the one in charge because your parents are out shopping. However, role strain is different from **role conflict** because this occurs when incompatible expectations from one status directly conflict with a role of another status that the same person occupies. Students have the role of studying for an exam, but this may clash with their role of going to work if they are employees. Fast food managers need to be loyal to their jobs but may struggle if one of their friends comes in asking for free food. A woman may want to take her spouse away for a romantic weekend, but she has a big project that is due on Monday, and her daughter has a karate tournament. Therefore, role strain happens within the confines of one status, while role conflict occurs between two or more statuses. (View Movie 1.3)

**Movie 1.3 My Role Conflict**

1) [https://youtu.be/i8O3kdqXWU](https://youtu.be/i8O3kdqXWU) - Video

2) What is the main point of this video?

3) What example(s) did the author use to illustrate his point? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

4) Can you think of role conflicts that you have? Explain.
A social group consists of two or more people who regularly interact and feel some sense of solidarity or common identity because of similar norms, values, and expectations. These start with in-groups, which is a relatively small collection of people that a person identifies with socially and psychologically, while out-groups represent collections of people that a person does not identify. In-groups are most likely a small group of friends, and this group may find themselves speaking negatively of the person or people that fall outside of your group. For example, if you are into West Coast rap you may consider individuals who favor East Coast rap as your out-group. Or you may be a person that is very much into Star Trek and go to the conventions with a uniform on, learn how to speak Klingon and know what a tribble is, but you may consider people that follow Star Wars and Battle Star Galactica as part of your out-group. (View Movie 1.4)

Another level of grouping is between primary and secondary groups. Primary group refers to a small group characterized by intimate, informal, face-to-face interaction and long-lasting cooperative relationships. These are usually spouses, immediate family members, and close personal friends. Secondary groups tend to be formal, emotionally cool and often

Movie 1.4 Feminizing the Out group

1) https://youtu.be/3wKmD_9TZ1M - Video
2) What is the main point of this video?
3) What example(s) did the author use to illustrate his point? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
4) Can you think of any other out groups that are feminized? Explain.
temporary with little social intimacy or mutual understanding. People’s involvement in these groups is often rational and calculated such as your teammates, your co-workers, or the people in your study group. Although it is entirely possible to have strong relationships with people in these groups, generally speaking, they remain secondary members if you do not spend time with them outside of your immediate purpose. In other words, someone that you get along with well at work is probably still in your secondary group if you do not hang out with them outside of work. (View Movie 1.5)

When a sizable number of people living in a single geographic area regularly interact with each other and share a common culture, they become a society. Although living close to each other has been a previous requirement, the Internet has almost eliminated that need. The Flat Earth Society, has thousands of members that truly believe that the earth is flat. They interact with each other on the Internet and at conferences and share common cultural knowledge that you would only know if you are a part of their society.

A global perspective on this topic reveals that there are at least six basic types of societies:

A. **Hunting-and-gathering societies** rely on available foods and do not consciously plant foods to maintain their diet. The people in this group are usually related to each other, and the elders of the group are generally the people that make the final decision on important matters. Believe it or not, many cultures still live in this manner. The San (Bushmen) of the Kalahari Desert is just one of many that actively choose to engage in this lifestyle.

B. **Horticultural/Pastoral societies** actively plant seeds to grow small crops and domesticate animals rather than subsist only on available provisions. People begin to develop specialized knowledge,

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**Movie 1.5 Poetry in Praxis**

*People You May Know* by Kevin Kantor

1) [https://youtu.be/LoyfunmYipU](https://youtu.be/LoyfunmYipU) - Video

2) **What is the poem about?**

3) **What larger social factors is the poet concerned about?**

4) **What do you think the poet believes is the problem?**

5) **Is the poet suggesting a solution? If so, do you agree or disagree? If not, what do you think might help?**
i.e. farmers and shepherds, and market relationships are established.

C. **Agrarian societies** use technological innovations (e.g., the plow, aqueducts, terrace farming) to yield abundant crops. Government and religion frequently separate out into distinct groups at this level because the citizen can pay taxes out of their surplus food. Market relationships are also formally established and exchange values regulated for common goods and services.

