

The Sociological Perspective/Imagination

How do sociologists “think” about the world?

I. Our INDIVIDUAL lives, choices, and opportunities are influenced by SOCIETAL factors and our “social location”. Some SOCIETAL FACTORS include:

- government/laws/rules
- race
- sex/gender
- religion
- wealth/poverty
- crime
- family (nuclear family (mom, dad, siblings) and/or extended family)
- friends
- school/education
- the internet/social media
- culture (art, music, movies, tv, fashion, video games, dance, etc.)
- organized extracurricular activities (soccer, band, ballet, gymnastics, mock trial, etc.)
- town/neighborhood
- work (volunteer work, job, un-paid responsibilities)

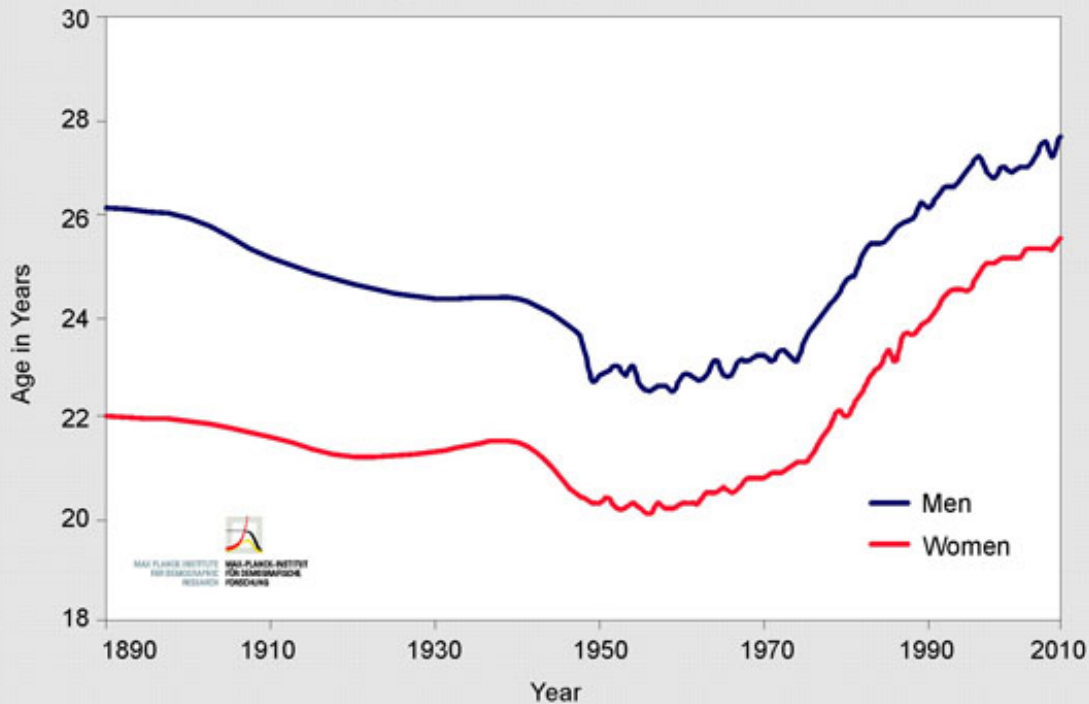
THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION



