

How do Sociologists Think?

- Many people find using the sociological perspective amounts to *seeing the strange in the familiar*
- Looking at life sociologically requires giving up
 - the *familiar* idea we live life in terms of our own decisions
 - in favor of the *strange* notion that society shapes those decisions
 - HOW????

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How do Sociologists Think?

- What are they doing? What does it mean to do nothing?
How would non-bystanders react?



- Each moment, location and context calls for a unique interpretation and (hopefully) understanding of the situation.

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How do Sociologists Think?

- Two situations allow clear understanding of how society shapes individual lives (being or becoming an *outsider*)
 - *Living on the margins of society*
 - How will people treat you? How will they talk to you?
What are their motivations?
 - *Living through a social crisis*
 - Who are your friends? Why do and don't step up?

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How do Sociologists Think?

- *Not being part of the dominant group*
 - The greater a person's marginality, the better able they are to use the sociological perspective.
- People at the margins of social life
 - Women
 - People of color
 - Gays/Lesbians
 - People with disabilities
 - Elderly
 - These people are aware of social patterns that others rarely think about

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How do Sociologists Think?

- New levels of reality
 - Examination of our social environment
 - Looking at the broader view
 - Discovery of new realities
 - By delving into our social life, we encounter new meanings, new aspects of society
 - What does it mean to have 536 "friends" on Facebook?
 - To what extent did your own "free will" enter in your decision to attend college?
 - Any social pressures?

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Sociological Imagination (pp. 4-11)

by C. Wright Mills

- Ability to see our personal experiences as part of larger structures and organizations
- Ability to relate our private troubles to societal problems
- Ability to think ourselves away from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew
 - What does this all mean?

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Sociological Imagination (pp. 4-11)

by C. Wright Mills

- Ability to see our personal experiences as part of larger structures and organizations
 - How is unemployment (*your own joblessness*) linked to economic and political decisions?
 - How are students' test scores (*your own scores*) linked to funding in education?
 - How is incarceration (*your loved one*) really linked to increase in crime?

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Sociological Imagination (pp. 4-11)

by C. Wright Mills

- Ability to relate our private troubles to societal problems
 - Why are many of you not always able to register for the classes you need? *Are you the only one?*
 - Why do many of you have to get in debt to get an education? *Are you the only one?*
 - Why do many men in power (or not) cheat on their spouses) *Is Tiger Woods the only one?*

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Sociological Imagination (pp. 4-11)

by C. Wright Mills

- Ability to think ourselves away from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew
 - Why do most of you call your parents “mom” and “dad”, and not by their first name?
 - Why do most of you do not talk to your professor(s) the way you talk to your friend(s)?
 - Why do most of you use a cellphone?

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Sociological Imagination (pp. 4-11)

by C. Wright Mills

- What is sociological about coffee?
 - Coffee carries a symbolic value in our daily life, and our social interactions. What is our ritual?
 - Do you want to go get a cup of coffee? Or go eat a burger?
 - Coffee also has health implications? Is it a drug?
 - How is it advertised to you, *consumers*?
 - Drinking coffee also means participating in globalization
 - Production, transport, distribution requires many social, political and economic relationships.
 - Are producers of coffee paid appropriately for their labor?
 - Coffee can explain the historical social and economic development that led coffee to be mass consumed

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Emergence of Sociology

- Political Revolutions
 - French revolution in 1789
- The Industrial Revolution & the rise of Capitalism
- The rise of Socialism in response to capitalism
- Feminism (*even at the margins*)
- Urbanization
 - Transition from agrarian to industrial societies
- Religious Change
 - Less concern with people's moral obligation to God and to political rulers - and more focus on pursuing one's own self-interest: *individual liberty* & *individual rights*
- The Growth of Science
 - *Positivism*

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Emergence of Sociology

- Changes in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries led scholars to start thinking about
 - Society and people's place in it (sociological thoughts)
- Three significant changes transformed society
 - Rise of a factory-based economy
 - Explosive growth of cities
 - New ideas about democracy and political rights

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Emergence of Sociology

- Industrial Technology
 - **Manufacturing** (*from Latin, meaning “to make by hand”*)
 - By the end of the 18th century, inventors were using new sources of energy
- The Growth of Cities
 - “Enclosure Movement”
 - Public land to private land (emergence of capitalism)
- Political Change
 - Economic development and growth of cities brought new ways of thinking