D. **Industrial societies** depend on mechanization to produce its products and services and regularly generate substantial levels of surplus goods. Manufacturing dominates and the core institutions are usually completely separate at this time. These would be countries like China, India, South Korea and Taiwan where producing goods are primary to their Gross National Product (GNP).

E. **Postindustrial Societies** primarily engage in the processing and control of information and is signified when a nation’s manufacturing core produces less than 50% of that country’s GNP. At this level, businesses focus on service-based and knowledge-based economic activity. The United States, Japan and most of western Europe fall into this category.
Social Institutions are established ways of organizing patterns of beliefs into predictable behaviors centered on meeting basic social needs and have the following essential functions:

1. Replacing members
2. Socializing new members
3. Producing and distributing goods and services
4. Preserving order
5. Providing a sense of meaning and purpose

With this definition, it should not be difficult to understand that the two biological parent family is the primary social institution because it performs all of these functions (some more than others) at the earliest stages of our lives, however, as civilizations grow and develop these features begin to separate out. (View Movie 1.6) Replacing members is still mainly a function of the family, but socialization is done primarily through the media and education system. Producing and distributing goods and services are done by businesses. The government, military, firefighters and police officers preserve order. While philosophers and religious organizations are whom people seek out to find meaning in their lives.

When social institutions become well defined, they become formal organizations, which are a

Movie 1.6 Poetry in Praxis

Family by Larry Fullard

1) https://youtu.be/nuK-xVSpfK0 - Video
2) What is the poem about?
3) What larger social factors is the poet concerned about?
4) What do you think the poet believes is the problem?
5) Is the poet suggesting a solution? If so, do you agree or disagree? If not, what do you think might help?
special type of secondary group designed to allow a relatively large number of people to accomplish complex goals. This level of organization requires **bureaucracy**, which is a component of a formal organization designed to accomplish routine tasks by large numbers of people through the use of rules and hierarchical ranking to achieve efficiency, and are easily recognizable through their:

1. **Extensive division of labor**
2. **Explicit written rules and regulations**
3. **Written records**
4. **A hierarchy of authority**
5. **Hiring and promotion by objective qualifications**
6. **Impartial, universalistic treatment**

The Department of Motor Vehicles would be a formal organization and within it is a maze of bureaucratic structuring. To get a drivers license, you first have to pass the test to get a provisional license. After you practice, then you come in for a driving test. In the car will be someone who has been specially trained only to assess your driving ability and little else. But then you must go through the line to receive your driver’s license. You must pass a basic eye exam and have your picture taken, which are usually conducted in separate lines. And if you can make it through this entire process you will finally receive your drivers’ license regardless of your age, race, sex, national origin and sexual orientation. Although this seems tiresome and unnecessary, think about this? How many licenses do they give out in a day? How many laws are there that regulate their operation? Would you want someone that is not qualified to receive a license? Taking this into consideration, it should be miraculous that you receive your license in such a short period.

Bureaucracy in the business world typically follows the path of **McDonaldization**, which is the process by which the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control shape organization and decision making in the United States and around the world. (View Movie 1.7)

**Movie 1.7 What is McDonaldization?**

1) [https://youtu.be/nI_g9yJhgIk](https://youtu.be/nI_g9yJhgIk) - Video

2) What is the main point of this video?

3) What example(s) did the author use to illustrate his point? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

4) Can you think of any other companies that are not fast food chains that use this concept? Explain.
So then how do other businesses apply the McDonaldization process? Let us take Wal-Mart for example. Wal-Mart, especially the Super Wal-Marts are efficient in that they are a one-stop-shop for every consumer need you have from food to firearms. You can find almost anything at Wal-Mart. They calculate how they are presenting the product to the customer: where to place it in the store and which shelf they should place it. Their products are predictable because they buy items in massive bulk quantities so that they can give customers lower prices and so they have them in every store. And lastly, they control their store through policies and procedures that are designed minimize theft and misuse.
Chapter Vocabulary

Social Structure (2)
Status (2)
Status Set (2)
Ascribed Status (2)
Achieved Status (3)
Master Status (3)
Social Roles (3)
Role Strain (4)
Role Conflict (4)
Social Group (5)
In-Groups (5)
Out-Groups (5)
Primary Group (5)
Secondary Groups (5)
Society (6)
Hunting-and-Gathering Societies (6)
Horticultural/Pastoral Societies (6)
Agrarian Societies (7)

Industrial Societies (7)
Postindustrial Societies (7)
Social Institutions (8)
Formal Organizations (8)
Bureaucracy (9)
McDonaldization (9)

Key Terms

Ascribed Status
Achieved Status
Master Status
Role Strain
Role Conflict
Bureaucracy
McDonaldization

Bullet-point answer questions:

- What are the three types of statuses?
- What four types of social groups?
- What are the five types of societies?

