

Study Questions: *The Dancer's Gift: Sociology in Life (2011)*

## Chapter 1 **The Sociological Perspective**

1. What is Samantha's major, what is her professional goal, and how will sociology help her to achieve this goal? What is sociology?
2. Criticize the statement, "Individuals create their own destiny." How does the social contexts in which one lives influence whether one goes to school, is occupationally successful, or lives a long life? Define sociological imagination.
3. What are three major sociological perspectives—define each.
4. Psychology focuses on the individual. What does sociology focus on?
5. What philosophy did Mrs. Cahill display by insisting on smoking with the windows rolled up?
6. Define group and how it is a source of Mrs. Cahill's view that college is a context for a woman to find a husband.
7. Specify the basis for Mrs. Cahill's stereotyping comments.
8. Define achieved and ascribed status. Which applies to Mr. and Mrs. Cahill respectively? Explain.
9. Define primary and secondary group. What is an example of Samantha's primary and secondary group?
10. Give an example of how one's social context affects one's personality.
11. Define self-concept and specify its source. Samantha is beginning to feel uncomfortable with what aspect of her personality?
12. Define role, roles strain and role conflict and give examples using Samantha and her mother/father.
13. Define manifest and latent functions and give examples in reference to education.
14. Where was Marcel from and how many lived in his house? Compare the folk society where he grew up with American society?
15. What are norms? Give an example of a norm regarding bathroom use.
16. What is the term which describes unclear norms? How did this apply to Marcel and bathroom use in the dorm?

17. What is the name of Marcel's roommate and how did he treat Marcel the first time they met?
18. Give examples of Marcel being homesick.

## **Chapter Two, Culture**

1. Is Marcel's family a reference group as well as a membership group for him? How about Samantha's family? Why or why not?
2. Does Samantha apply cultural relativism to her assessment of Daly Brown? Why or why not?
3. Give two other examples of material culture in this chapter, besides Kevin Bittner's cell phone.
4. How would Marcel violate a folkway in Professor Carter's dance class, within the context she describes? A more? A taboo?
5. Give two examples of the use of language in culture. One example should illustrate that meaning is understood by both parties because they share the same culture. The second example should illustrate that meaning is not understood because the cultural background is different.

## **Chapter Three, Socialization**

1. Discuss how the looking-glass self relates to Samantha and her parents' impending divorce; also explain how the concept relates to Marcel and his peer group of the dance class.
2. Identify five agents of socialization that taught Samantha that marriage means 'till death do us part.'
3. Give two examples of behavior described in chapter 3 that is shaped by expectations of the generalized other.
4. In comparing Marcel and Samantha's socioeconomic status, which of them belongs to an upper class and which to a lower class, and why?
5. What is the difference between a generalized other and a significant other? Give an example of each from the chapter.
6. Who are Samantha's significant others?

### **Chapter Four, Sex and Gender**

1. How might Samantha's and Marcel's socialization have been different to result in different ideas about gender roles?
2. How are one's gender identity and gender roles different?
3. Would you describe Samantha as androgynous? Why or why not? What about Marcel?
4. What taboo is found in some form in every known culture?
5. Explain the difference between sex and gender.

### **Chapter Five, Research Methods**

1. What is the difference between macro and micro sociology?
2. Why is objectivity important in research? Do you think it is possible for a researcher to be totally objective? Why or why not?
3. Why does Mr. Stroud recommend that Samantha and Jill do participant observation research, rather than non-participant observation research at the homeless center?
4. Describe three different types of survey research. Which type of survey research is best suited for studying residents at a homeless shelter? Explain your answer.
5. Suppose Samantha wanted to find out what percentage of homeless shelter residents currently use illegal drugs. Which type of research method would probably provide the most valid data? Why?