Sociological Theories

- Everyone creates theories to help them make sense of what they experience
 - Common-sense theories tend to be less systematic
- “Sociological theory is defined...as a set of interrelated ideas that allow for the systematization of knowledge of the social world” (Ritzer, 2010)
 - Specifically and systematically developed
 - Typically built on the theories and ideas of previous sociologists
 - Built on scientific research (desire to share--ongoing dialogue)
 - Focused on structural relationships (individual *in* society, human being *as* social being), rather than “personal experiences”
 - Personal concerns directed toward understanding social issues

Sociological Theories

- Abstract interpretations, general explanations used to explain facts
- Contrary to popular beliefs “*facts do not speak for themselves*”
 - Do you understand what you see?
 - Do you have all the information necessary to come up a theory?
- Common-sense theory vs. sociological theory

Sociological Theories

- Example: Tally's Corner
 - "A pickup truck drives slowly down the street. The truck stops as it comes abreast of a man sitting on a cast-iron porch and the white driver calls out, asking if the man wants a job. The man shakes his head and moves on up the block, stopping again whenever idling men come within calling distance of the driver. At the Carry-out corner, five men debate the question briefly and shake their heads no to the truck. The truck turns the corner and repeats the same performance up the next street." (Liebow, 1967)
- Many would conclude that those men are lazy and irresponsible, and that unemployment is an individual problem. What would lead people to make this conclusion?
- How do those men construct their future? What does this labor represent to them?

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Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

(pp.13-14)

- Positivism — a way of understanding based on science. Sociology could become "social physics" by applying the same scientific method
- He coined the term "Sociology"
- Social Statics
 - How do the parts of the system interact with one another
- Social Dynamics
 - Process of progressive evolution in which people become cumulatively more intelligent and in which altruism eventually triumphs over egoism

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Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

- Coined the term "survival of the fittest"
 - Spencer opposed education, and even basic services like garbage removal, or even state and private philanthropy as they both helped to maintain "unhealthy" or unfit members of society, which stifled present and future society from evolving to perfect harmony.
- Society is a "living organism" and any sociological inquiries should start with human beings
 - Emotions and feelings should be studied (link with Psychology) as they lead to social action; however, sociologists should be aware of their own emotional biases
- He viewed society as an entity in and of itself—thus, the whole of society can live on even if its component parts die

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Functionalist Theory (pp. 21-23)

- This perspective is built upon
 - The application of the scientific method to the objective social world
 - The use of an analogy between the individual organism and society
- The emphasis on scientific method leads to the assertion that one can study the social world in the same ways as one studies the physical world
 - Thus, Functionalists see the social world as “objectively real,” as observable with such techniques as social surveys and interviews
 - Their positivistic view of social science assumes that study of the social world can be *value-free*, in that the investigator’s values will not necessarily interfere with the disinterested search for social laws governing the behavior of social systems

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Functionalist Theory (pp. 21-23)

- The emphasis on the *organic* unity of society leads functionalists to speculate about the needs required for a social system to exist, as well as the ways in which social institutions satisfy those needs
 - For instance, religion assumes certain *functions* which contribute to the survival of the social system as a whole, just as the organs of the body have functions which are necessary for the body’s survival
- Social systems work to maintain *equilibrium* even after external shocks disturb the balance among social institutions
 - Such social equilibrium is achieved through:
 - The socialization of members of the society into the basic values and norms of that society (to reach a *consensus*)
 - Where socialization is insufficient to make members conform to cultural roles and social norms, various social control mechanisms exist to restore conformity
 - Gossiping; schools, prisons, and mental institutions etc...

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Functionalist Theory (pp. 21-23)

- Robert Merton proposed important distinctions about functions
 - *Manifest* functions
 - They are recognized and intended by actors in the social system and hence may represent motives for their actions
 - *Latent* functions
 - They are unrecognized unintended by the actors
- “Thus the “manifest” function of antigambling legislation may be to suppress gambling, its “latent” function to create an illegal empire for the gambling syndicates. Or Christian missions in parts of Africa “manifestly” tried to convert Africans to Christianity, “latently” helped to destroy the indigenous tribal cultures and this provided an important impetus towards rapid social transformation.” (Berger, 1963)

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Functionalist Theory (pp. 21-23)

- Critics argue that they are reversing the usual order of cause and effect by explaining things in terms of what happens afterward, not what went before
- Critics also claim that the perspective justifies the status quo and complacency on the part of society's members
 - It does not encourage people to take an active role in changing their social environment, even when such change may benefit them.
- Instead, functionalism sees active social change as undesirable because the various parts of society will compensate naturally for any problems that may arise

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Conflict Theory (pp. 23-24)

