**Macrosociology: Social Paradigm Shifts**

Macrosociology is a sociological approach in which groups, social systems, and social structures are analyzed on a large scale. Sociologists, using this method are concerned with the wide-sweeping changes that influence an entire society, and they examine elements that have long-term positive and/or negative effects on society as a whole. When the majority of a society’s population is engaged in and actively pursuing change in a specific social area, it is possible to see a transformation in their collective ideals and beliefs. When a new set of ideals, beliefs, and values becomes strong enough to affect and change the way individuals see and perceive reality (remember intersubjective reality?), it is known as a **paradigm shift**. The term *paradigm* refers to a pattern, like a pattern in our way(s) of thinking. Paradigm shifts occur when unique circumstances present themselves and permeate a group in such a profound way that it causes the group to re-evaluate its current course and envision an alternative way of doing things.

Society is thought to be governed by **dominant paradigms** whose function is to organize and define reality for its members. Dominant paradigms are a barometer for society’s standard and widely held systems of thought. When the social conditions or circumstances change the system of thought, a paradigm shift occurs. The most profound changes come about when a **social institution** changes because it has a central role in society. Changes at this level force the society to assess the institution’s common goals, purposes, and character.

(*institution* = e.g., the institution of marriage – practices, customs, traditions – even education)

An example of a paradigm shift is **recycling**. When municipalities began introducing blue boxes to residential communities, many people complained that it was just one more chore to add to the list. It didn’t take long before the blue box became a permanent fixture at the curb on garbage day. Collective thinking and awareness about the environment allowed those changes to happen. **Paradigm paralysis** refers to the inability or refusal to see beyond the current systems of thought. Psychologists refer to this phenomenon as confirmation bias. **Confirmation bias** is the tendency among people to favour information that confirms their beliefs and preconceptions about an issue regardless of whether the information is accurate or valid. Confirmation bias can lead people to disregard valid information and rely on their personal interpretation alone. The result is a one-dimensional, biased view on important social issues.

1. How does the iceberg picture at the top of the page represent a **paradigm shift**?

2. From *Prom Night in Mississippi*, provide an example of **paradigm paralysis** and **confirmation bias**. Explain your choice.

3. What is an example of a **dominant paradigm** in our society? (something that defines reality for us – like an intersubjective belief)

4. What is an example of a **paradigm shift** that your generation is experiencing currently, or one that has recently taken place. \*

5. List the **agents of change** (what caused the change) and the impediments to change for each. \*

6. Predict the possible effects of these changes on Canadian society. \*

Examples:

* ‘Marriage’ (e.g., same sex marriage)
* Technology in school
* Post-secondary education
* Communication
* Voting (and/or ‘democracy’)
* Diversity (ethnic)
* Food
* Birth control
* Gender roles
* Family
* Sex Education
* The ‘Holidays’
* Catholic Church