- What are the five functions of a social institution?

- What are the six components of a bureaucracy?

**Short answer questions:**

- What is the difference between ascribed status and achieved status and give an example of both?

- What is the difference between role strain and role conflict and give an example of both?

- What is the difference between a primary group and a secondary group and give an example of both?

**Critical thinking questions**

- Define the sociological imagination and explain how your status is a result of wider social factors.

- Define McDonaldization and explain how this concept has affected how business is done in the United States.
Movie 1.1 Race as Ascribed Statuses

Sociologists Devah Pager was trying to find out how someone’s criminal record could affect them getting a job however what she really found out is that how someone’s race can actually operate as an ascribed status and so this is what she did with her Experiment what she did is she took four well-dressed men two white two black and they went to look for entry level jobs at 350 businesses in Milwaukee Wisconsin and later on in New York City, New York right, and so they were going looking for jobs they were all college graduates however they portrayed themselves as high school graduates and for the experiment she wanted two of them one white one black male to say that they had a felony that they were convicted of cocaine possession with the intent to distribute ok so a pretty big deal right and they had spent eighteen months in jail okay and so what she found was that the white male without a felony received call backs thirty-four percent of the time while the white male with a felony received a call back for a job seventeen percent of the time ok but now here’s where race as described status kicks in and so what she found was that the white male with a felony on his record at seventeen percent was actually slightly more likely to receive a call back for a job than a black male without a felony on their record at fourteen percent so 3 percentage point difference there ok so what does this even mean so what to suggest then is that being black it as it pertains to Milwaukee and New York City being black is the equivalent of having a felony on your record right now so this definitely would point to a race being considered an ascribed status.

Movie 1.2 Master Status

Alright so this one is about master status and I don’t want you to get all kind of understand that being the president of the united states is a master status being the Pope is a master status I get that but having a master status can also be something as simple as being a professor right in telling you about this my professor status can be a master status to a lot of my students because even after they graduate even after they leave Mira Costa to get their BA and PhDs and all that stuff even after they do that they still think of me as their professor right and one of the ways I know this is that they see me out in public when you see me out in public like that like shopping at Wal-Mart or something like
that they look at me like they’re surprised like you’re like oh my god this is Professor Hoskins and I’m like easy like I’m not a superstar or anything like that but they get so excited because then they ask me what I’m doing there like Wal-Mart what am I doing shopping but they’re so surprised because they don’t register that as regards to I’m just a regular person who does these regular everyday things right I kid you not there was this one I remember this I feel like a celebrity to this day there was a young Japanese exchange student who saw me at Terri Cafe if you’re an Oceanside and you want a restaurant to go to go to Teri cafe any way oh but she saw me I kid you not she almost fainted she was so excited like she almost dropped to the ground that just cracked me up and then the last thing about having this master status if you wouldn’t they always like have a hard time figuring out what to call me like after they graduate because in school I get it call me professor Hoskins call me Dr. Hoskins whatever but after they graduate I always tell people that look just call me Bruce that’s my name and they’re like man I could never do that and so that’s one of those things that let you know that even being a professor can be a master status.