### **Chapter Six, Organizations**

1. What is alienation? Which character in this chapter is described as being alienated?
2. What are the goals of the Miller Street Shelter?
3. What are the five main social institutions?
4. Is the Miller Street Shelter a total institution? Why or why not? What is an example of a total institution?
5. What is the meaning and origin of the term "Double-Black"? Are the members of Double Black planning on using coercion to achieve their aims? Explain your answer.

### **Chapter Seven, Population and Social Change**

1. What makes New York City a megalopolis?
2. Explain how industrialization affects population growth (according to demographic transition theory).
3. How do you think the fertility and mortality rates in the United States compare with those on Martinique?
4. How might urbanization influence the way homosexuals are treated on Martinique?
5. Give an example of collective behavior.

### **Chapter Eight, Religion**

1. Give an example of U.S. society that could be described as 'profane.'
2. Is 'The Kingdom of Love' a cult or a sect? Explain.
3. Are the practices of 'The Kingdom of Love' and 'Obeah' both religions? Why or why not?
4. Marcel's parents rejected belief in the traditional Obeah and turned to Christianity. Is this an example of secularization? Why or why not?
5. Would the practice of Obeah be considered a cult back in the time of Marcel's grandmother? How about now, during Marcel's time?

### **Chapter Nine, Family**

1. Compare the family households in which Marcel and Samantha grew up. What are the differences and similarities?
2. Would you describe Marcel's family as matriarchal, patriarchal, or egalitarian? What about Samantha's family? Explain your answer.
3. Describe an example of familism from this chapter. Why is familism stronger in Martinique than in the United States?
4. Why is the 'empty nest syndrome' more common in the United States than in Martinique?

5. Do you think that Samantha's attitudes toward polygamy would be different if she had grown up in a society where polygamy is socially acceptable? Explain.

### **Chapter Ten, Race and Ethnicity**

1. What is Marcel's ethnicity?
2. Where do you think Marcel would experience more prejudice and discrimination—the United States or Martinique? Explain your answer.
3. Why is the graffiti spray-painted on the brick wall near Harrison Hall considered a 'hate crime?'
4. Do you think racism is more common in the U.S. or in Martinique? Why?
5. Give an example of how Marcel has begun assimilation into U.S. society.

### **Chapter Eleven, Deviance**

1. Distinguish between the concepts 'deviance' and 'crime.' How are these concepts similar? How are they different?
2. What examples of informal social control does Samantha experience while out on her research expedition as a homeless person?
3. What type of formal social control does Samantha experience while doing her research expedition as a homeless person?
4. Is stigmatization similar to the concept of formal social control or informal social control? Explain your answer.
5. What example provided in this chapter illustrates how Dash, in many ways a nonconformist, expects conformity from Samantha?

### **Chapter Twelve, Stratification, Social Class and Economy**

1. Compare capitalism with socialism.

2. If Marcel's dream of becoming a successful professional dancer were to come true, with the accompanying financial and social status, would he then be an example of intragenerational or intergenerational mobility? Or both? Why?
3. In Marcel's dedication in the program, he 'asks that we all make an effort to drop the barriers of social class which separate us from each other, and reduce the social inequality that exists throughout the world.' Is Marcel asking for increased social mobility? Why or why not?
4. What are some examples of conspicuous consumption?
5. In what ways do Samantha and Marcel both exhibit a Protestant ethic?

### Epilogue

1. Discuss how Marcel and the "starving artists" used social context to induce donating behavior?
2. What is the norm of reciprocity? Give an example of how it was used by the "starving artists"?
3. How did Samantha use her role as attorney to help Marcel in the airport?
4. What did Samantha say to the airport security guards who handcuffed Marcel?
5. What did Marcel encourage Katie to do with the dollar she received from Mrs. Kendall?
6. What was Marcel's goal in going to the airport to see Samantha one last time? To what degree was his goal accomplished?
7. How did Samantha act toward Marcel at the airport?
8. At the end of the book, what is the status of the relationship between Samantha and Marcel?