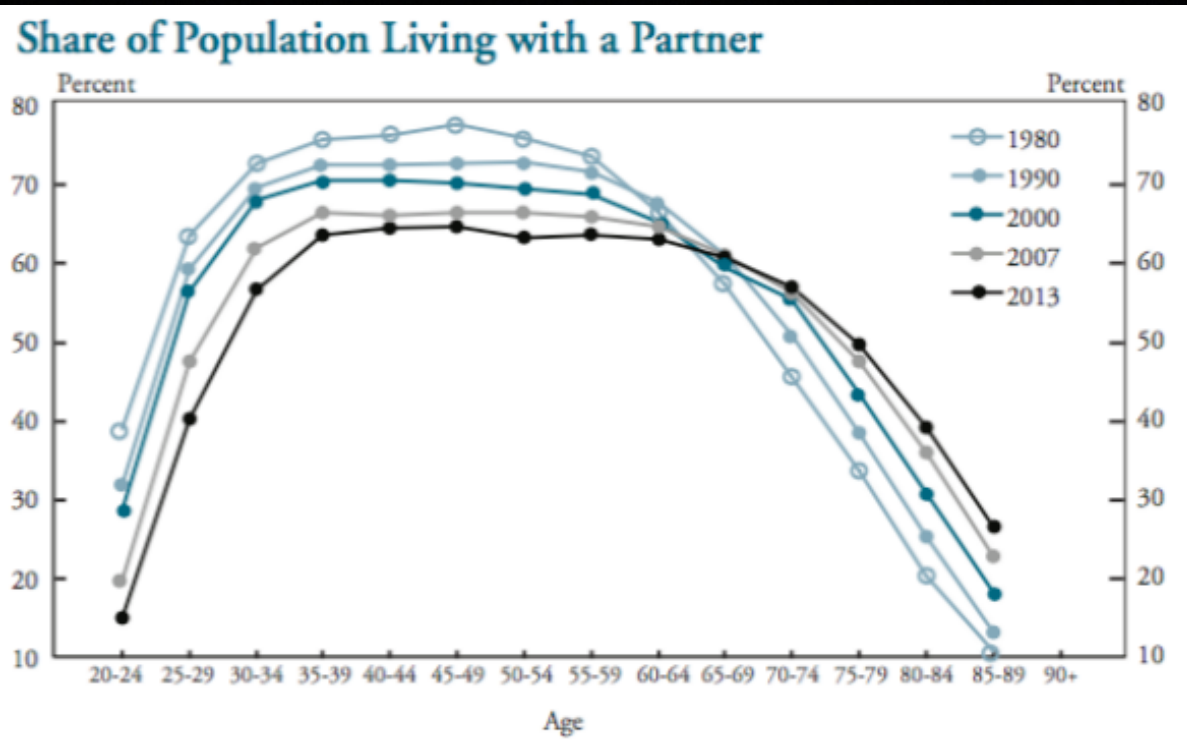
2. See the GENERAL in the PARTICULAR

Looking for how individual life circumstances fit (or don't) a societal pattern

Age at Marriage in the USA



How does something (like an ad) demonstrate a common societal phenomenon (like a belief or idea)



The suicide gap

Suicide rates vary by gender and veteran status, based on an analysis of nearly 174,000 suicides in 23 states between 2000 and 2010.

■ Women ■ Men

Annual number of suicides per 100,000 population

Among people who never served in the military, women kill themselves far less often than men.

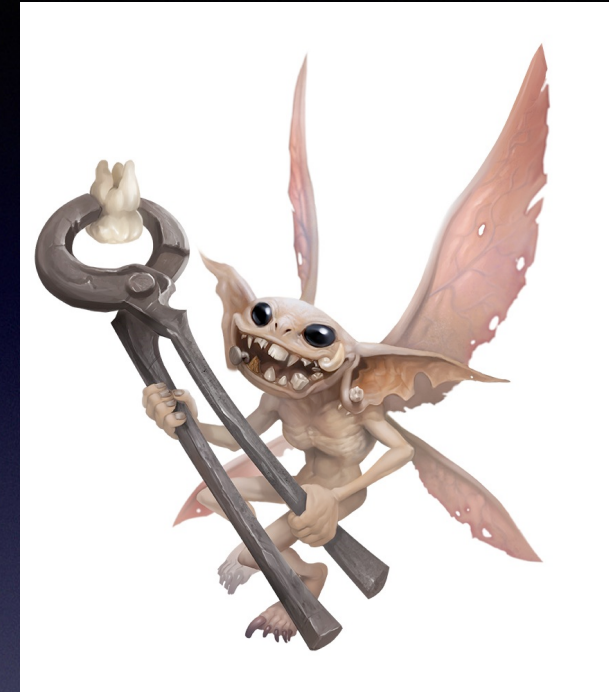


Among veterans, the suicide rates are much higher, but also much closer.