- Economic exploitation leads directly to political oppression, as owners make use of their economic power to gain control of the state and turn it into a servant of bourgeois economic interests
 - Police power, for instance, is used to enforce property rights and guarantee unfair contracts between capitalist and worker
 - Oppression also takes more subtle forms:
 - Religion serves capitalist interests by pacifying the population
 - "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Karl Marx)
 - Marx argues, opium (and religion) actually can actually be said to be contributing to human suffering by removing the impetus to do whatever is necessary to overcome it – which, for Marx, is to relinquish religion and turn to revolutionary politics
 - Intellectuals, paid directly or indirectly by capitalists, spend their careers justifying and rationalizing the existing social and economic arrangements

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Conflict Theory (pp. 23-24)

- The economic structure (*forces of production*) of society molds the *superstructure*, including ideas (e.g., morality, ideologies, art, and literature) and the *social institutions* that support the class structure of society (e.g., the state, the educational system, the family, and religious institutions)
- Because the ruling class (*the bourgeoisie*) controls the social relations of production, the dominant ideology in capitalist society is that of the ruling class
- Ideology and social institutions, in turn, serve to reproduce and perpetuate the economic class structure
- However, Weber saw that conflict didn't overwhelmingly involve the economy, but that the state and economy together (*rationalization*) set up conditions for conflict

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Conflict Theory (pp. 23-24)

- Conflict theory has been used by feminists to explain the position of women in society
- Feminist conflict theorists argue that women have traditionally been oppressed so that men can benefit from positions of power, wealth, and status
- These theorists would argue that the conflict over limited natural resources is what led men to relegate women to domesticity

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Conflict Theory (pp. 23-24)

- Being coerced is an intrinsically unpleasant experience, and hence that any use of coercion, even by a small minority, calls forth conflict in the form of antagonism to being dominated
- The basic conflict argument has three strands:
 - *that men live in self-constructed subjective worlds*
 - *that others pull many of the strings that control one's subjective experience*
 - *that there are frequent conflicts over control*
- Life is basically a struggle for status in which no one can afford to be oblivious to the power of others around him/her

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Conflict Theory (pp. 23-24)

- Critics would say that:
 - They ignore other ways (i.e. non forceful ways in which people reach agreement)
 - They side with people who lack power
 - They focus on economic factors as the sole issue for all conflict in society

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Interactionist Theory (p. 21)

- Interactionists focus on the *subjective* aspects of social life, rather than on objective, macro-structural aspects of social systems
 - For interactionists, humans are *pragmatic actors* who continually must adjust their behavior to the actions of other actors
 - We can adjust to these actions only because we are able to *interpret* them, i.e., to denote them symbolically and treat the actions and those who perform them as symbolic objects

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Interactionist Theory (p. 21)

- For the interactionist, society consists of organized and patterned interactions among individuals
 - Thus, research by interactionists focuses on easily observable *face-to-face interactions* rather than on macro-level structural relationships involving social institutions
 - Furthermore, this focus on interaction and on the meaning of events to the participants in those events (the *definition of the situation*) shifts the attention of interactionists away from stable norms and values toward more changeable, continually readjusting *social processes*
 - For interactionists *negotiation* among members of society creates temporary, *socially constructed* relations

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Interactionist Theory (p. 21)

- Harold Garfinkel, a pioneer in these types of investigations, demonstrated the problem by sending his students out to perform “experiments in trust,” called *breaching experiments*
 - They brought ordinary conversations to an abrupt halt by refusing to take for granted that they knew what the other person was saying, and so demanded explanations and then explanations of the explanations (Garfinkel 1967)
- How would people react if you were
 - to buy only one piece of grape at the grocery store?
 - to pay for snacks with only pennies?
 - to shop in the grocery store from other customers’ carts? etc...

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Interactionist Theory (p. 21)

- Interactionists tend to study social interaction through *participant observation*, rather than surveys and interviews
- They argue that close contact and immersion in the everyday lives of the participants is necessary for understanding the meaning of actions, *the definition of the situation* (see chapter 4) itself, and the process by which actors construct the situation through their interaction
- Given this close contact, interactionists could hardly remain free of value commitments, and, in fact, interactionists make explicit use of their values in choosing what to study but *strive to be objective* in the conduct of their research

Interactionist Theory (p. 21)

- Symbolic interactionists are often criticized by other sociologists for being overly impressionistic in their research methods and somewhat unsystematic in their theories
- These objections, combined with the fairly narrow focus of interactionist research on small-group interactions and other social psychological issues, have relegated the interactionist camp to a minority position among sociologists