**Movie 1.3 My Role Conflict**

So check this out, so role conflicts can happen at some of the weirdest times. Okay, so one of the role conflicts that I've had in my life was that I used to be a member of a church and then I also was a football player. That was a real conflict that I had, now obviously it’s not professional football or anything like that, but anyway let me set up the situation. So, here I was a member of this church and every year they had a men’s retreat that I would go to for the weekend and over the weekend, normally on Saturday, they would give us like a five hour block of free time and during that time, the men, we normally play the game of football okay. Now this year was particularly interesting because it was snowing that year and so us knuckleheads, we decide to play tackle football. Now here’s the deal, so here’s where the conflict starts rolling in. So, the pastor’s son was on the other team. Now here I am, I’m a full-grown man at the time, I was about 33 something like that, and the pastor’s son is about 15 or so, and they decide to run a play for the pastor’s son. It’s called a "naked reverse", if anybody knows anything about football, and so they fake a hand-off, and then they pitch it out to him, and he comes running around on my side. Now the "naked" part of the reverse means that he doesn’t have any blockers, and so he’s running around to my side of the football field and I didn’t buy the fake at all, and so I see him with the ball, and I come barreling forward on the football field, and right before I hit him, I thought to myself "Wow, this is the pastor’s son..." and then boom! I hit him! I laid him out boy, I tell you! Anyway, but when we’re talking about role conflicts, this is what we’re talking about in regards to, you have these different statuses in your life and you never know when those roles might actually come into conflict with each other.
Movie 1.4 Feminizing the Out group

So something that I noticed in our society is that how people tend to feminize the out-group. So what does that mean? So I was watching this movie, "Stomp the Yard" with my two teenage sons, it's a little bit older, it's 2007 so it's not too bad, but if you haven’t watched that movie that’s your fault because it has like some of the better dance sequences that I've ever seen in a movie taken from an old man. But anyway, to get to my point, is that the main character in "Stomp the Yard", his name was D.J. and he was asked to join the rival step team right? And the step team was walking up to him and asking him to join, and since D.J. didn't step, he called people that did do step dancing, he called them "Pussies". So, if that’s not bad enough, in the very final climactic scene the step team that D.J. did wind up joining, which should be interesting in and of itself, they called the rival team now "Bitches", ok, so then what does this mean that we do this? Because here I am in Southern California, look I know that surfers call people who body board and boogie board, I know they call them "Bitches". I know people that street race, who use American muscle cars, they call people who use the Japanese cars "Bitches". I know people who ride Harley's call people who ride Ninja bikes "Bitches". I know, you know that, people who skateboard call people who ride scooters "Bitches". And I kid you not, I would not be surprised if I found out that people who sow, call people who knit and crochet "Bitches". But I don't know that one, but anyway, but what does this mean? What exactly does this mean in our society? What it means is that, not only do we devalue the female in a male dominated society, but we also devalue the feminine in a masculine dominated society.

Movie 1.5 Poetry in Praxis

People You May Know by Kevin Kantor

When my rapist showed up under the “people you may know” tab on Facebook, it felt like the closest to a crime scene I’ve ever been. that is, if i don’t count the clock work murder that I make of my own memory every time that I drive down Koufax avenue, still, I sit in my living room and I sift for clues. click. I see myself caught in his teeth. he is dancing with his shirt off in a city that I've never been to. click. he is eating sushi over a few beers with friends and I am under his fingernails. click. I know that alley. click. I killed the memory of that t-shirt. click. this is an old photograph. it’s a baby picture. there’s also an older man, presumably his father. they are both round and bright and still smiling. click. he is shirtless again and I catch my reflection in the weight room mirror #beastmodeselfie. I call him The Wolf when I write about him. The Wolf so as to make him as storybook as possible. The Wolf when I write about him, which is to say when my memory escapes the murder or when the Internet suggests it. Facebook informs me that we have three mutual friends, which is to say that he is people you may know, which is to say I am people you may know and there are people that know and people that don’t know and people I don’t know I want to know, am afraid to let know, and
probably people that know him that know of me that know the word no, no, no. the word no is a flock of sleeping sheep sitting in my mouth and now, now I know The Wolf’s middle name. and what he listens to on Spotify. and the all too familiar company that he keeps and he can no longer be a Wolf, or the nameless grave I dig for myself on bad days. we have three mutual friends on Facebook and now it feels like they are holding the shovel. 64 people liked the shirtless gym pic and 4 people have told me that they’d rather I said nothing. 2 police officers told me that I must give his act a name or it didn’t happen, that obviously I could have fought back, which is to say no one comes running for young boys who cry “rape.” when I told my brother, he also asked me why I didn’t fight back. Adam, I am right now, I promise. every day, I write a poem titled “tomorrow.” it is a handwritten list of the people I know that love me and I make sure to put my own name at the top.