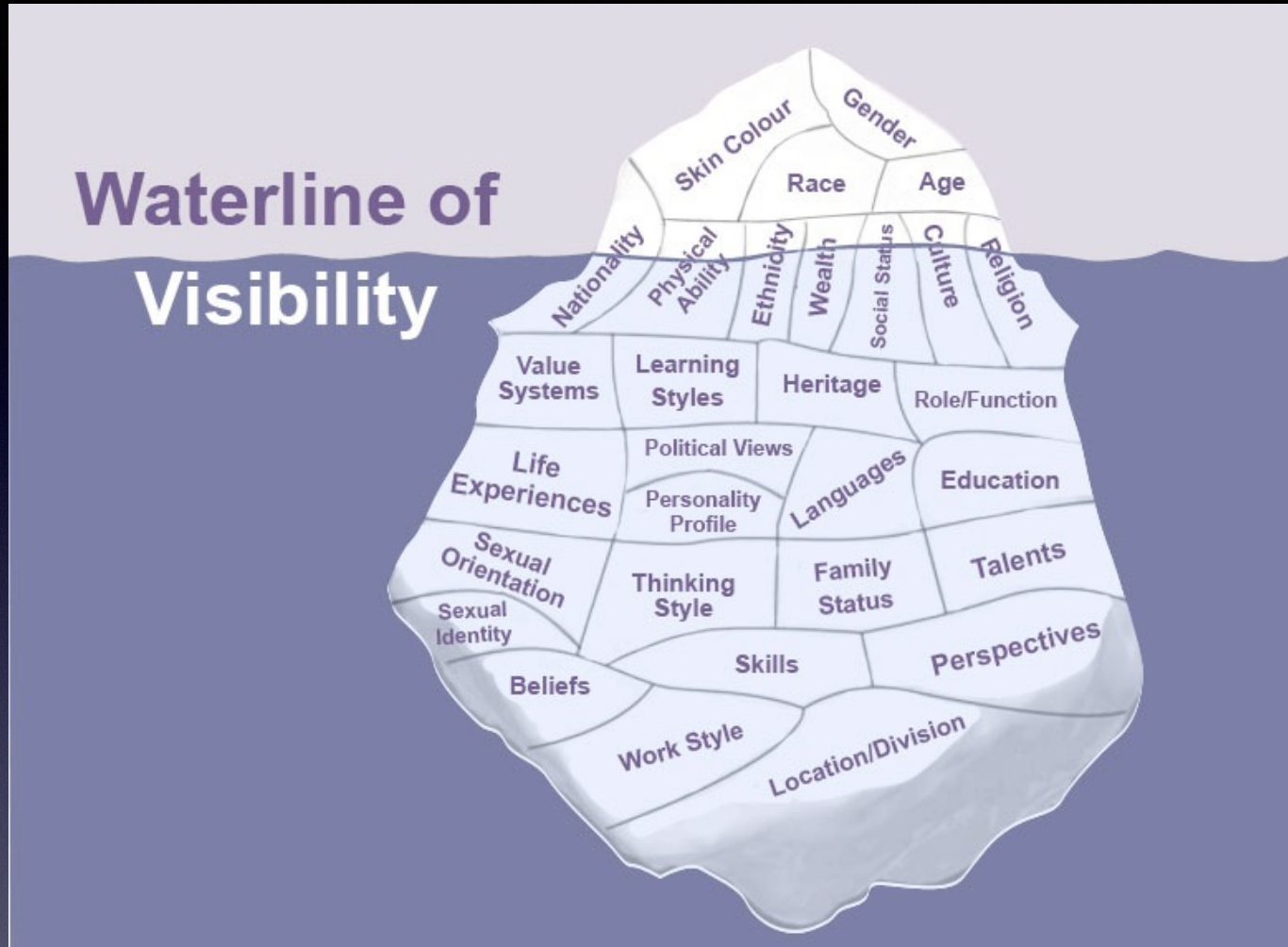
But why?

3. See the STRANGE in the FAMILIAR



Analyzing your own society from the perspective of an outsider. Thinking about what might be “weird” about common beliefs, values, norms, or patterns of behavior. Pretend you are an alien visiting America. What about our lives would seem strange to a newcomer?

4. See beneath the “waterline of visibility”



Looking below the surface of people's lives and societal problems. What are the deeper causes of things happening in the world? Never be content with surface level explanations or conclusions

Excerpts from David Foster Wallace's "This is Water" commencement speech at Kenyon College in 2005.



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"The only thing that's capital 'T' True is that you get to decide how you're going to try to see it. This, I submit, is the freedom of real education, of how to be well-adjusted. You get to decide what has meaning and what doesn't. That is real freedom. That is being educated and understanding how to think. The alternative is unconsciousness."

"Learning how to think" really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think.

It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot or will not exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed."

What is the main point of Wallace's speech? What is the connection between his words and the "Sociological Imagination?"