**Movie 1.6 Poetry in Praxis**

*Family* by Larry Fullard

Is this thing on? It’s on. Ok. So my Aunt calls me up and she says "Hey, we’re having a family reunion this year. 2015. We want you to do something that stresses the importance of family unity", she said "Our family over the years has just been kind of disconnected. We haven’t really gotten together like we used to. The older generations kind of understand the importance of coming back together. The newer generations not that much, so we want to really stress that this year, the importance of coming back together." And I was like "Wow, that’s amazing, and I feel her in that. While I do know some of my family members, there is this kind of impersonal disconnect I have with others. You know, you kind of have have this situation where you know one side better than the other and the side that you do know, you don’t really know, know them, you know I’m saying, that’s really important." And so, while this may have been written specifically for my family it applies to all families, it applies to friends, just the importance of coming back together and getting to know each other. The importance of unity, heritage, roots, all of that, and so I have entitled this specific poem simply "Family", and I hope you like it, ok. When I think about the concept of family I think about love unity heritage history and a lot of families over the years seem to be losing that sense of identity they have with one another a lot of families only relate to one side of their family with the other side they just don’t connect or don’t know them at all I’ve talked to a lot of friends you say family reunions used to be a common occurrence and now they seem to just be slowly fading away but that’s why family reunions are so important reunions are about reuniting that love creating that unity and being reminded of that heritage in history in my opinion family can be summed up by one example, and that example is a "Tree" when I look up at a tree and see how it stands in perfection I can’t help but notice that every tree is divided up into its sections, every section representing a time, every element representing a group, and so to understand the concept of family you have to start at the roots.
Our ancestors, though we may not have known them, had to fight through slavery, and because of that descendants of: Walker’s, Berry’s, Sampson’s and Fullard’s are here. Our people had to live through world wars and seasons of drought, and because of that, Kings Jones and Gutens are here. And while the great depression may have torn families apart, we survived, we are: Okines, Montgomerys, Davis. We are: Kirby, Low, Ashley, but most importantly we are family. And as a tree grows from its roots, branches off, and gets bigger, and bigger. So do families, you see the branch from the left side of the tree can’t always see how the branch on the right is doing, but both sides look forward each year, for that one season, when their leaves fall, and they again can meet back at their roots. That one place they all have common ground. Here’s something to note when leaves fall to the ground it turns into a compost that strengthens the tree, and without the fall of leaves each year, the tree would not be. So the tree, knowing what it must do to survive, let’s it’s leaves fall each year, so that it can stay alive. So if the leaves of a tree understand the importance of coming back to that place of common ground each year, how much more so should we? We must stay rooted in our history and be strong like a trunk, so that when we branch off a family bond won’t snap like a twig when we leave, this is my prayer: “That families can learn to stay united once again.”

Movie 1.7 What is McDonaldization?

So McDonaldization right, is about efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. And so if we think about this efficiency with McDonald’s, think about the amount of time it takes for them to give you your order? Normally it happens in about 60 seconds, which should be amazing to most of us, but we really don’t think of it that way because McDonald’s is just so commonplace in the way that they do things is just so commonplace now, right? Look, I’ve a family of six people and if we decide that we don’t have enough time energy, and effort to put into a meal, then we can go to McDonald’s, order, pay for it at the first window, and by the time we get to the second window, the order is already there. That should be amazing to us, right? And that’s what McDonald’s has done with our thinking. When it comes to calculability, think about how the Big Mac tastes, right? Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun. I remember that from a commercial back from the 80s, but anyway, that the big Mac within the continental United States tastes the same no matter where it is that you go, and again we should know that that’s actually an amazing thing. When it comes to predictability, you walk into a McDonald’s and you knew what you see. Again the big Mac, you’re going to see the Quarter Pounder, you’re going to see McNuggets, you’re going to see the fillet of fish, you can expect to see those things and so that’s where the predictability comes in. And then lastly, is about control, that McDonald’s, if you ever work in a fast food place, because all the
fast food places have taken on this McDonaldization, that they have everything regulated in steps, right? Perfectly into steps, if you put the burger on, you flip it in 60 seconds, and in 90 seconds you remove it, and 10 minutes you have to throw it away. That's where this all breaks down, and for conflict theorists we would argue that the reason why they have so much control then is literally to reduce the individuals down into robots. Where they don't have to think anymore because then you're much more easily replaceable.